



TOWNSHIP OF WEST ORANGE

66 MAIN STREET, WEST ORANGE, N.J. 07052

Department of Planning and Development

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TO: Planning Board Members

FROM: Paul Grygiel, AICP, PP, Planning Director

DATE: March 23, 2021

RE: **PB-20-03/The Alpert Group, LLC**
Block: 9; Lots: 32 and 36; Zone: Central Avenue Redevelopment Area
8-10, 18 Central Avenue
Preliminary and final major site plan and variance approvals

INTRODUCTION

The applicant is requesting approvals to construct a mixed-use development on parcels with frontage on Central Avenue and Mitchell Street. The subject property is located in the Central Avenue Redevelopment Area. A redevelopment plan for this area was adopted in 2016. The proposal is consistent with the permitted uses and most bulk and design regulations in the redevelopment plan, but requires variances from certain requirements.

LAND USE/CIRCULATION

The subject property consists of two tax lots with a combined area of 1.93 acres. It is located on the south side of Central Avenue and has frontage on Mitchell Street on the south. Lot 32 (known as the Biddleman site for its former occupant) is developed with a vacant two-story building and other improvements. Lot 36 (the Selecto-Flash site) is vacant, other than rubble piles in a couple of locations. Environmental investigations and cleanup have been undertaken on both lots. There is a mix of land uses in the surrounding area. These include recently constructed multifamily residential developments to the east, commercial and industrial uses on various properties, and residential uses to the west, southwest and south. Sidewalks are located along both street frontages but are in fair to poor condition.



New Jersey Transit's Highland Avenue railroad station is two blocks to the southeast along Mitchell Street. Bus stops are located on Scotland Road and Central Avenue approximately four blocks to the southeast. Central Avenue is an Essex County road (Route 508).

SUBMISSIONS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SIGNED BY</u>	<u>DATE/REVISION</u>
Boundary and Topographic Survey	Frank J. Barlowski, P.L.S.	5/21/20
Site Plan (15 sheets)	Sean M. Savage, P.E.	2/23/21
Architectural Plans (5 sheets)	Stephen L. Schoch	2/23/21
Stormwater Management Report	Sean M. Savage, P.E.	2/25/21
Limited Environmental Impact Statement	Sean M. Savage, P.E.	2/4/21

VARIANCES REQUIRED

STANDARD	REQUIRED	PROPOSED
Maximum building height	55 feet	60.48 feet
Minimum residential unit size	750 sq. ft.	686 sq. ft.
Minimum non-buildable area ¹	20%	14.3%
Minimum landscape buffer along side or rear property line adjacent to residential use	5 ft.	4 ft. along Lot 11.01

DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Proposal

The applicant is proposing to construct a five-story mixed-use building with 94 dwelling units. The ground floor is proposed to include 3,533 square feet of commercial space; office, utility, amenity and lobby space for the residential use; and 10 dwelling units. Eighty four dwelling units (21 units per floor) are proposed on the upper four stories of the building. The breakdown of unit types is 49 one-bedroom units and 45 two-bedroom units. The building's design is similar the adjacent developments constructed by related entities of the applicant to the east in West Orange and Orange. Brick veneer and decorative masonry will be provided on the ground floor façade on Central Avenue and in some other locations on the building, with the decorative masonry

¹ Includes open space, pedestrian areas (excluding hard surface sidewalks) and landscaped areas



extending around up onto the second story façade around the building's front entrance. Fiber cement panels and faux wood aluminum panels are proposed on most of the other façade areas on the building, along with what would appear to be vertical corrugated metal (the arrow from the label for this material needs to be corrected).

A total of 133 parking spaces are proposed, inclusive of 31 compact spaces and five handicap spaces. Vehicular access will be provided by one two-way driveway on Central Avenue and one two-way driveway on Mitchell Street. Pedestrian entrances to the commercial spaces and the residential lobby are proposed on Central Avenue, as is a sidewalk next to the Central Avenue driveway. A bicycle rack is provided along this sidewalk. A sidewalk is proposed adjacent to the eastern property line on the southern portion of the site to provide access to Mitchell Street.

Site Plan Issues

The Township of West Orange Site Plan Review Advisory Board (SPRAB) held a virtual meeting on February 9, 2021. At this meeting, the SPRAB reviewed the above application with the applicant and its attorney, engineer and architect. The applicant's professionals have made a number of revisions to the originally submitted plans to address site plan and design issues that were raised. The following is noted related to some of the topics discussed at this meeting:

- **Circulation and parking:** The applicant noted the number of parking spaces exceeds the minimum required in to order to provide public parking for the Valley area, as well as for an affordable housing project being developed on Tompkins Street by a related entity to the applicant. Requests to provide a pedestrian connection from the sidewalk next to the parking area to the Mitchell Street sidewalk and outdoor bicycle parking were addressed. The applicant has added an electric vehicle charging station-ready parking space to the site plan. Indoor bicycle parking does not appear to have been added, and a truck and emergency vehicle turning template was not added to the site plan as requested. The applicant's professionals should provide testimony regarding the status of these items.
- **Stormwater management:** The Board Engineer raised issues about the stormwater management report and in particular to comply with New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection regulations, which were supposed to be addressed by the applicant's engineer. I defer to the Board Engineer with regard to this topic.

