

MINUTES
TOWNSHIP OF WEST ORANGE
PLANNING BOARD MEETING
June 10, 2026, 7:30 P.M.

The Township of West Orange Planning Board held a special meeting on June 10, 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 **Wednesday, June 24, 2026 at 7:30 p.m.** via Zoom.
- The next Planning Board regular meeting will be held on **Wednesday, July 1, 2026 at 7:30 p.m.** via Zoom.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Chairman Robert Bagoff; Mr. Jerry Guarino;
Mayor Susan McCartney; Councilwoman Susan Scarpa; Mr. Lee Klein; Ms. Lori Kapferer; Mr. John Cardoza;

ABSENT: Mr. William Wilkes; Mr. Frank Noborine; Mr. Ken Alper; Mr. Christopher Morgan, Sr.

ALSO PRESENT: Diana P. McGovern, Esq., Planning Board Attorney;
Jamilet Baquerizo Vite, Planning Board Secretary

MINUTES & RESOLUTIONS

[PB-24-01 West Essex Highlands Inc - Draft-Resolution](#)

Motion: Council President Scarpa

Second: Ms. Kapferer

Alper: ---	Mayor McCartney: ---
Bagoff: ---	Morgan: ---
Cardoza (Alt.2): Y	Noborine: ---

Guarino:	---	Scarpa:	Y
Kapferer:	Y	Wilkes:	---
Klein:	---		

SWEARING IN

- The Township Professionals: Mr. Ryan MacNeil (Consultant Engineer) and Mr. Michael Davis (Consultant Planner) were sworn under oath.

APPLICATIONS

- **PB-25-11 525 Northfield Ave LLC**
525 Northfield Avenue
Block: 159.04 Lot: 1.01 Zone: B-2
The applicant is proposing a 4-story mixed-use building containing 1,200 sq. ft commercial space on the ground floor and 95 residential units on the upper floors, and 165 off-street parking spaces.

PRESENTATION

- Marsha Moore, Esq appeared on behalf of Northfield Ave LLC.
- She requests to continue the presentation with testimony from the project architect, Matthew Jarmel.
- Mr. Jarmel begins sharing architectural plans that were included in the submission.
 - o Plans are dated March 30, 2026.
- The cover sheet identifies:
 - o Property address: 525 Northfield Avenue
 - o Mixed-use development
 - o Block 159.04, Lot 1.01
- A rendering shows the building located at the corner of Northfield Avenue.
- Mr. Jarmel explains a major design factor:
 - o The site has an approximately 18-foot elevation difference from one end to the other.
 - o The first floor is partially built into the hillside.
 - o As a result:
 - The building is technically four stories
 - From much of Northfield Avenue it appears to be only three stories
- Proposed exterior materials include:
 - o Brick at the base
 - o Cementitious wall panels on all four sides for architectural consistency
 - o Color palette primarily of browns and whites
 - o Sustainable materials
 - o Decorative faux green walls in several locations
- Each floor measures approximately 43,150 square feet
- Residential and lobby areas total approximately 115,335 square feet
- Parking area totals approximately 57,245 square feet
- Total building size is approximately 172,600 square feet
- Total residential units: 95

- 76 market-rate units (80%)
 - 19 affordable units (20%), satisfying inclusionary housing requirements.
- Unit mix:
 - 68 one-bedroom units
 - 22 two-bedroom units
 - 5 three-bedroom units
- Affordable housing breakdown:
 - One-bedroom:
 - 3 affordable
 - 65 market-rate
 - Affordable share = 15.7%, below the maximum allowed 20%.
 - Two-bedroom:
 - 11 affordable
 - Affordable share = 57.8%, exceeding the required minimum of 30%.
 - Three-bedroom:
 - All 5 are affordable
 - Represents 26.3%, exceeding the required minimum of 20%.
- Mr. Jarmel states the project complies with both affordable housing requirements and required distribution of unit types under UHAC (Uniform Housing Affordability Controls).
- Proposed apartment sizes meet or exceed both West Orange ordinance and UHAC requirements.
 - One-bedroom units:
 - Ordinance minimum: 800 sq ft
 - Proposed: 800–850 sq ft
 - Two-bedroom units:
 - Ordinance minimum: 1,000 sq ft
 - Proposed: 1,000–1,225 sq ft
 - Three-bedroom units:
 - Proposed size: 1,350 sq ft
 - Exceeds both:
 - West Orange requirement (1,200 sq ft)
 - UHAC minimum (1,150 sq ft)
- Ms. Moore clarifies that some affordable housing numbers differ from the planner's report.
- The testimony reflects the correct numbers shown on the submitted architectural plans.
- Mr. Jarmel presented drawing SD101, which depicts the ground floor of the building
- Northfield Avenue borders the front of the site
- County improvements require:
 - Removal of an existing deceleration lane
 - Widened sidewalks
- Although earlier discussion suggested the building was close to the property line:
 - The widened sidewalk creates an effective setback of approximately 18–20 feet.
- The first floor includes:
 - Residential vestibule and lobby facing Northfield Avenue
 - Zen garden
 - Building utility rooms
 - Co-working amenity space
 - Approximately 1,200 square feet of retail/commercial space fronting Northfield Avenue

- Large utility room along Sheridan
 - Transformer vault
 - Allows electrical transformers to be housed inside the building rather than in exterior ground-mounted equipment.
 - Also accommodates water, gas, and electrical meters.
- Two separate parking entrances from Northfield Avenue:
 - Western entrance at a lower elevation
 - Eastern entrance at a higher elevation
- These entrances serve different parking levels due to the site's slope.
- Eight parking spaces near the lower entrance are reserved for:
 - Commercial customers
 - Building deliveries
- Parking entrance will have:
 - Open metal gates (not solid)
 - Automatic operation using resident proximity readers
 - Gates open and close automatically for tenants
- Green parking spaces represent lift/tandem parking.
- Includes 22 lift/tandem parking arrangements.
- Intended primarily for residents of two-bedroom apartments, which require two parking spaces.
- Operation:
 - Automatic push-button lifts
 - Residents receive training
 - The lower vehicle must be removed before lowering or raising the lift
- Regarding planner concerns, if a lift malfunctions, maintenance staff will repair it similarly to elevator maintenance.
- Yellow parking spaces are designated EV spaces.
- The project complies with New Jersey's requirement for up to 15% EV parking.
- EV charging stations are intentionally located outdoors:
 - Preferred by fire departments
 - Avoids placing chargers beneath occupied buildings
- A sectional drawing illustrates the site's approximately 18-foot elevation change.
- Parking is split into two levels:
 - Lower parking level
 - Upper parking level
- Above parking are:
 - Three residential floors
 - Second floor contains both parking and apartments
- Circulation:
 - Vehicles may enter from either driveway
 - Drivers entering from the eastern entrance can circulate through the garage
 - A ramp connects the upper parking level to the lower level
- Large open areas behind parking spaces are intended for:
 - Bicycle storage
 - Snow storage if needed
- Snow removal plan is the developer will use a small Polaris utility truck equipped with a plow.
- Snow can be stored:
 - Near EV parking
 - Behind storage areas

