

**DRAFT
MINUTES
TOWNSHIP OF WEST ORANGE
PLANNING BOARD MEETING
August 6, 2025 7:30 P.M.**

The Township of West Orange Planning Board held its regular meeting on August 6, 2025, at 7:30 P.M. via virtual ZOOM videoconference.

Chairman Bagoff called the meeting to order at approximately 7:30 P.M. He announced that notification of the meeting was given to the Township Clerk, and posted on the Township Bulletin Board, sent to the West Orange Chronicle and the Star Ledger, and posted on the Township's website calendar. This meeting has been properly noticed to the public in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act. No new matters will start after 10:30 P.M.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

- *Chairman Bagoff* requested all persons stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The next Planning Board special meeting will be held **Wednesday, August 13, 2025, at 6:30 P.M in person.**
- The next Planning Board regular meeting will be held **Wednesday, September 3, 2025, at 7:30 P.M via Zoom.**

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Dr. Robert Bagoff; Mr. Jerry Guarino; Mr. Ken Alper; Mr. John Cardoza; Mr. William Wilkes; Mr. Lee Klein; Mr. Christopher Morgan, Sr.; Mayor Susan McCartney; Mr. Frank Noborine; Councilwoman Susan Scarpa; Ms. Lori Kapferer

ABSENT:

ALSO PRESENT: Diana P. McGovern, Esq., Planning Board Attorney;
Gerry Haizel, Consulting Town Planner;
Jamilet Baquerizo Vite, Planning Board Secretary

MINUTES & RESOLUTIONS

2-26-2025 Draft Minutes

Motion: Chairman Bagoff

Second: Mr. Guarino

Alper:	Y	Morgan:	----
Bagoff:	Y	Scarpa:	Y

Cardoza (Alt.2): Y	Noborine: ----
Guarino: Y	Wilkes: Y
Kapferer: Y	
Klein: Y	
Mayor McCartney: Y	

4-30-2025 Draft Minutes

Motion: Chairman Bagoff

Second: Mayor McCartney

Alper: Y	Morgan: ----
Bagoff: Y	Scarpa: Y
Cardoza (Alt.2): Y	Noborine: ----
Guarino: Y	Wilkes: Y
Kapferer: Y	
Klein: Y	
Mayor McCartney: Y	

SWEARING IN

- The Township Professional(s) sworn in.

APPLICATIONS

- **PB-25-06 Turtle Back Zoo/Gibbons Exhibit**
560 Northfield Avenue
Block: 163 Lot: 1 Zone: R-1
Renovate the existing Gibbons exhibit at the Turtle Back Zoo.

PRESENTATION

- The attorney, Mark Fleder, on behalf of the applicant, appreciates the opportunity to be heard. This is a courtesy review as provided by the New Jersey Statute 40:55 D-31.
- The architect, Mr. Piga, filed a written report explaining the proposed renovations to the Gibbons exhibit that's already at the zoo.
- This is a proposed renovation project. In particular, from a planning perspective, it's a minor matter because the building is proposed to be enlarged by only 125 square feet in its rear section.
- The architect, Michael Piga, entered on the record, he was sworn under oath, and his credentials were accepted by the board. He testified to the following:
- Mr. Piga authored and signed the letter of July 2, 2025, which was addressed to the township that explained the proposed project known as Renovations of the Gibbons

Exhibit at Turtle Back Zoo.

