

**Borough of Florham Park  
Planning Board  
Work Session Meeting Minutes  
February 13, 2023**

The Work Session Meeting of the Borough of Florham Park Planning Board was called to order on Monday evening, February 13, 2023 at 6:30p.m. in the Municipal Building located at 111 Ridgedale Avenue, Florham Park, New Jersey.

**Members Present:**

Mr. Michael DeAngelis – Chairman  
Mr. Joseph Guerin – Vice Chairman  
Mayor Mark Taylor  
Ms. Kristen Santoro  
Mr. David Roberts  
Mr. Jeffrey Noss  
Mr. Sid Dvorkin  
Mr. Jeffrey Hegan

**Members Absent:**

Mr. Gary Feith

**Also Present:**

Mr. Michael Sgaramella, Board Engineer  
Mr. Michael Mistretta Board Planner  
Mr. John Wyciscala, Esq. Board Attorney

**Statement of Adequate Notice:**

Mr. DeAngelis asked the Board Secretary if the statutory requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act were met. Board Secretary Marlene Rawson responded that we are in compliance with the requirements.

**Site Plan Waivers:**

The following site plan waivers were administratively approved by Mike Sgaramella:

- 23SPW-01 – The Villa at Florham Park, Park Avenue. Transfer of ownership. (No operator at this time)
- 23SPW-02 – Open Road Cadillac, Columbia Turnpike. Construction of an elevated utility platform due to flooding issues.

On a motion duly made and seconded the meeting was adjourned at 6:35pm.

Marlene Rawson  
Board Secretary

February 13, 2023

**Borough of Florham Park  
Planning Board  
Regular Meeting Minutes  
February 13, 2023**

A Regular Meeting of the Borough of Florham Park Planning Board was called to order on Monday evening, February 13, 2023 at 6:35.m. in the Municipal Building, located at 111 Ridgedale Avenue, Florham Park, New Jersey

1. Call to Order.
2. Adequate notice has been given in accordance with the Sunshine Law.
3. Announcement – There will be no new testimony after 9:30 p.m.

**Members Present:**

Mr. Michael DeAngelis – Chairman  
Mr. Joseph Guerin – Vice Chairman  
Mayor Mark Taylor  
Ms. Kristen Santoro  
Mr. David Roberts  
Mr. Jeffrey Noss  
Mr. Sid Dvorkin  
Mr. Jeffrey Hegan

**Members Absent:**

Mr. Gary Feith

**Also Present:**

Mr. Michael Sgaramella, Board Engineer  
Mr. Michael Mistretta, Board Planner  
Mr. John Wyciscala, Esq. Board Attorney  
Mr. Joseph Fishingier, Board Traffic Consultant

**Approval of Minutes:**

4. Approval of the minutes of the January 23, 2023 meeting.

Ms. Santoro made a motion to approve the minutes, second by Mr. Dvorkin  
Roll: On a roll call vote all members present and eligible voted to approve the minutes.

**Resolution of Approval:**

7. **Open Space and Recreation Master Plan Element**

Mr. Guerin made a motion to approved the Open Space and Recreation Master Plan Element, second by Mr. Dvorkin  
Roll: On a roll call vote all members present and eligible voted to approve the Open Space and Recreation Master Plan.

**Sign Variance:**

8. **Florham Village, LLC** **Application # 22SPW-18**  
187 Columbia Turnpike  
Block 1901, Lots 1 & 2 (B-1 zone)

Applicant is seeking approval for a second ground sign that exceeds permitted area, height, and content.

Carried from the January 23, 2023 meeting without further notice or publication.

Gregory Meese, Esq. represented the applicant. He stated they have heard and responded to the concerns of the Board at the last meeting. They also pushed the sign location back to 12 feet from the road. It is now far outside the site triangle. The monument sign was reduced from 15.75ft high to 12'33" feet high. This was accomplished by removing the shopping center name at the top. They will add the street number near the base of the sign.

Mr. Meese stated that it is still similar to the existing sign in terms of material but is much smaller. The area is reduced to 96 square feet. These calculations include the entire structure instead of only the display area, as noted in the ordinance.

Paul Ricci, Planner for the Applicant, remained sworn in. He reiterated the changes described by Gregory Meese. He said that the sign fits nicely in the space and will not block visibility. It is the smallest freestanding sign in all downtown plazas. He added that the ordinance allows double-sided signs. They still need a variance for the second freestanding sign.