- In other open-air portions of the site
- Mr. Jarmel notes an error on one architectural sheet:
 - Parking chart incorrectly lists 160 spaces
 - Correct number is 165 spaces, matching the civil engineering plans
- Second Floor Layout contains:
 - Upper parking level
 - Residential apartments
 - Resident lounge
 - Sports simulator room
- There are no studio apartments
- The original proposal included outdoor amenity decks.
- These were removed because:
 - They would have required a building coverage variance.
 - Eliminating the decks eliminated the need for that variance.
- Previous questions regarding recessed corner apartments
- Mr. Jarmel clarified:
 - The notches extend completely to the roof
 - They provide adequate natural light and ventilation
- Additionally modern residential mechanical codes require dedicated outside-air systems.
- Compliance no longer depends solely on operable windows.
- Third floor is entirely residential.
- Includes approximately 1,000-square-foot fitness center.
- Building includes:
 - Five stairways
 - Main elevator
 - Two additional elevators positioned at east and west ends
- Design provides convenient access from parking to residential units.
- Every floor contains:
 - Trash room
 - Dual trash chute system
- Separate chutes allow:
 - Regular refuse
 - Recycling (paper/cardboard and commingled recyclables)
- Building will use:
 - Private trash collection service
- Main trash room is located on the second-floor parking level.
- Additional storage rooms allow overflow storage before collection.
- Trash will be moved internally to larger storage rooms until pickup.
- Private hauler is expected to collect trash:
 - Initially about once or twice per week.
 - Can increase to three or more pickups weekly depending on building occupancy.
- Mr. Jarmel explains trash generation will increase gradually as the building fills.
- Using a private hauler allows flexible pickup frequency.
- The developer owns and manages similar apartment buildings throughout Essex County
- Maintenance staff will:
 - Monitor all trash rooms
 - Keep them clean
 - Move trash and recycling into larger storage areas as necessary
- Mr. Jarmel explains that the fourth floor is substantially similar to the third floor, except that the gymnasium area on the third floor is replaced by an apartment on the fourth floor

- The roof plan shows a proposed flat roof with a 3-foot-high parapet surrounding the building.
 - o The parapet is intended to screen mechanical equipment from view at ground level.
- Mr. Jarmel explains that the building requires a height variance, but the proposed height is within the 10% threshold that permits the variance to be treated as a C variance.
- On drawing SD104, Mr. Jarmel reviews the building elevations along Northfield Avenue:
 - o The left side of the elevation is west and the right side is east.
 - o The ordinance measures building height from the average grade line, shown in red on the elevation.
 - o The average grade elevation is approximately 393.54 feet.
 - o The lobby finished floor is at elevation 384, approximately 9.5 feet below average grade.
 - o The second-floor elevation reaches approximately 402 feet, or 8.46 feet above average grade.
 - o The proposed building height measured from average grade to the roof is 38 feet 6 inches, compared with the permitted 35 feet.
 - Mr. Jarmel explains that this is exactly at the 10% threshold.
 - o Rooftop features are permitted to extend beyond the roof height by up to 10 feet. The highest parapet is just under 10 feet above the roof, while most of the parapet is positioned to screen mechanical equipment.
 - o One garage entrance is at approximately elevation 389, about 4.5 feet below average grade.
 - o Another garage access point on the east side is at elevation 402, about 18 feet above the finished floor and 8.46 feet above average grade.
- Mr. Jarmel emphasizes that the changing grade allows the building to appear predominantly three stories from much of the site and become four stories as the elevation drops.
 - o The building is intentionally tucked into the existing grade.
 - o The grade helps screen the parking, which is largely contained within the site and not visible from outside.
 - o A large portion of what appears to be the second-floor frontage is actually parking.
 - o Window features similar to those used elsewhere on the building are placed along the parking frontage to visually blend it into the building and screen the parking.
- Mr. Jarmel reviews a building-signage detail showing the southwestern façade and lobby area.
 - o The proposed building name is “Sofia by Gomes.”
 - o The name is displayed on a faux green wall.
 - o The total sign area is approximately 120 square feet, which Mr. Jarmel believes complies with the ordinance.
 - o Approximately 51 square feet consists of backlit lettering.
- Mr. Jarmel reviews the Sheridan Avenue elevation:
 - o Sheridan Avenue is relatively flat along the western side of the site but becomes very steep farther north
 - o The façade includes glass around amenity spaces, a faux wall, metal panels opening into the parking garage, and utility rooms.
 - o The east elevation uses similar materials throughout the building.
- Because the original submission did not include a rear elevation, Mr. Jarmel introduces Exhibit A3 as a supplemental exhibit, dated April 15, 2026.

- A3 contains eight pages of architectural plans and renderings.
 - Page EX103 is the northern/rear elevation, added after the original submission.
 - Although this side of the building faces a steep and a wall of trees, Mr. Jarmel states that the same high-quality materials are used on all four sides.
 - The elevation shows the parking ramp that allows vehicles to travel from the upper parking level down to the lower parking level.
- Mr. Jarmel returns to the original exhibits and explains that EX100 corresponds to SD101, the original site/building drawing, with the correction of the previously discussed parking count of 165 spaces.
- EX101 provides detailed plans of the residential amenity areas:
 - The second-floor building lounge includes seating, a small kitchenette, and a pool table for residents.
 - An accessible bathroom is located off the corridor.
 - A sports simulator room is located next to the lounge and will include a golf simulator.
 - The third-floor gymnasium includes its own bathroom and equipment storage.
 - The gym will contain cardio equipment and universal/strength-training equipment.
- EX102 provides details of the proposed faux green wall.
 - The feature was requested by the municipal planner.
 - Mr. Jarmel shows an example and explains that it is designed to look lush and realistic.
 - The developer has used the product on other buildings, and Mr. Jarmel describes it as a signature design element associated with the client.
- EX103 is identified again as the rear elevation.
- EX104 is a rendering of the Sheridan Avenue façade.
 - The rendering illustrates the significant change in grade along the site.
 - The building uses brick at lower portions and cementitious panels to provide a modern appearance.
- EX105 is a rendering looking toward the building from the southern side of Northfield.
 - The rendering demonstrates the steepness of Northfield using the project's grading information.
 - On the far eastern side, the building appears only three stories tall.
 - The floor-to-floor heights there are approximately 10 feet, making the building roughly 30 feet from the parking level to the roof.
 - Farther down Northfield, a secondary entrance becomes visible.
 - As the grade drops, more of the first-floor commercial and amenity spaces become visible and the building appears four stories tall.
- EX106 is another Northfield rendering, viewed from the southern side and farther east.
 - It again shows the building as three stories from this perspective.
 - Vehicles enter the upper parking area and can proceed toward a roll-up gate.
 - The grade begins to become steep farther along the site.
- EX107 is a site section prepared to illustrate the relationship between the building and the steep surrounding grade.
 - The upper portion shows the ground-floor plan.
 - Northfield is shown below, with Sheridan to the left.
 - A section line cuts through the site, allowing the viewer to look east.
 - Mr. Jarmel prepared the section specifically to provide context for the building's height relative to the steep slope, existing vegetation, and nearby homes.