- The Gibbons' Exhibit already exists at the Turtle Back Zoo. The changes include the netting being replaced. The netting needs repair. They're going to be putting a brand new net system in.
- While they were doing that, they had opportunities to do a little bit of other adjustments that Gillian, the zoo director, preferred.
- They're putting in two new platforms for the gibbons to sit on. There are three tiers, about 18 feet high. They're also adding a new viewing window.
- They're changing out the concrete pavers to go to brick pavers to match the fountain area.
- They are adding a little bit of landscaping on the outskirts. There's existing bamboo in areas that they're keeping. There are a couple of older shrubs that they're taking out, but for the most part, they're just putting in new grasses and lower bamboo so that people can see in those areas. No trees are being removed for this project. No new trees are being added for this project.
- They're putting a little tunnel for the gibbons to have a new exploration that brings them out to the guests.
- The existing building that is being talked about will have a little bit of a vestibule pop-out. It's 6 feet by 21 feet, and they're going to match the height of the roof, which they'll put it at 15 feet to match up with the existing story building.
- Additionally, they're adding a sidewalk.
- The public access part of the project will be available as handicap accessible. It already is, they're just making some adjustments to it.
- With respect to the 125 square foot little addition to the rear of the building, there will not be a meaningful impact on water drainage in this exhibit.
- The project will take roughly 5 months to get to completion. The project being underway will not interfere with the public going to the zoo.

BOARD QUESTIONS

- Councilperson Scarpa asked if it would be possible to put a few native trees for shade for those who will be standing around observing. Mr. Piga said it would be difficult because of the nature of the netting. There's a canopy that goes over the top of this exhibit right now, so the type of trees with shade would immediately have an effect on the exhibit itself. However, they do have trees in this area that provide shade for these locations.

BOARD COMMENTS

- Mayor McCartney said the administration is ready to present a bamboo ordinance, and during their discussions, Mr. Piga's name has come up numerous times because he integrates bamboo often with county projects at the zoo. Mayor McCartney states Mr. Piga does an outstanding job in explaining how to control it, and they are using those methods in their proposed ordinance.
- Councilperson Scarpa states that a couple of residents have talked to her that since the increased attendance and expansion of the zoo, it has created some challenges for the community. There has been an increase in garbage from Oak Ridge to Pleasant Valley Way, and from where the zip line is to Walker Road. Councilperson Scarpa wanted to know if the county could do a good job of monitoring and taking charge of any of the excess garbage that is being dumped in that area.
- Chairman Bagoff asks that the county speak to the board's fire chief and or their representatives to evaluate how many times ambulances are being dispatched to the zoo over the time that the zoo is open, and what can be done to make better response time? Chairman Bagoff thinks of possibly having one ambulance stationed near the zoo at peak

hours or peak times when the zoo has the most people. Chairman Bagoff will leave that to the applicant to evaluate and make sense of that for safety, health, and welfare, for the zoo visitors, and for the township of West Orange.

- Councilperson Scarpa wanted to add to what Chairman Bagoff said that at that meeting, Chief Vecchio has since given them some statistics about that, because it was quite a concern. Councilperson Scarpa added that he also had a recommendation that perhaps the county might want to provide them with an ambulance that they could use, since they're out on so many runs, which could promote the zoo. Councilperson Scarpa would love to work collaboratively with them to see if something like that could happen.

NO PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONS

NO PUBLIC QUESTIONS

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Robert Rashkes at 35 Oak Crest Road has a question about health and safety at the zoo. At the May 29th West Orange Township Council Budget Workshop, the township's CFO and the township's fire chief talked about the substantial number of ambulances being dispatched to the zoo and the strain that it places on the firefighters and the service life of the ambulances. Mr. Rashkes would like to know more about the first aid resources available at the zoo and whether consideration is being given for the zoo to have ambulances of its own stationed there. He noticed there was a long line of traffic on Memorial Day approaching the zoo going westbound on Northfield Avenue around 12 noon. The traffic jam seemed to be worsened by the unsynchronized sets of traffic lights outside the zoo. This would delay the response time of first responder vehicles being dispatched to the zoo and to other locations in West Orange.

Motion: Chairman Bagoff

Second: Mr. Guarino

Alper:	Y	Morgan:	Y
Bagoff:	Y	Scarpa:	Y
Cardoza (Alt.2):	----	Noborine:	Y
Guarino:	Y	Wilkes:	Y
Kapferer:	----		
Klein:	Y		
Mayor McCartney:	Y		

Meeting adjourned at 8:04 P.M.

ADOPTED:

Jamilet Baquerizo Vite
Planning Board Secretar