

**MINUTES
TOWNSHIP OF WEST ORANGE
PLANNING BOARD MEETING
February 4, 2026, 7:30 P.M.**

The Township of West Orange Planning Board held its regular meeting on February 4, 2026, 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 **on February 11, 2026, at 6:30 P.M.** in person.
- The next Planning Board special meeting will be held **on February 25, 2026, at 6:30 P.M.** in person.
- The next Planning Board regular meeting will be held **on March 4, 2026, at 7:30 P.M.** via Zoom.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Dr. Robert Bagoff; Mr. Ken Alper; Mr. John Cardoza (8:13 P.M.); Mayor Susan McCartney; Mr. Christopher Morgan, Sr.; Councilwoman Susan Scarpa; Mr. Frank Noborine;

ABSENT: Mr. Jerry Guarino; Ms. Lori Kapferer; Mr. Lee Klein; Mr. William Wilkes;

ALSO PRESENT: Diana P. McGovern, Esq., Planning Board Attorney;
Diana L. Chandler, Planning Board Interim Secretary
Ryan MacNeill, Planning Board Engineer
Malvika Apte, Planning Board Planner

SWEARING IN

- The Township Professional(s) sworn in.

APPLICATIONS

- **PB 25-10 Trader Joe's**
Block: 157 Lot: 5 Zone: B2
457 Mount Pleasant Avenue
The applicant proposes to refit and reoccupy approximately 18,768 square feet of existing

tenant space within the main building, including approximately 1,522 square feet mezzanine with a Trader Joe's retail grocery store.

PRESENTATION

- Howard Geneslaw, from FBT Gibbons, LLP, on behalf of the applicant.
- At the previous meeting, there was testimony from the civil engineer and architect.
- Site plans, engineering, and architectural drawings were also reviewed.
- Comments from engineering (CME) and planning reports were addressed.
- The current meeting will present the traffic engineer and professional planner
- Mr. Geneslaw reviewed follow-ups from the previous meeting.
- Fire officials requested no-parking fire lane striping, signage, and painted curbs.
 - o The applicant agrees to revise plans accordingly.
- Fire officials will allow jitney-style vehicles to briefly stop in fire lanes for drop-off/pick-up.
 - o The applicant will add a designated bus stop note on the plans.
 - o They will also install a bench near the stop for waiting passengers.
- Compost will be collected twice a week by a commercial food waste collection service.
 - o It will be stored in totes in a refrigerated trash room until pickup.
- Pest control service visits weekly.
 - o Initial inspection and trap placement after store completion.
 - o Trash will also be stored in a refrigerated area to minimize odor/pests.
- The traffic engineer, Paul Going, entered on the record; he was sworn under oath. His credentials were accepted by the board and testified to the following:
- Mr. Going prepared a traffic statement on this matter dated September 19th, 2025, last revised January 15th, 2026.
- Site size is approximately 3.7 acres.
- Location:
 - o Northeast quadrant of intersection:
 - Mount Pleasant Ave (Route 10)
 - Pleasant Valley Way (County Route 636)
- There are multiple access points:
 - o 2 driveways on Route 10
 - o 1 driveway on Pleasant Valley Way
 - o 1 driveway on Mount Pleasant Place (local road)
- The site is occupied by the Mount Pleasant Plaza Shopping Center
- There are 2 buildings:
 - o Main building: 29,200 sq ft (includes mezzanine)
 - o Secondary building: 3,200 sq ft (bagel & pizza shops)
- Previous tenants:
 - o Metropolitan Plant Exchange (~16,367 sq ft + outdoor greenhouse canopy)
 - o Restaurant (~3,200 sq ft)
 - o Martial arts studio (~2,400 sq ft)
- The proposed change is replacing the former plant exchange and martial arts studio with Trader Joe's.
- They will also replace the greenhouse canopy with new parking area
- The parking that's in front of the site would be reconfigured to be perpendicular parking with two-way aisles.
- There will increase in parking from 165 to 188 spaces (includes EV credits)
- In regard to the traffic impact analysis, two methodologies were used.