- Survey information indicates that several homes farther up Sheridan have rear yards at elevations around 419 feet.
 - The rear of the project site is approximately elevation 391.
 - Mr. Jarmel concludes that the building is generally comparable in height to the homes to its north, while the heavily vegetated slope provides substantial screening.
- Ms. Moore asks Mr. Jarmel to clarify the building-coverage variance because the project is seeking relief for exceeding permitted building coverage.
 - Mr. Jarmel refers to drawing C002, prepared by professional engineer Anthony Faccino.
 - The zoning schedule permits 40% building coverage.
 - The proposal has approximately 53% coverage, about 13 percentage points above the permitted amount.
 - The original design had substantially more coverage.
 - The applicant removed amenity decks in an effort to reduce the coverage and bring it closer to the permitted percentage.
- Mr. Jarmel then discusses the design implications of the setback variances:
 - The required front-yard setback is 30 feet.
 - The existing Essex House restaurant has a front-yard setback of only 0.4 feet.
 - The proposed building is approximately 2.6 feet from the applicable property-line reference, but Mr. Jarmel explains that the actual relationship to the roadway is more favorable because of the site's configuration and roadway changes.
 - Existing-conditions drawing C100 shows a deceleration lane along Northfield that previously allowed vehicles to leave the roadway and enter the property.
 - The county directed the applicant to remove the deceleration lane and extend the two-lane roadway curve instead.
 - Removing the lane pushed the effective property line/setback farther away from Northfield.
 - The proposed building will be approximately 24–25 feet from the curb line, making it substantially farther from the roadway than the existing restaurant despite technically requiring a front-yard variance.
 - The former deceleration area will be filled in and converted into sidewalk and landscaped space.
 - The new area is intended to improve the setback and pedestrian environment through lawn, trees, shrubs, and additional landscaping.
- Ms. Moore asks about walkability and the pedestrian environment.
 - Mr. Jarmel highlights the site's proximity to retail and restaurants, which he says are less than a quarter-mile west.
 - The surrounding area also includes the zoo, arena, and park
 - He believes the site's access to public transportation and nearby retail makes it possible for residents commuting into the city to live without necessarily owning a car.
 - He also notes that Sheridan Avenue is treated as a front yard because the property is a corner lot.
 - The proposed Sheridan setback is approximately 25 feet.
 - The existing restaurant extends beyond that setback line, while the proposed building is essentially at the setback line.
- Ms. Moore confirms that all amenity spaces are intended for residents and that affordable and market-rate residents will have equal access.

- Mr. Jarmel confirms there will be no distinction in amenity access based on affordability.
- Affordable and market-rate units will have the same general finishes and amenities, with differences limited to factors such as rent, unit sizes, and unit mix.
- Units will include built-in washers and dryers and similar HVAC systems.
- Mr. Jarmel confirms that the project will not use P-TECH HVAC units, addressing a planner's earlier question.
- Exterior grills will be colored to match the building's finished materials so they blend into the façade.
- Mr. Jarmel explains the proposed rooftop HVAC equipment:
 - Most apartments will have individual/unitary HVAC systems capable of heating, cooling, and bringing in outside air for ventilation.
 - The exact equipment has not yet been finalized, but Mr. Jarmel confirms it will not be a P-TECH system.
 - If a split system is used, the apartment would contain the furnace and air handler, while a condensing unit would be located on the roof.
 - The roof plan currently shows approximately 95 condensing units.
 - These units are expected to be approximately 2.5–3 feet high and will be hidden behind the parapet.
 - Additional air-handling equipment may be needed for corridor and commercial-space ventilation.
 - Such equipment has not yet been finalized but is expected to be approximately 4 feet high and positioned centrally on the roof so it will be screened by the parapets and not visible from ground level.
- Ms. Moore asks Mr. Jarmel to describe security measures separating the small retail component from the residential portion.
 - The project contains one approximately 1,250-square-foot retail space with its own entrance directly from the Northfield side.
 - Eight parking spaces are designated for visitors and retail users.
 - Those spaces are covered and accessible from Northfield but are located before the controlled residential garage gates.
 - Visitors can park there and then walk to the retail entrance or residential lobby.
 - The residential lobby includes a vestibule and electronic visitor-call system allowing residents to be contacted and visitors to be buzzed in.
 - A package room is located near the lobby, with delivery personnel such as Amazon and FedEx drivers receiving controlled card access.
 - The mailroom provides access for the postal service.
 - Stair doors are controlled by card access so unauthorized people cannot freely enter the residential floors from the garage.
 - A secondary elevator lobby on the east side is accessible only from inside the parking garage and has a dedicated elevator.
 - Vehicles entering the garage from Northfield encounter an entry gate controlled by tenant proximity readers.
 - Only tenants or authorized individuals with security credentials can enter the secured garage.
 - Once inside, residents can access secured stairwells or elevator lobbies.
- Mr. Moore notes that Mr. Gomes has incorporated similar security and safety measures in other apartment buildings in Essex County.
 - Mr. Jarmel estimates that Mr. Gomes may own more than 1,000 apartment units

- Mr. Jarmel confirms that similar security systems and amenities, including Zen Gardens, have been used in Mr. Gomes's other buildings.
- Mr. Jarmel considers the proposed amenity package more than sufficient for the size and type of the building and describes it as a high-end offering with substantial resident amenities.

BOARD QUESTIONS

- Chairman Bagoff asks whether a green roof could be incorporated, particularly with plants or small shrubs around the perimeter to improve the view from Northfield and for neighbors to the north. Mr. Jarmel says a green roof was not considered in the original design. He states that he believes the client would consider it if the Board recommended it, noting that he is working on other buildings for the client that incorporate green-roof features.
- Chairman Bagoff asks about a fire-safety room and confirms that the building will be sprinklered. Mr. Jarmel confirms that the building will have sprinklers. He explains that a dedicated fire command center is not required by building code for a low-rise building of this type. However, if the Board and fire department consider such a room important, Mr. Jarmel says it could be accommodated in the main lobby.
 - Mr. Jarmel explains that the building code already requires the fire stairs to function as areas of refuge.
 - The five fire stairs are fire-rated and designed to remain safe for a longer period during a fire.
- Chairman Bagoff asks how building height is calculated and whether the measurement uses sea level or an average between the high and low points of Northfield. Mr. Jarmel explains the project's civil engineers calculated the average grade according to the ordinance's criteria. The resulting average grade is elevation 393.54 feet above sea level. Building height is then measured from that average grade to the top of the roof.
- Chairman Bagoff asks whether the faux green wall could instead be a real living green wall. Mr. Jarmel says the applicant can discuss that possibility with the applicant but expresses concern about the maintenance requirements of a living wall.
 - The Chair suggests a compromise: using living plants on the lower portion closest to the roadway and faux greenery above, where maintenance would be easier while still producing a blended appearance.
 - Mr. Jarmel asks to defer the issue so that Mr. Gomes can address the Board directly regarding the design decision.
- Mr. Guarino asks why the county required removal of the deceleration lane along Northfield Avenue. Mr. Jarmel says he did not personally meet with the county and therefore cannot explain the reason. He states that civil engineer Anthony Faccino met with county representatives and could return to answer the question.
- Mr. Guarino asks about the mechanical operation in the underground parking lot. Mr. Jarmel explains that the underground parking will use mechanical vertical stackers, with two parking spaces stacked vertically. The system is operated by a push button. The traffic engineer will provide more detailed testimony regarding the proper operation of the mechanical parking system.
- Mr. Guarino asks if the parking spaces will be assigned to residents. Mr. Jarmel explained the mechanical parking spaces will be assigned to particular apartments and will not be shared with other residents
- Mr. Guarino asks about fire department access to the roof and whether firefighters will have a way to enter the building from the roof and reach the floors below. Mr. Jarmel

states that the roof access will comply with the applicable building code. He adds that if the Fire Department wants something beyond the minimum code requirements, the applicant can provide it.

