

STONEFIELD

February 27, 2026
Township of West Orange
Township of West Orange Planning Board
66 Main Street, West Orange, NJ 07052

RE: Planning Memo
Applicant: 525 Northfield Ave., LLC
Block 159.04, Lot 1.01
525 Northfield Avenue
West Orange, Essex County, NJ

Greetings:

Stonefield Engineering & Design, LLC ("Stonefield") has prepared this Statement of Principal Points to provide details of the proposed use and justification for variance relief pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40:55D-70.

Project Description

525 Northfield Ave., LLC (hereinafter "The Applicant") proposes to construct a 4-story mixed-use development on Block 159.04, Lot 1.01, also known as 525 Northfield Avenue in West Orange. The subject property is approximately 2.4 AC (110,205 SF) and is located within the B-2 General Business District. The site is an irregularly shaped corner lot bounded by single-family homes to the north, retail uses to the west, the South Mountain Reservation to the south, and undeveloped land to the east.

Under existing conditions, the site is occupied by a vacant building and associated surface parking lot which previously served The Essex House restaurant, lounge, and banquet. Access is presently provided via one (1) full-movement driveway along Northfield Avenue and one (1) full-movement driveway along Sheridan Avenue. The surrounding area consists of a mix of land uses. Other notable developments nearby include the St. Cloud Elementary School, the Primrose School of West Orange, and the Essex County South Mountain Recreation Complex.

The project proposes to raze the existing commercial building and associated site improvements and construct a 4-story mixed-use building containing 105 residential units, 180 physical parking spaces, and 1,200 SF of retail space. The first floor will contain the lower-level parking garage, residential lobby, leasing office, building storage and utility rooms, a commercial space, and tenant amenities including an amenity/co-working space and a zen garden. The second floor will contain the upper-level parking garage, residential apartments, and tenant amenities including a lounge, club room, and amenities deck. The third floor will contain residential apartments and tenant amenities including a gym and amenities deck. The fourth floor will contain residential apartments. The building will contain 2 studios, 82 one-bedroom, 16 two-bedroom and 5 three-bedroom apartments. Of the 105 residential units proposed, 21 will be designated as affordable units. Additional site improvements include a retaining wall and landscaping to buffer the site from the neighboring residential properties.

Mixed-use developments are listed as conditionally permitted in the B-2 General Business District pursuant to § 25-24.2.b.2(m). The proposed project complies with all required conditions and is therefore permitted. A summary of these conditions is provided in the table below.

CONDITIONAL USE REQUIREMENTS (MIXED-USE IN B-2 DISTRICT)

Code Section	Required	Complies
§ 25-24.2.b.2(m)(1)	Permitted uses on the ground floor of a mixed-use development shall include the following permitted uses in the B-1 and B-2 Districts: retail store, personal service store or studio, office, business or vocational school, restaurant, bar, massage, bodywork or somatic therapy establishment, and fitness center/health club.	Complies
§ 25-24.2.b.2(m)(2)	One or more dwelling units shall be permitted on the upper floor(s) above any of the permitted ground floor uses in § 25-24.2b2(m)(1).	Complies
§ 25-24.2.b.2(m)(3)	Access to upper floor uses shall be provided by means of a separate entrance than provided for ground floor uses.	Complies
§ 25-24.2.b.2(m)(4)	Minimum lot area shall be 5,000 square feet, and the minimum street frontage of such lot shall be 50 feet.	Complies Minimum Lot Area = 110,205 SF Minimum Frontage = 440 FT along Northfield Avenue

The applicant seeks various “C” variance relief and Design Waivers associated with the proposed development.

C Variance Relief Justification

The board has the power to grant “C” variance relief based on “hardship” criteria pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40:55D-70c(1) or based on “flexible” criteria pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40:55D-70c(2). All “C” variance relief associated with this application can be granted under the “C(2)” “benefits vs. detriments” criteria. We find that the benefits of the project as a whole substantially outweigh any detriments for the following reasons:

1. § 25 Attachment 3 - Maximum Lot Coverage: The maximum permitted lot coverage is 60%, where 86.79% is proposed. Under existing conditions, lot coverage is 90.67%, and the proposed development represents an overall decrease in impervious coverage of approximately 3.88%, or 3,265 SF. Reducing impervious coverage constitutes an improvement over existing conditions.
2. § 25 Attachment 3 - Maximum Building Coverage: The maximum permitted building coverage is 40%, whereas 62.93% is proposed. Under existing conditions, the majority of the lot is covered with asphalt. The proposed building coverage represents a more efficient use of the site, given its corner lot location in a mixed-use area. To mitigate potential impacts, landscaping is proposed along all property lines.
3. § 25 Attachment 3 - Maximum Building Height/Stories: The maximum permitted height permitted is 35 FT/2.5 Stories, where 38.27 FT/4 Stories is proposed. Due to significant grade changes across the site, less than half of the structure reaches 4 stories, dropping down to 3 stories in the higher elevation areas. In addition, portions of the surrounding properties are situated at higher elevations, which reduces the overall perceived height of the building. Given the site’s topographic conditions and the proposed landscaping, no detriment is anticipated.