- Method 1 was based on guidelines from the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE).
 - o Contains traffic generation rates for many land uses.
 - o Focuses on peak hour traffic volumes.
- Traffic is calculated based on total floor area (square footage)
- The conclusion was no change in floor area between the existing shopping center and the proposed shopping center
- Therefore, no change in total traffic generated, and the project does not increase traffic under this method
- Method 2 examines the actual change in tenants/uses at the site.
- The calculation shows
 - o 10-trip reduction in the weekday morning peak hour
 - o 30-trip increase in the weekday evening peak hour
 - o 23-trip increase in the Saturday midday peak hour.
- An increase of fewer than 100 trips is not considered significant by the NJDOT.
- It is concluded that the project would not have an impact on area traffic.
- The traffic analysis was submitted to NJDOT, and they issued a “Letter of No Interest” dated September 18, 2025.
- Aside from traffic, they also looked into parking.
- Currently, there are 165 existing parking stalls.
- In the proposed condition, they'd have 188 stalls, which includes a credit for EV stalls.
- Required parking is 188 spaces
 - o Retail: 117 spaces
 - o Restaurant: 71 spaces
- As a result, it eliminates prior parking variance and brings the site into full compliance
- In conclusion, the project does not generate a significant increase in traffic.
 - o The DOT agreed with that assessment.
- In addition to eliminating the existing parking variance, the project extends the sidewalk along the westerly side of the building, which is a benefit to the patrons to walk safely.

BOARD QUESTIONS

- Dr. Bagoff asked if there would be wayfinding signs in the parking lot. Mr. Going said there are pavement arrows, striping, and stop lines that will guide traffic.
- Mayor McCartney asked if there will be improvements on the access that goes over the South Branch Rahway River out to Pleasant Valley Way. Mr. Going said the plan is to add a stop sign with solar-powered LED flashers at the entry.
- Mayor McCartney follow-up regarding customers coming in and out. Mr. Going added that they can strip a stop line and add a stop sign to help guide people coming in.
- Mr. Alper asked if one can make a left turn onto Pleasant Valley. Mr. Going said left turns are allowed, but drivers will likely prefer Route 10 exits.
- Mr. Noborine asked is there was anything restricting trucks from using the back exit or entrance, since it was noticed in Mr. Going’s assessment that there would be no trucks entering Pleasant Valley Way into the parking lot. Mr. Going said the plan is not to have trucks at the Mount Pleasant Place entrance.
- Mr. Noborine asked if there was an evaluation of the increase and decrease of traffic on Mount Pleasant Place. Mr. Going said they evaluated the increase and decrease of traffic for the site as a whole.

PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONS

- Mr. MacNeil asked Mr. Going if he had meetings with the county regarding the right-of-way on Pleasant Valley Way. Mr. Going said he did not attend any pre-app meeting with the county.
- Mr. MacNeil asked would the applicant have any objections to improving with sidewalk and ADA curb ramps along the frontage. Mr. Going said they could work with the county on that, and add a crosswalk and curb ramps if they're needed there.

PRESENTATION

- The professional planner, Justin Auciello, entered on the record; he was sworn under oath. His credentials were accepted by the board and he testified to the following:
- As part of Mr. Auciello's analysis, he conducted a site visit to understand the physical conditions, surroundings, and roadway network.
- He also reviewed the township's master plan, zoning ordinance, and application materials
- The site is located in the B2 Retail Business Zone
- Proposed Trader Joe's supermarket use is permitted in this zone.
- Multiple variances are required; however, some are pre-existing nonconforming conditions and some are improved by the project
- For the impervious coverage variance:
 - o Required: 60%
 - o Existing: 83.8%
 - o Proposed: 82.1%
- This is a slight reduction (improvement) from existing conditions.
- Front Yard Parking (Accessory Use Location):
 - o Requirement: No accessory uses allowed in front yard
 - o Existing & Proposed: Parking located in front yard
 - o Justification:
 - Pre-existing condition
 - Cannot be changed
 - Parking is necessary
- Parking Setback Variance
 - o Requirement: 10-foot setback
 - o Existing/Proposed:
 - ~27 spaces along frontage within setback
 - ~25 spaces alongside the lot line within setback
 - Total: 52 spaces
 - o Justification: Existing condition, continues as-is
- Front Yard Encroachment
 - o Requirement: No accessory structures in the front yard
 - o Proposal: Trash enclosure in Mount Pleasant Place front yard
 - o Hardship (C1) due to multiple frontages (3 streets)
 - o Improvements:
 - Enclosed structure
 - Existing + proposed vegetation
 - Fence/wall screening
 - Additional trees
- Fence Height Variance:
 - o Maximum allowed: 6 feet
 - o Existing & Proposed: 8 feet
 - o Pre-existing condition needed to screen the loading area and buffer adjacent