Redevelopment Plan Compliance/Other Issues

The Redevelopment Plan allows the Planning Board to grant relief from bulk, parking and sign requirements of the Redevelopment Plan, in accordance with the requirements of the Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) for "c" variances at N.J.S.A. 40:55D-70c. To grant a "c" variance, the Board must find that there is either undue hardship or practical difficulty associated with the strict application of the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance in connection with this specific



piece of property; or that one or more purposes of zoning would be advanced by the deviation and the benefits of granting the variance for this specific piece of property would substantially outweigh any detriment. In addition, the Board must be satisfied that the granting of the variances would not cause substantial detriment to the public good or substantially impair the intent and purpose of the zone plan and zoning ordinance.

One or more additional variances may be required for signage, as no information is provided on the plans about what standards are applicable for the development. It is acknowledged the Redevelopment Plan is unclear on this point, as its only language regarding is in Section 2.3.11: “The Redeveloper will adhere to all signage requirements as listed in Section 25-15 of the Township Zoning Code.” However, the “18 CENTRAL” vertical sign is roughly 25 feet in height and would not be permitted in any zone district in the Township, as best I can determine. There is more reasonable signage on the Harvard Printing buildings to the east. The sign bands for the commercial spaces are more in line with the signage regulations for the Township’s business zones.

In terms of environmental issues, contamination on the site from prior uses is being remediated and the project requires New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection approvals due to its location partially in a flood hazard area. As the subject property was previously developed and is being redeveloped as a “brownfield” site, the applicant requested being able to submit a limited environmental impact statement (EIS) focusing on these issues and I concurred with this request. Certain design features are described in the limited EIS, including elevating the residential component of the building at least one foot above the maximum flood hazard area design flood elevation (FHADFE), flood proofing the commercial and other portions of the building below the FHADFE and elevating a portion of the building to allow flood waters underneath.





Building and improvements on Lot 32



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Interior of Lot 36



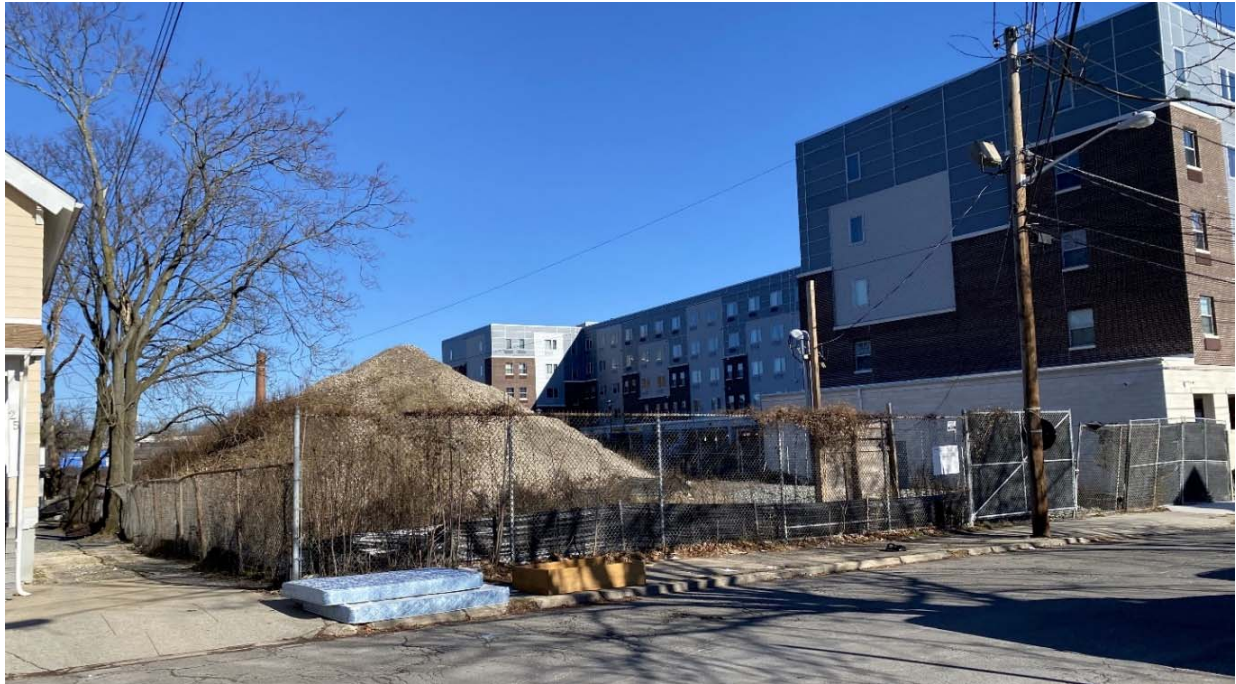
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Lot 36 and Central Avenue frontage



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Portion of Lot 36 along Mitchell Street



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