4. § 25 Attachment 3 - Minimum Side Yard Setback: The minimum required side yard setback is 25 FT, where 0.4 FT on Sheridan Avenue is proposed. The proposal includes repairing the existing 4 FT sidewalk and adding diverse landscaping, such as inkberry, winterberry, sargent junipers, and thornless cockspur hawthorns, to provide visual buffering and enhance the streetscape. This landscaping promotes a more active, pedestrian-friendly frontage along Sheridan Avenue.
5. § 25 Attachment 3 - Minimum Front Yard Setback: The minimum required front yard setback is 30 FT, whereas 2.4 FT is proposed along Northfield Avenue. A 4 FT-wide concrete sidewalk, combined with landscaping and street-facing public entrances, creates an active, pedestrian-friendly frontage. This design supports ground-floor commercial and mixed-use activity.
6. § 25-28.8 - Maximum Disturbance of Steep Slopes: Disturbance of steep slopes greater than 25% is not permitted, whereas 30.83% proposed. In addition, disturbance of steep slopes between 20-24.99% is proposed at 29% of the total area of these slopes on-site, whereas a maximum of 20% disturbance of these slopes is permitted. The site contains significant changes in grade, and the proposed grading has been designed to minimize impacts. Please refer to the Steep Slopes Response Memo prepared by ANS Consultants, dated January 26, 2026.
7. § 25-11.3 - Minimum Residential Buffer: The minimum required residential buffer is 50 FT, whereas 13.6 FT is proposed in the northwest corner of the property. The area where the buffer deviates from occurs at a pinch point, while the buffer expands up to 71 FT moving east along the property, exceeding the minimum requirement. Several existing trees within the buffer will be preserved, and additional trees up to 10 FT in height will be planted.
8. § 25-12.1.1 - Parking Entrance Location: Each entrance or exit from a parking area shall be at least 50 FT from any residential district, whereas the proposed driveway is located 1.2 FT from the eastern property line, which abuts an existing undeveloped property. This reduced distance occurs at a pinch point, with the buffer widening northward along the property line. Proposed supplemental landscaping, including red twig dogwood and American holly reaching up to 10 FT, will provide effective screening and minimize potential impacts.

Design Waivers

1. § 28-4(b)(4) - Tree Removal on Steep Slopes: Tree removal is not permitted on a slope with a grade of 10% or greater on a slope where vegetation is presently stabilizing soils, whereas 23 trees are proposed for removal on the steep slope areas. While some mature trees will be removed, the proposed landscaping plan constitutes an enhancement over current conditions. The project includes the installation of 94 new trees and 187 shrubs, which will improve soil stability.

The variances can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and will not substantially impair the intent and purposes of the zone plan and zoning ordinance. The proposed mixed-use development, which includes both affordable and market-rate units and a mix of bedroom types, aligns with the Township's 2019 Master Plan objectives to *maintain a balance of land uses, provide a range of appropriate housing types and units, and improve and maintain existing residential neighborhoods*. The project also advances the Master Plan's goals of promoting compatible economic development.

The development complies with all B-2 District conditional use requirements, is appropriately located between commercial and residential areas, and revitalizes a previously vacant site. The proposed development will result in a decrease in impervious coverage while adding extensive landscaping, new sidewalks, and buffers to enhance the streetscape of the Business Zone.

Overall, the project promotes purposes "a," "i," and "g" of the MLUL by supporting affordable housing and providing a permitted mixed-use development, thereby promoting the general welfare of residents and users of the proposed building. The proposed landscaping creates a desirable visual environment, and the development complements existing and permitted uses within the Business Zone and the surrounding neighborhood while providing public and community benefits. Under the C(2) "benefits versus detriments" standard, the benefits of the proposed development, including affordable housing, improved landscaping, a pedestrian-friendly streetscape, enhanced neighborhood character, and effective use of an underutilized site outweigh any potential detriments.

Conclusion

Based on a review of the subject property, surrounding area, and applicable zoning requirements, it is concluded that the application's benefits substantially outweigh the detriments, and that the application can be approved without substantial detriment to public good or substantially impairing the intent and purposes of the zone plan and zoning ordinance. It is the opinion of our office that the statutory criteria has been met for all relief required as presented by the planning proofs and the justifications presented in this report.

Regards,



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