

66 Main Street West Orange NJ 07052

July 27, 2026

Dr Robert Bagoff, Chairman
West Orange Planning Board
Township of West Orange

Re: PB application No. 25-12

Dear Chairman and Planning Board Members,

Please be advised that the Downtown West Orange Alliance (DWOA) has reviewed the submitted application. Last year, we also met with the property owner and their architect to discuss the proposed project. Today, the site holds two shuttered storefronts, and we are especially excited to see that the developer has chosen architectural plans featuring a uniquely designed building. This kind of thoughtful investment is exactly what we have been encouraging along the corridor.

The New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) identifies the Orange/West Orange/Montclair area as a Food Desert Community. Even more importantly, a full-service grocery store serves as an anchor use that can support continued growth, investment, and economic activity throughout the downtown corridor. One study summary reports that grocery stores are associated with a 5% to 7% increase in nearby residential home values.

Grocery stores have also been well documented to spur economic activity in communities. Research by the Reinvestment Fund, a Community Development Financial Institution whose supermarket-impact studies have been produced for the U.S. Department of the Treasury, as well as research by The Food Trust and PolicyLink, has found that grocery stores can function as economic anchors for commercial corridors by generating steady, seven-day-a-week foot traffic, attracting complementary businesses such as restaurants and services, and creating local jobs. This anchor effect is exactly what this stretch of Main Street needs.

Recent community feedback also demonstrates strong demand for additional businesses and destinations in Downtown West Orange. The Transformation Strategy recently completed in partnership with Main Street America found that 67% of survey respondents, most of whom were Township residents, identified the lack of businesses and destinations as the number one issue facing our downtown. Grocery stores were also among the most requested new business types identified by respondents.

Beyond the individual benefits of the proposed grocery store, this project represents a significant private investment in Main Street and the downtown corridor. Replacing vacant storefronts with a substantial new development demonstrates confidence in the future of the area and can help encourage additional investment in surrounding properties. This type of investment is important as we continue working to strengthen the commercial corridor, reactivate underutilized properties, and create a more active and attractive downtown.

The project also represents an opportunity to create new jobs within the downtown corridor. A full-service grocery operation requires employees across a range of positions and skill levels. The DWOA strongly encourages the applicant to prioritize qualified West Orange residents when hiring and to work with local organizations and workforce resources to help connect residents with available positions. Beyond the direct economic benefit of these jobs, employees working downtown also contribute to the daily activity and vitality of the surrounding commercial district.

Loading, Deliveries & Parking

The application proposes a designated loading area along Main Street that will temporarily utilize four on-street parking spaces during morning delivery hours. While we recognize the importance of considering the impact of loading activity along Main Street, this type of activity is already a regular part of the daily operation of our commercial corridor. We have numerous stores and businesses that routinely receive deliveries of products and supplies from trucks of varying sizes at different times throughout the day.

In our view, deliveries associated with the proposed grocery store are consistent with the normal activity of an active commercial district and should not present an unusual burden on Main Street. The temporary use of four on-street spaces during designated morning delivery hours should also be considered in the context of the additional off-street parking being provided as part of the development.

We are also mindful of the preschool located nearby and the importance of maintaining safe pedestrian conditions for children and families. We understand that many of the students arrive by bus and that a designated parking and drop-off area is located approximately one block away from the store. Students crossing Main Street are also assisted by a crossing guard. Given these existing measures, we do not believe the proposed development creates an unreasonable conflict with the preschool; however, we support continued coordination to ensure that delivery activity and other site operations do not interfere with student arrival and dismissal times.

We also believe the two proposed employee parking spaces along Prospect Place are a good use of this portion of the property.

Architectural Design & Streetscape Improvements

The proposed design represents a significant improvement over the existing conditions at the site. The architect has taken an approach that considers not only the building itself, but its relationship to Main Street, pedestrians, parking, and the surrounding commercial district. The existing site contains multiple curb cuts, disconnected parking areas and inactive frontage that the architect identifies as obstacles to walkability, pedestrian safety and a cohesive streetscape.