- Mayor McCartney asks about the parking entrances and access for residents and visitors. Mr. Jarmel confirms that the easterly driveway is intended for residents only. The westerly entrance includes eight spaces for visitors and/or retail users
- Mayor McCartney confirms that there will be no vehicle ingress or egress onto Sheridan Avenue. Mr. Jarmel confirms that there will be no vehicle access to Sheridan Avenue
- Mayor McCartney asks about green features beyond the EV parking spaces. Mr. Jarmel says
 - o The roof would use either a white roof or an EPDM/TPO roof.
 - He states that this would help reduce the heat-island effect because the existing property is almost entirely blacktop.
 - o Modern mechanical equipment will comply with current energy and refrigerant requirements.
 - o The building will use highly efficient LED lighting.
 - o Each apartment will have its own HVAC system, allowing residents greater control and improving building controls.
- Mayor McCartney asks whether the applicant has determined what will occupy the approximately 1,200-square-foot retail space. Mr. Jarmel says there have been some thoughts and ideas regarding the retail use. No specific retail tenant has been identified at this point.
- Council President Scarpa asks whether more trees and greenery can be incorporated in front of the building. Mr. Jarmel says the answer is yes and explains that the rendering did not accurately show all of the landscaping proposed. Significant foundation plantings are proposed along the front of the building. No new trees are currently proposed along Northfield because the county may need to approve them. Trees are proposed along Sheridan, as well as at the corner near Northfield
- Mr. Klein asks about the sidewalk and curb treatment. Mr. Klein says he does not object to eliminating a grass strip between the curb and sidewalk because road salt tends to kill grass during the winter. He suggests using a more durable material, such as a rock strip, in that area. Mr. Jarmel says the applicant can consider that suggestion.
- Mr. Klein asks about the distance between the proposed building and nearby property identified as Lot 81. Mr. Jarmel displays Google Maps/Street View imagery to illustrate the relationship between the proposed building and the existing homes along Sheridan. He points out that the existing homes have retaining walls and that the terrain becomes steep very quickly
- Mr. Klein asks whether additional trees will be planted in the area shown on the plan. Mr. Jarmel confirms that additional trees, including evergreens, are proposed.
 - o Ms. Moore and Ms. McGovern discuss marking the Google Street View images as an exhibit.
 - o The images are to be marked as Exhibit A4, consisting of Google Earth/Street View freeze frames showing the house and rear side as discussed during the testimony.
- Council President Scarpa asks what type and size of trees are proposed. Mr. Jarmel says many of the proposed trees are junipers. The proposed red cedar junipers will be approximately 8 to 10 feet tall.
- Mr. Klein asks whether very large transplanted trees may have a lower survival rate than smaller trees, such as trees with a 2- or 3-inch caliper. Mr. Jarmel agrees that this can be

the case. He states that the proposed trees are already substantial at approximately 8 feet tall. He cautions that trees should not be planted too close together.

- Ms. Moore reiterates that the project includes the proposed buffer and that the applicant will meet with the municipal forester regarding the trees, buffer, and residential character of the site.
- Mr. Cardoza asks about the operation of the building's lobby. Mr. Jarmel states the lobby will be unmanned and will not have a concierge.
- Mr. Cardoza asks about package deliveries and whether there will be restrictions on delivery hours. Mr. Jarmel states the lobby will remain accessible 24 hours a day to authorized users. Delivery personnel who are authorized to enter the building will be able to obtain access as needed.
- Mr. Cardoza asks where delivery vans such as UPS or postal vehicles are expected to park. Mr. Jarmel says delivery vehicles are not intended to park on Sheridan. Delivery vehicles should use the eight visitor spaces located off Northfield
- Mr. Cardoza asks about deliveries to the proposed retail space. The retail space is approximately 1,250 square feet. Mr. Jarmel expects deliveries to be made by relatively small vehicles such as vans.
- Mr. Cardoza asks whether a delivery van would have enough room to maneuver if the parking area were occupied. Mr. Jarmel says the project provides a 24-foot-wide drive aisle. He states that a standard delivery van should be able to make a K-turn within the drive aisle
- Mr. Cardoza asks whether delivery companies will be instructed not to stop on Northfield in front of the retail space. Mr. Jarmel says the applicant can provide directions to companies such as Amazon, UPS, and FedEx regarding where deliveries should occur. He acknowledges, however, that actually enforcing where delivery vehicles stop can become an enforcement issue.
- Mr. Cardoza asks a question regarding roof access for the fire department. Mr. Jarmel explains that the building code does not require a stairway to the roof and that the plans show roof hatches.
 - Mr. Cardoza notes that the local fire department prefers stair access, and Mr. Jarmel says that the project could accommodate stairs if necessary.
- Mr. Cardoza asks about the three parking spaces outside Parking Entrance A and whether they would be assigned to residents or used for visitors and retail overflow. Mr. Jarmel explains that the spaces would primarily be assigned to residents. If they are not needed for residents, they could instead be used as overflow parking.
- Mr. Cardoza asks about the width of the parking entrance. Mr. Jarmel explains that it is approximately 25.9 feet wide at its narrowest point and approximately 27 feet wide where it comes in from the road.
- Mr. Cardoza asks about security measures and whether security personnel would be provided since there would not be a concierge. Mr. Jarmel explains that the lobby vestibule would have card-controlled access. The outer door could remain open, while the inner door would remain locked. A virtual concierge/intercom system would allow visitors to contact a resident in the building. The resident could remotely buzz the visitor into the building or come down to let the visitor in.
- Mr. Cardoza asks whether the project would have sufficient security cameras. Mr. Jarmel says it definitely would.
- Mr. Cardoza asks whether the camera data would be stored off-site with sufficient storage, and Mr. Jarmel indicates that the system would provide the necessary security coverage and storage.