- residential properties
- Wall Height Variance
 - Maximum allowed: 6 feet
 - Proposed: 8 feet
 - The purpose is to screen ground-mounted utility equipment
 - Improves visual screening, safety, and security
- Utility Screening Variance
 - Requirement: Screening on 3 sides with landscaping
 - Proposed: Provides for a transformer on a pad within a service area.
 - The issue is the transformer located in paved area, so no room for landscaping
 - However, it is located in an inconspicuous rear area
 - Already screened by:
 - Trash enclosure
 - Mechanical enclosure
 - Existing fence along residential boundary
- Loading Space Variance
 - Required: 4 loading spaces
 - Existing: 1
 - Proposed: 2
 - Result:
 - Improvement over existing
 - Still requires variance but enhances operations
- Illumination Variance
 - Requirement: Minimum 2 foot-candles
 - Proposed: Slightly reduced lighting levels
 - Justification: Reduce light spillover onto neighboring properties
- Canopy Projection Variance
 - Maximum: 6 feet
 - Existing: 8 feet
 - Proposed: 8 ft 7 in
 - Justification:
 - Increase is minimal due to signage
 - Rebuilding canopy would be unreasonable
- Canopy Sign Height Variance
 - Allowed: 8 inches
 - Proposed: 1 ft 6 in
 - Necessary for visibility, safety, and site identification
 - Additionally, there is a building design constraint where there is insufficient wall space for traditional signage
- Planner cites the case of Pullen v. Township of South Plainfield, where the board weighed the benefits of the entire project vs detriments, and the planner believes it should be applied here.
- Positive Criteria:
 - The application reoccupies vacant retail space and has no expansion of the footprint
 - There is a community benefit where it provides a grocery store serving local residents
 - Additionally, it is accessible, being walkable for nearby residents and convenient for drivers.
 - There is improved site functionality with better parking layout and improved

circulation

- There is also added loading space and EV charging spaces
- There will be new landscaping and sidewalks, paving, and striping will be improved.
- It is an advancement of Zoning Purposes as it supports the purposes of Municipal Land Use Law:
 - Purpose A – public health, safety, welfare
 - Purpose G – adequate space distribution
 - Purpose I – desirable visual environment
 - Purpose J – conservation, prevent sprawl
 - Purpose M – efficient land use
- Negative Criteria:
 - 1. No Harm to Public Good
 - Variances: Mostly existing conditions, and the remaining are minor
 - Impacts mitigated by:
 - Fencing
 - Landscaping
 - Screening
 - Lighting controls
 - Noise mitigation
 - 2. No Impairment of Zoning Plan
 - Proposal is consistent with zoning intent and supports township planning goals
- Consistent with the 2019 Master Plan re-examination
- Supports:
 - Balanced growth
 - Economic development
 - Reinforcement of commercial areas
 - Aligns with smart growth principles:
 - Infill development
 - Redevelopment of underutilized sites
 - Maintaining suburban character
 - Appropriate land use placement
- Planner's final conclusion is that the benefits clearly outweigh the detriments
- Any detriments are not substantial

NO BOARD QUESTIONS

PROFESSIONAL COMMENTS

- Ms. Apte emphasized that the project is rehabilitating and repurposing the site. Additionally, the variances are largely due to existing conditions
 - Mr. Auciello agrees that the variances are the result of working within existing site constraints.

NO PUBLIC QUESTIONS

NO PUBLIC COMMENTS

Motion: Chairman Bagoff

Second: Mr. Alper

Alper:	Y	Mayor McCartney:	Y
Bagoff:	Y	Morgan:	---
Cardoza (Alt. 1):	---	Noborine:	Y
Guarino:	---	Scarpa:	Y
Kapferer (Alt. 2):	---	Wilkes:	---
Klein:	---		

ADOPTED:

Jamilet Baquerizo Vite
Planning Board Secretary