We also appreciate the proposed use of pavement art as part of the streetscape design. This creative approach would add visual interest, enhance the pedestrian experience, and introduce a new placemaking element that could help distinguish this portion of Main Street and make it more inviting.

The proposal brings the building to the corner and consolidates access to the parking area, creating a more defined street edge and reducing the number of vehicle-pedestrian conflict points. We agree with the architect's goal to create a more active and inviting Main Street frontage and encourage pedestrian activity rather than have the property function primarily as a parking lot. The building placement and façade treatments are intended to encourage foot traffic and help make this area a destination rather than a drive-through zone.

Sustainability & Site Improvements

The project also incorporates a substantial number of environmental and sustainability features. These include a solar-ready roof, high-reflectivity white roof, skylights for natural daylighting, rain gardens, permeable paving, low-flow plumbing fixtures, increased open space, native trees, EV parking and a bicycle rack. The rain gardens and permeable surfaces are intended to improve on-site stormwater management, while the additional trees will provide shade and contribute to the Main Street tree canopy.

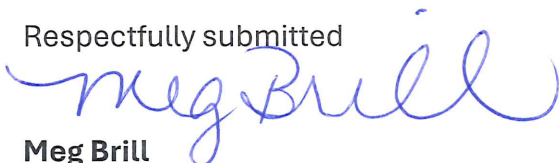
Given the site's proximity to residential properties, we also believe appropriate landscaping and tree buffers are important to provide screening and help minimize the impact of the commercial use on neighboring homes. While the proposed green elements are encouraging, detailed testimony regarding the landscaping and buffering plan has not yet been presented. We look forward to reviewing that portion of the application and would encourage a thoughtful landscape plan that provides an appropriate transition between the commercial property and the surrounding residential neighborhood.

DWOA Support & Conclusion

Overall, the DWOA is supportive of the proposed application and believes the Leon Marketplace represents the type of significant private investment and redevelopment we have been working to encourage along the downtown corridor. The project will reactivate vacant commercial properties, introduce a much-needed full-service grocery store, create new employment opportunities, improve the physical appearance and pedestrian experience of the site, and bring consistent daily activity to this portion of Main Street.

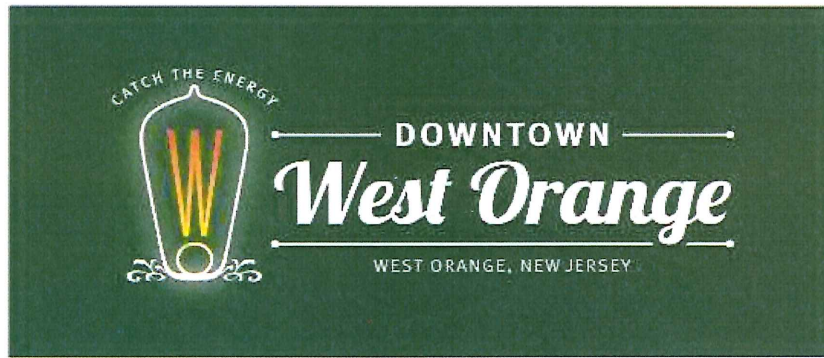
We look forward to the remaining testimony and the comments and recommendations of the Planning Board and its professionals. We encourage the applicant to continue working with the Board and Township professionals to address any outstanding issues while preserving the elements of the project that provide meaningful economic, community, and streetscape benefits to Downtown West Orange.

Respectfully submitted



Meg Brill

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66 Main Street West Orange NJ 07052

July 29, 2026

Re: PB Application No 25-12

Dear Chair and Members of the Planning Board:

On behalf of the Downtown West Orange Alliance (DWOA), please find attached our comments regarding the Leon Marketplace application at 262–270 Main Street.

The DWOA is governed by an 11-member Board of Trustees representing stakeholders within our downtown community. In preparing the attached report, the application materials were shared with our Trustees for review and comment, and their feedback has been incorporated into the attached document.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide the DWOA's perspective on a project of this significance to the downtown corridor and ask that the attached report be made part of the record for the application.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Meg Brill'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Meg' and last name 'Brill' clearly visible.

Meg Brill

Executive Director

Downtown West Orange Alliance