- Ms. Kapferer asks what consideration has been given to the timing of the entry gate to ensure that vehicles can enter the property without creating backups onto Northfield. Mr. Jarmel defers the question to the traffic engineer, who can address gate timing and related traffic issues.
- Ms. Kapferer asks whether the sidewalk, grass, and planting areas along Northfield and Sheridan were designed with consideration of matching or mirroring the treatment at a similar building across from Cody Arena. Mr. Jarmel says that he did not personally make that comparison and suggests that the civil engineer who previously testified may have addressed it.
- Ms. Kapferer asks about the elevation along Sheridan, noting that the roadway has a significant slope, and asks how the first floor would appear from the street and whether portions of it would be obscured. Mr. Jarmel presents the Sheridan elevation and explains that Sheridan is relatively flat toward the northern portion of the site before becoming very steep farther up the road. He states that the project's elevation identified as 00 is approximately 9.5 feet below the average grade at the main front door. Mr. Jarmel explains that the entire lower portion of the building would be faced in brick. Near Northfield, where the Zen Garden and amenity spaces are located, there would be windows and decorative metal grills. The decorative grills would be open toward the parking area but would screen the cars from view. A series of doors would also be provided, including doors associated with the building's egress stair.
- Ms. Kapferer asks whether the doors shown along the lower level would be at grade. Mr. Jarmel confirms that they would open out to grade.
- Mr. Cardoza asks whether AED devices would be provided in the building. Mr. Jarmel says he had not previously testified about AED devices but believes the applicant could readily accommodate them.
- Mr. Cardoza asks what number or placement would be appropriate. Chairman Bagoff recommends having an AED on every floor.
- Mr. Cardoza asks about providing an AED in the garage as well. Chairman Bagoff suggests that AEDs would be more appropriate in the gym or amenity areas rather than specifically in the garage.
- Mr. Cardoza asks whether a column appears to be located on the culvert near the EV parking area. Mr. Jarmel identifies the columns on the plan and adds that the five parking stacker spaces located over the culvert could easily be relocated
 - o Mr. MacNeill says relocating those stackers would be beneficial because it would reduce the load over the culvert

PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONS

- Mr. Davis asks whether an ADA-accessible parking space will be added to comply with the ordinance. Mr. Jarmel says that if it is required, the applicant will provide it.
- Mr. Davis asks whether the proposed building sign will project more than one foot from the building facade. Mr. Jarmel confirms that it is not anticipated to project more than one foot.
- Mr. Davis asks whether the recent plan changes will result in a need for lighting variances. Mr. Jarmel says that it's primarily a civil engineering issue.
- Mr. Davis states that, given the variances required for the application, he believes that adding as much planting as reasonably possible would be a valuable addition to the project.
- Mr. MacNeill returns to the issue of the culvert beneath portions of the proposed building and asks Mr. Jarmel to generally explain how the building would be constructed above it

and how the project would avoid creating problems for the culvert. Mr. Jarmel identifies the culvert on drawing SD101 and explains that it runs underneath the building. Mr. Jarmel states that the building has been laid out with constructability in mind. Mr. Jarmel says the design team has been careful to ensure that no building columns land directly on the culvert or in close proximity to it. Mr. Jarmel does not recall the exact depth of the culvert but knows that it is a concrete structure. He believes it was designed to support the vehicle loads that have existed over the culvert for many years and that the proposed project would not substantially change those loads.

- Mr. MacNeill asks that Mr. Faccino later provide testimony regarding what would happen if the culvert failed or required repairs beneath portions of the building. Ms. Moore agrees and notes that the applicant had previously had the culvert tested and could provide additional testimony regarding its condition.

BOARD COMMENTS

- Council President Scarpa says the overall project looks very industrial and expresses concern that residents who moved to the community wanted a suburban environment.
- She says the large sidewalks are positive and wants the project to maintain the suburban character of the area.
- Council President Scarpa emphasizes that the landscaping needs to provide a substantial screen for nearby residents.
- She says the residents do not want the project to look like Orange or Newark.
- She wants substantial, mature trees rather than small saplings that could take many years to grow.
- She specifically wants screening both in front of and behind the building to preserve the suburban feel of the community.
 - o Mr. Jarmel explains that the proposed landscaping includes a combination of tree types.
 - o Ms. Moore notes that questions concerning the precise landscaping, tree replacement, buffers, and compliance with the landscaping ordinance are better addressed by the civil engineer and landscape-related testimony.
- Council President Scarpa reiterates that the residents want the project to maintain the character of West Orange.
 - o Ms. Moore says the project includes sufficient landscaping and that the rendering shows a residential rather than industrial building.
 - o Mr. Jarmel explains that the design is intended to be appropriate for a suburban community.
- Council President Scarpa responds that residents continue to tell her that the building looks industrial and that they want substantially more trees in front of this type of development.
 - o Ms. Moore says the applicant is receptive to adding trees and is willing to meet with the municipal tree forester.
- Council President Scarpa emphasizes that the landscaping must provide a real barrier for the nearby residents.
- She notes that residents have had concerns about development of this property for many years.
 - o Ms. Moore references earlier testimony concerning the proposed buffer and landscaping from the April 15 hearing.
- Council President Scarpa again states that the trees need to be mature enough to provide a serious screen for the residents.

- Mr Klein raises a concern that the three-and-two parking stackers appear to be located directly over the culvert. Mr. MacNeill explains that the stackers are in an area on the lower side of the site where the culvert is deeper, as well as another area farther upstream on the upper parking level. He identifies these as the two portions of the building area located over the culvert.
- Mr. MacNeill says the Board should have testimony on the record explaining how such a repair would affect the building's operations, including whether units would need to be shut down or whether repairs could occur while the building remained occupied and whether the work could affect the certificate of occupancy.

The Board then recessed for approximately ten minutes.

- After the recess, Mr. Turteltaub begins questioning Mr. Jarmel on behalf of nearby property owners, Richard Gajdek at 64 Sheridan and Charlotte Westcott at 346 St. Cloud, and asks him to display the grading plan C400.
- Mr. Turteltaub identifies the eastern side of the building on the grading plan and confirms that the building ends after the three parking spaces where the shading changes from light gray to dark gray. Mr. Jarmel confirms this.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks about a curved line labeled 403 on the plan. Mr. Jarmel identifies it as a proposed grade.
- Mr. Turteltaub then identifies another line labeled 402 inside the building and asks what it represents. Mr. Jarmel confirms that it is also a proposed grade.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether Mr. Jarmel has reviewed the FEMA flood maps for the property. Mr. Jarmel says he has not personally done so. Mr. Jarmel explains that Mr. Faccino, the project's civil engineer and an expert in flood hazards, reviewed the FEMA information, met with the DEP, and participated in studies concerning the site's flood area.
- Mr. Turteltaub shares a FEMA flood map from the FEMA website.
 - o The map is marked as a separate exhibit, O1, identified as the FEMA flood map, and Mr. Turteltaub states that it was exported on June 8, 2026 at 5:46 p.m.
- Mr. Turteltaub attempts to use the FEMA map to question Mr. Jarmel about the property's flood zone. When he asks whether the AE zone shown on the map is a floodway, Mr. Jarmel says he is not sufficiently experienced with those terms to answer.
- Ms. Moore objects, explaining that Mr. Jarmel is appearing as the architect and is not the appropriate expert to provide testimony regarding the floodway or other civil engineering issues.
- Mr. Turteltaub returns to the grading plan, limiting his questions to matters within Mr. Jarmel's architectural testimony.
- Mr. Turteltaub confirms that the 402 proposed-grade line is located within the building structure.
- Mr. Turteltaub confirms that most of the area is currently a parking lot and that the culvert runs beneath the parking lot.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether, if the culvert needed to be upgraded or repaired, it would be preferable to perform that work before constructing the building rather than after construction. Mr. Jarmel agrees that it would be easier to do so before construction. Mr. Jarmel states, however, that the culvert has already been inspected and is in excellent condition.