Mike Sgaramella agreed that the sign is now out of the site triangle. He asked about any possible tree removal. Greg Meese responded that they do not intend to remove any trees. They may need to trim back some of them.

Mark Taylor did not think that the sign would be visible because of the existing trees. He said once they leaf out, they would block the sign. He asked how they would resolve that. He did not think there is any benefit if the signage cannot be seen from Ridgedale Avenue.

Mike DeAngelis commented that he appreciates the changes and is happy that there are no site triangle issues. He was not sure if it was safe to read while driving. He understands that years ago there were several large stores in the shopping center that were more noticeable due to their size. Now there are all small stores. Although the sign is larger than what is allowed, the other shopping centers have oversized signs as well. He added that he thought the existing tree branches would block the site line especially when making a left turn out.

Mike Sgaramella pointed out that simply the street number "187" may not work because it is a Columbia Turnpike address and this entrance/exit is on Ridgedale Avenue. This needs to be clarified by possibly adding "Columbia Tpk." after the street number.

Jeff Noss confirmed that the trees are owned by the Applicant and are not Borough trees.

Kristen Santoro verified that there are sixteen slots for tenants and asked if they pay for their sign space. Board Attorney John Wyciskala responded that we do not get involved with what businesses get the signage or with any financial arrangements.

The meeting was opened to the public. Seeing no questions, the meeting was closed to the public.

Paul Ricci continued that the variances meet the C-2 criteria, as this will advance the purposes of zoning. The property is a large and oversized parcel. The Ridgedale Avenue frontage is 229 feet. There are five driveways on Ridgedale Avenue prior to driving up to this one. They need signage to direct the public into making the correct turn. It will eliminate traffic safety hazards. It will protect the economic value of the area. There is no negative impact to adjacent property owners and it is away from residential properties.

Mike DeAngelis said that he appreciates the efforts to reduce the signage and he hopes the owner does not remove the trees. He also would like good faith cooperation with the Mayor's concerns about the metal guardrail installation along the Panera Bread storefront in order to deter the public from crisscrossing into the drive aisle. Illegal curbside parking in fire zone by the public and delivery vehicles remains an ongoing problem.

Greg Meese responded that they are willing to meet with the Mayor to discuss these matters. The variances needed are for sign height and sign area.

The meeting was opened to the public. There were no questions or comments and the meeting was closed to the public.

Greg Meese agreed to the condition that any tree trimming would be at the approval of the Borough Engineer.

There were no further comments. Mike DeAngelis called for a motion.

Mr. Noss made a motion to approve the application as amended second by Mr. Roberts

Roll: On a roll call vote all members present and eligible voted to approve the application.

### **Amended Preliminary and Final Site Plan:**

9. **McDonald's USA** **Application #22SP-5**  
176 Columbia Turnpike  
Block 804, Lot 1 & 2

Applicant is seeking approval for improvements to the drive-thru configuration.

Michael Miceli, Esq. represented the applicant. He gave an overview of the application. There is currently a single lane tandem drive-thru on the site. They want to create a dual lane side-by-side drive thru configuration. There has been a definite increase in volume at the drive-thru since Covid and this will make the order process more efficient. This is a business decision that McDonald's made on the national level and is implementing across the country. This drive thru design is the known as the gold standard in the industry and used by many fast food restaurants.

Tiago Duarte, Engineer for the applicant, was sworn in.

A-1: aerial photo of the site, colorized

Mr. Duarte oriented the Board to the site. The recent subdivision has been perfected to the best of his knowledge. There is currently a single lane drive-thru with two menu boards, a pay window and a pick-up window. The site is accessed through Lot 1. The plan is to modernize the drive-thru operations with a dual line side-by-side drive thru ordering arrangement creating two order points. They will keep the one pay window and one pick-up window.

A-2: site plan rendering, colorized (2.13.23)

Mr. Duarte described the proposed design. Each drive-thru lane will have a menu board. The two-lane ordering system works efficiently because the orders can be filled faster than it takes the customer to order and pay. This design will reduce the stacking of vehicles that tend to back up close to the main drive aisles in Lot 1 during peak times.

The efficiency was observed through traffic counts at other sites with dual drive-thru ordering. Mr. Duarte described the ordering process and noted that one large order can delay the entire drive-thru. He said that there are two lanes to accommodate the dual drive-thru, but they will merge into one lane for the pay and order pick-up. The staff will direct the vehicles when to move to the pay window and will control the merge.