- Ms. Moore notes that there has been no testimony establishing that the culvert needs to be improved.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether Mr. Jarmel has researched the property's flood history. Mr. Jarmel says he has not personally done so but explains that the project's civil engineers have reviewed the issue, communicated with the DEP, and obtained DEP approvals and letters.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether the property is located in the B2 zone. Mr. Jarmel says he believes it is.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether the proposed use is a conditional use in the B2 zone. Mr. Jarmel says that is his understanding but notes that it is primarily a planning question.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether the B2 zone's bulk standards refer to the R1 zone. Mr. Jarmel says he does not know and explains that the civil engineers and planners performed the zoning evaluation.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether Mr. Jarmel researched the zoning when preparing the architectural plans. Mr. Jarmel reiterates that the civil engineers and planners conducted the zoning analysis and advised him regarding the applicable requirements.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks where Mr. Jarmel obtained the permissible building height. Mr. Jarmel points to drawing C002, which contains a zoning schedule prepared by the civil engineer. Mr. Jarmel explains that the zoning schedule contains the information on which the architectural design was based.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether determining the applicable average height under the zoning ordinance would be a question for the planner. Mr. Jarmel agrees.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether the methodology for calculating average height would also be a matter for the planner. Mr. Jarmel says it would involve the planner and civil engineer.
- Mr. Turteltaub points to the average-height calculation on drawing C002 and asks whether Mr. Jarmel prepared it. Mr. Jarmel says he did not. Mr. Jarmel explains that although his firm prepared the drawings, they are signed and sealed by Anthony Faccino, a professional engineer who is also a professional planner.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether Mr. Jarmel can testify about site triangles for the site's access points. Mr. Jarmel says he cannot because that is within the expertise of the traffic and civil engineers.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether Mr. Jarmel evaluated whether the plan and layout would work when designing the building. Mr. Jarmel states that, from an architectural design standpoint, the project was evaluated for functionality and that he believes the design works very well. He also states that he believes the project provides significant benefits to the community by helping address its affordable housing needs.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether Mr. Jarmel analyzed how vehicles entering through the western entrance would interact with cars backing out of parking spaces or leaving the area. Mr. Jarmel says that analysis would be more within the traffic expert's area of responsibility.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether Mr. Jarmel's earlier comments regarding vehicles being able to make K-turns were based on his own expertise. Mr. Jarmel says the traffic engineer should testify regarding that issue, although the matter was discussed during the design process and the traffic engineer advised the team regarding the width of the drive aisles.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks about the reduction of the project from the original 105 units to 95 units and then questions Mr. Jarmel about the West Orange Fair Share Housing Plan. Mr. Jarmel says he does not believe such a plan exists.
- Mr. Turteltaub presents a document obtained from the West Orange website and asks Mr. Jarmel whether he has seen it before. Mr. Jarmel says he has not.

- The document is identified as the fourth-round plan and is marked as an exhibit, O2.
- Mr. Turteltaub directs Mr. Jarmel to pages 87 and 89 of the document, which identify 525 Northfield Avenue, the former Essex House restaurant property, as a 2.5-acre lot. The document states that in 2025 a developer approached the Township regarding a potential mixed-use residential and commercial building and that the Township proposed rezoning the property to permit 60 units, including 12 affordable units.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether anyone had discussed that proposed 60-unit plan with Mr. Jarmel. Mr. Jarmel says he does not believe the plan existed when his plans were prepared, explaining that his plans were initially submitted in early November and that the fourth-round plan came about later.
 - Ms. Moore objects to the introduction and discussion of the document, arguing that the application concerns a permitted use, that no density variance is being requested, and that the application was filed and deemed complete before the plan was adopted or provided to the applicant.
- Mr. Turteltaub argues that the document is relevant because the applicant is seeking variances, including height and setback variances, to construct a 95-unit building, and the Board must consider whether the proposed development is the only reasonable use of the property or whether other uses could better suit the neighborhood.
 - Ms. McGovern agrees with Ms. Moore's position that the application was filed before the fourth-round plan was adopted. She explains that the date appearing on the document is believed to be the date the Township Council endorsed the plan and emphasizes that the zoning ordinance did not contain a density limitation for the mixed-use zone when the application was filed or at the time of the hearing
 - She acknowledges that the requested side-yard, rear-yard, and other bulk variances could potentially relate to the number of apartment units.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether Mr. Jarmel can testify about the proposed landscaping, including landscaping at the rear of the building.
 - Ms. Moore notes that the civil engineer previously testified about the landscaping
 - Mr. Jarmel clarifies that he did not prepare the landscape plan and that, when he previously answered questions about landscaping, he was simply reading and interpreting the plan, including the number and location of trees, rather than providing landscape-design expertise.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether Mr. Jarmel understands the grade difference between the base of the proposed building and the homes located at the top of the hill. Mr. Jarmel says he can read the grading plan and understand the grade differential.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks what screening is proposed for rooftop mechanical equipment to protect homeowners on the hill. Mr. Jarmel explains that the building will have a parapet surrounding and screening the mechanical equipment.
- Mr. Turteltaub points out that the homes are above the parapet and may have views and potential noise impacts from the rooftop equipment, Mr. Jarmel says the site already has a significant wall of trees and that the landscape plan provides for more than 40 additional trees to supplement that screening.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether the additional trees are located at the base of the hillside. Mr. Jarmel explains that the new plantings begin at the base but extend substantially up the hill.
 - Mr. Jarmel states that, to his understanding, the applicant intends to discuss the landscaping with neighbors and is open to creating a very dense wall of trees,
 - Mr. Turteltaub responds that, although the applicant has met with his clients, the plans have not been changed and additional landscaping could potentially mitigate

the neighbors' concerns because the proposed building would place the building and rooftop elements directly behind homes that currently overlook the area.

- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether the proposed trees would shield the homeowners from the rooftop equipment. Mr. Jarmel says they may not provide complete screening immediately, but the proposed trees will be approximately 8 to 10 feet high when planted.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks how the structural columns for the building will be installed and whether driven piles will be required. Mr. Jarmel explains that geotechnical testing indicates the site has adequate bearing capacity for conventional spread footings. He describes the process as excavating holes, forming and pouring concrete footings, and states that driven piles are not intended to be used.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks about the parking stackers and how long they take to maneuver a vehicle. Mr. Jarmel says he does not know the exact timeframe.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks why the building is proposed to be approximately 2.5 feet from the property line rather than being moved closer toward the rear. Mr. Jarmel explains that the design is intended to avoid the steep slopes.
- Mr. Turteltaub asks whether the number of units could be reduced further. Mr. Jarmel says that would ultimately be a question for the applicant because there are economic considerations involved.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- Mr. Weisleder, 17 Howell Drive, asks whether additional visitor parking is required. Mr. Jarmel explains that the proposed parking complies with both the Residential Site Improvement Standards and the West Orange zoning ordinance, and that the applicant is not requesting a parking variance.
- Mr. Weisleder asks about deliveries from UPS, FedEx, and other last-mile delivery companies. He confirms that the plan is for those vehicles to use the visitor parking area and make deliveries into the lobby or vestibule. Mr. Jarmel confirms that this is the plan.
- Mr. Weisleder asks whether the design accounts for food deliveries. Mr. Jarmel says his personal experience is that food deliveries usually arrive in cars rather than vans and could use the same parking spaces.
- Mr. Weisleder asks where food-delivery vehicles would go if all eight visitor spaces were occupied. Mr. Jarmel points out that there are three additional spaces on the easterly side of the building.
- Ms. Roro, 24 Hutton, asks whether the larger one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments are expected to attract school-age families and whether the project could affect local school capacity. Mr. Jarmel says the question regarding school-age children would probably be better answered by the project's planner. However, based on his familiarity with New Jersey affordable-housing requirements, he believes the larger apartments are intended to allow residents to live with children, although he cannot say whether those children would necessarily be school-aged.
- Mark, 362 St. Cloud Ave, ask whether the architectural design included any studies or changes specifically intended to address increased pollution or noise pollution associated with the development's proximity to South Mountain Reservation and wildlife across the street. Mr. Jarmel says there were no specific design measures undertaken for that purpose. He explains, however, that the building will comply with applicable building codes, energy codes, and New Jersey stormwater rules and regulations, which provide those protections through the required standards.

- Mark asks whether any additional requirements apply because of the property's proximity to South Mountain Reservation. Mr. Jarmel says that, from a building-code or zoning perspective, he is not aware of any
- Sacha Eaton, 62 Lenox Terrance, asks to display the elevation/section showing the proposed building from Sheridan, looking east toward the houses at the top of the slope and asks about the actual height of the building, noting that the elevation identifies it as 48 feet. Mr. Jarmel explains that building height can be confusing because municipalities in New Jersey measure height differently. He points to the sea-level elevations on the drawing and explains that the roof is approximately 48 feet above the entryway elevation at Northfield.
- Ms. Eaton explains that her house is on the east side of the property, on the north side and at the top of the slope. She is concerned that the proposed building appears to be above the level of the houses and questions whether the proposed trees would actually reduce noise or the visual impact of the building. Mr. Jarmel responds that the roof of the proposed building is slightly below the roof of the house shown in the section, while also noting that there is already dense vegetation in the area.
- Ms. Eaton explains that because she lives on top of a hill, she sees the existing trees every day, but because they are deciduous, she has a completely clear view of the lot during the winter. She also says she does not think the proposed building fits the architectural style of the neighborhood and asks Jarmel how he would characterize its style. Mr. Jarmel describes it as a “contemporary suburban multi-family home.”
- Ms. Eaton asks about the culvert and whether the parking garage on the east side will be built below grade. Mr. Jarmel explains that the property slopes approximately 18 to 20 feet from a low point along Sheridan on the west side to the higher east property line. Rather than substantially excavating the property, the project takes advantage of the existing slope to create two levels of parking, one at the lower grade and one at the higher grade. He confirms that the higher parking level will be above ground.
- Ms. Eaton asks whether the east-side parking garage would require digging into the area where the culvert is located. Mr. Jarmel says no and explains that, if anything, some material would be added to level the area.
- Ms. Eaton asks about the noise level of the 95 HVAC units proposed for the roof. Mr. Jarmel says he does not know the exact decibel level if all of the units were operating simultaneously.
- Richard Mensah, 68 Sheridan, asks whether the proposed egress door could be moved farther away from his house and closer to Northfield Avenue because there is already considerable foot traffic in the area. Mr. Jarmel explains that the door is a fire stair and fire exit that opens to the street, which is required by building code for exits to open onto a public way. He says it therefore cannot really be moved, but he does not expect it to be used regularly.
- Mr. Mensah also raises concerns about the loss of his current view once the deciduous trees lose their leaves in the fall and winter, saying that residents will then essentially see the back of the proposed building. Mr. Jarmel states the proposal includes approximately 37 evergreen trees along the hill, which he says would provide additional screening when the deciduous trees lose their leaves.
- Justin Goldsman asks whether any comparative topography or slope studies were conducted, including in comparison with the nearby Ron Jolyn Apartments. Mr. Jarmel says he is not familiar with the apartments but explains that the project was made smaller because West Orange has a steep-slope ordinance intended to protect slopes from runoff and deterioration.

- Joe Scott, 36 Birchwood Ave, asks for the height of the building from the sidewalk at the corner of Northfield and Sheridan, specifically from the perspective of someone standing at the front door and looking to the top of the parapet. Mr. Jarmel states that the grade at the corner is approximately elevation 384 and the roof is at approximately 432.04, producing a height of approximately 48.04 feet.
- Mr. Scott asks where the private truck collecting trash will stand while loading because there is no loading zone. Mr. Jarmel explains that the truck will drive through the parking lot.
- Mr. Scott asks what type of use the retail space was designed for. Mr. Jarmel explains that the space has not been marketed because the building has not yet been approved. He says the eventual use must comply with the uses permitted in the zone, which allow a variety of retail uses, including restaurants.
- Mr. Scott asks about the number of family-sized apartments. Mr. Jarmel clarifies that there are 95 apartments total: 68 one-bedroom units, 22 two-bedroom units, and 5 three-bedroom units. He explains that the five three-bedroom units are affordable units and, under UHAC guidelines, are generally intended to accommodate families. He also notes that approximately 65% of the building consists of one-bedroom units, which he says are not designed for families.
- Mr. Scott asks how many cars can fit between the street and the gate before vehicles would have to back up onto Northfield. Mr. Jarmel says there are eight parking spaces between the gate and Northfield, with approximately 20 feet between the curb of Northfield and the point where vehicles enter that area. He states that all eight cars can park there and none would have to back onto Northfield to exit.
- Asad Shaikh, 53 Sheridan Ave, asks whether the building was specifically designed and evaluated from the perspective of St. Cloud Elementary School, which is located diagonally across from the site. He asks whether the design considered the children, the school's views, and the pedestrian routes used by students. Mr. Jarmel says the building was not specifically designed with the school in mind. He says, however, that the project will enhance sidewalks and pedestrian safety along Northfield and has eliminated vehicle access and entrances from Sheridan, which he says will improve traffic safety around the school.
- Mr. Shaikh asks how many units on the top two floors along Sheridan Avenue have windows facing Sheridan. Mr. Jarmel states that there are five units per floor on the third and fourth floors facing Sheridan, for a total of 10 units.
- Mr. Shaikh expresses concern that these units will have direct visibility toward the school, whereas the current site does not provide comparable visibility. He asks whether consideration was given to protecting the privacy of children entering and leaving the school, including through additional trees or other screening. Mr. Jarmel states that there was no consideration given to screening the school from the building and that no such provisions were included in the plan.
- Mr. Malanga asks Mr. Jarmel whether he reviewed the March 13, 2026 Planning Review Number 1 memorandum prepared by Heyer, Gruel, and Associates. Mr. Jarmel confirms that he reviewed it but notes that the report was outdated and had been supplemented on April 8.
- Mr. Malanga references the report's recommendation that the applicant consider exterior facade materials and design elements that would be harmonious with the historic character of the neighborhood and asks what materials and design elements were incorporated to satisfy Municipal Code Section 25-16. Mr. Jarmel says the proposed building uses materials similar to the apartment complex immediately to the west, which he estimates is approximately 570 feet away.

- Mr. Malanga asks whether Jarmel considers the proposed building a luxury building, and if so, what are the elements of a luxury building. Mr. Jarmel says yes and identifies amenities as a general characteristic of a luxury building.
- Mr. Malanga asks whether ceiling height is an amenity and whether an 8-foot-4-inch ceiling is indicative of a luxury space. Mr. Jarmel says ceiling height is not necessarily an amenity
- Mr. Malanga references the March 13 planning report's discussion of several triangular-shaped one-bedroom units adjacent to the amenity space and asks about the distance between the windows of those units. Mr. Jarmel states that the distance between the windows is 10 feet.
- Mr. Malanga asks whether having only 10 feet between apartment windows is indicative of a luxury space. Mr. Jarmel says the term luxury is subjective.
- Mr. Malanga asks about the location of the lounge, club room, and gym due to The Heyer Gruel report critiquing the location. Mr. Jarmel explains that he does not recall the exact original concern about the location but believes the planner was seeking additional information about what activities would occur in those rooms. He says the applicant supplemented the submission with drawings and an exhibit showing the room layouts and amenities.
- Mr. Malanga asks whether Mr. Jarmel considers it a good design to place apartments next to a lounge, club room, and gym. Mr. Jarmel says yes.
- Mr. Malanga asks whether residents in the adjacent apartments could be affected by noise. Mr. Jarmel says he does not believe they will be affected because the walls will be insulated and the amenity rooms will have established hours of operation.
- Micaela Bennett, Old Indian Road, notes for the record that during a previous attempt to participate, she had asked questions similar to Mr. Malanga's and was disconnected and forced to log back in. She says she wants the issue documented in case the same thing happened to other members of the public.
- Ms. Bennett asks why 95 units is the appropriate number for the site rather than a lower number such as 60, 70, or 80. Mr. Jarmel says that 95 units fits well on the site. He also says the distribution of units is beneficial because the high percentage of one-bedroom units reduces the number of families and school-aged children, which he says has been a concern raised by members of the public. He adds that a greater number of units also produces more affordable housing units, helping West Orange meet its affordable housing plan.
- Ms. Bennett asks whether the number of units and associated parking requirements result in stacked and tandem parking. Mr. Jarmel confirms that they do and says the parking is designed to meet the Residential Site Improvement Standards (RSIS)
- Ms. Bennett asks whether the proposed property differs from 555 Northfield because water runs underneath the proposed site, whereas at 555 Northfield the water runs behind the property. Mr. Jarmel says he did not comment on the water at 555 Northfield and is not familiar enough with that site to know where the water runs.
- Ms. Bennett asks whether Mr. Jarmel believes it is safe to construct a four-story building above the culvert and whether he knows when the culvert was installed. Mr. Jarmel says he does not know when it was installed but says it has been inspected and reported to be in excellent condition.
- Ms. Bennett asks what material the culvert is made from. Ms. Jarmel says it is reinforced concrete.
- Ms. Bennett asks whether concrete has a life expectancy and whether it can eventually deteriorate. Mr. Jarmel agrees that it can.

- Ms. Bennett asks Mr. Jarmel has concerns for the concrete that's running underneath the building to deteriorate during the lifetime of that building. Mr. Jarmel acknowledges that both he and the owner have concerns about the possibility of the concrete deteriorating during the lifetime of the building. He says this is why the applicant has discussed establishing a maintenance plan with the board and engineers.
- Ms. Bennett asks how heavy the proposed building will be. Mr. Jarmel says he does not know the weight yet.
- Ms. Bennett asks whether the stated building height includes the four-foot-tall air-handling units described in Mr. Jarmel's testimony. Mr. Jarmel says it does not.
- Ms. Bennett asks how many stories of the proposed building would be visible from the adjoining residential properties to the north. Mr. Jarmel refers back to the previously presented section exhibit. He points out that the proposed roofline is slightly below the roofline of the adjacent house shown in the section.
- Ms. Bennett asks Mr. Jarmel to identify where the air-handling units would sit in relation to the roofline. Mr. Jarmel points to the roof section and explains that the air-handling units would be placed on top of the roof, below or approximately at the height of the parapet. He says they would be screened from view by the parapet on all sides.
- Ms. Bennett asks whether the use of tandem and stacked parking has accurately estimated the building's carrying capacity and number of units. Mr. Jarmel states that the parking was designed to comply with the state Residential Site Improvement Standards, the West Orange Zoning Ordinance, and state requirements concerning electric-vehicle charging.
- Ms. Bennett then asks about emergency safety and whether Mr. Jarmel is familiar with flooding that allegedly occurs on the property during hurricanes, including situations in which the culvert cannot handle stormwater runoff and water flows through the parking lot. Mr. Jarmel says he is not familiar with that specific flooding.
 - o Ms. Bennett responds that, as a licensed architect, Mr. Jarmel has a responsibility to consider issues such as hurricane flooding and to design buildings to withstand applicable storm events, particularly because the building is proposed above a water culvert.
 - o Mr. Jarmel responds by explaining that New Jersey's flood-hazard regulations establish requirements governing where and how buildings can be constructed. He says he believes information presented during the hearing established that the site is not within a flood-hazard zone and that the residential units are located in a position where they would be permitted even if the area were subject to flood-hazard regulations.
- Ms. Bennett asks Mr. Jarmel directly whether he is saying that the building and residential units are not within a flood-hazard zone. Mr. Jarmel clarifies that flood hazards are not his area of expertise, but says the project has been reviewed by the New Jersey DEP, which has jurisdiction over flood-hazard matters in New Jersey.
- Ms. Bennett asks whether the architectural design accounts for the health, safety, and welfare of residents and neighboring properties when the culvert overflows and flooding occurs. Mr. Jarmel responds that the project follows applicable code requirements and therefore, in his view, the design has accounted for the health, safety, and welfare of the residents.

The application will be carried to the July 1, 2026 regular Planning Board meeting with no additional notice required.

- Before the hearing was adjourned, Ms. Moore added that Ms. Kapferer previously asked about making the sidewalks similar to those at 555 West. She says the applicant

discussed the suggestion with the client, who liked the idea, and the applicant agreed to comply with it.

ADOPTED:

Jamilet Baquerizo Vite
Planning Board Secretary