Each lane will have a menu board and a speaker box. There is also one pre-browse board. They agreed to remove the overhead gateway bar. The planned signage is as follows:

- Menu board on primary lane – 19.7 sf.
- Speaker box in primary lane - 3 sf.
- Integrated menu board in second lane (inc. speaker box) – 21.8 sf.
- Pre-browse board – 9.8 sf.

The 20x20ft trash enclosure must be re-oriented, resulting in setback variances. The enclosure will be re-built with masonry finish that will match the building, and will be landscaped with evergreens.

A new 12 ft. bypass lane will loop around the building allowing full circulation without affecting the drive-thru lanes. This lane will be 3 feet from the property line and will be fenced and further screened with additional landscaping. It was noted that there is an additional 3.6 ft. from the property line to the curb line. They agreed to construct a retaining wall under the direction of Borough Engineer Mike Sgaramella.

Trash disposal trucks will easily circulate around the building. There are no changes to the trash pick-up and delivery truck schedules. There are 39 spaces on the site and none are impacted by this change. It was noted that they are over-parked on the site (24 required). There are no EV stations.

Additional variances are for conditions that exist today and not changing. They are a drive aisle width (24 ft. required) where 19.1 feet that exists today and is not changing. The drive-thru lanes are 10 feet. Also parking stall size of 10ft X 20ft (required) where 10.3ft X 17.6 feet exists today and is not changing.

Mr. Miceli and Mr. Duarte reviewed the Board professional reports. The Fire Department has no concerns. Mike Sgaramella asked if the trash enclosure would be finished to match the building. They responded that they would use the same brick veneer. They will comply with the comments of the Planner.

Board Planner Mike Mistretta suggested that since they are over-parked by 15 spaces, it might make sense to re-orient the trash enclosure, even if it involves losing a few spaces. This will eliminate the setback variance of 20ft for an accessory structure.

Mike Miceli agreed to that suggestion and they will revise the plan to show that.

Joe Fishinger, traffic engineer for the Board, confirmed that the dual menu boards would be active at all times. He asked about the actual stall size of the angled parking spaces. Mr. Duarte stated that the actual length of the angled space is close to 18 feet but they will confirm. Joe Fishinger commented that although the McDonalds lot is over-parked, the attached shopping center lot is under-parked.

Break: 8:00-8:10pm

Craig Perego, traffic engineer for the Applicant, was sworn in. He stated that the reconfiguration proposal is part of the national initiative to improve the drive-thru operations. He said that the peak busy times at this location are Saturday and weekday lunch. Vehicle stacking of 14 cars was observed during the Saturday lunch hours. Once the stacking of vehicles reaches 10, the line is close to the property line drive aisle in the main parking lot.

Mr. Perego noted that when fast food chains became popular in the 1960's, the drive-thru ordering amounted to 50% of the overall business. Today, the drive-thru business accounts for 80% of the business and the original operation has become inefficient. In order to improve this, they must receive the order quicker so it can be processed faster. There is still only one pay and one pick-up window. All fast food restaurants are adopting this dual drive thru design. This is because the drive-thru business becoming more popular than sit-down business.

Mike DeAngelis asked how this would improve the pay and pick up window. He needs testimony because there are variances involved in the request. Mr. Perego responded that from a traffic standpoint, this is an operational improvement because it will fix the vehicle stacking.

Joe Guerin asked how improves McDonald's if you are not increasing volume. Michael Miceli stated that the business would not essentially change. Craig Perego added that this is best option to increase efficiency and works well on this site.

Mike DeAngelis asked about the online orders and how that works. It was stated that there are designated mobile parking spaces for pick-up of those orders.

Sid Dvorkin asked about the traffic leaving the site. He was concerned that there would be an uptick in traffic due to the increased efficiency. Mr. Peregoy responded that there is no change to the exit plan and he did not think that this would affect traffic leaving the site. Mayor Taylor stated that he has not seen any problem when traffic exits the site.

Joe Fishinger asked how it works with cell phone orders. Mr. Peregoy replied that the dual lanes would help in that the customer would advance directly to the pick-up window since the order is pre-paid. Joe Fishinger confirmed that there is unobstructed circulation in the bypass lane.

The meeting was open to the public. Seeing no questions, it was closed to the public.

Chris Cottreal, owner-operator was sworn in. He stated that he owns 24 franchises in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. This location can process more than 140 cars per hour. He has already converted four of his properties in New Jersey to the dual drive-thru style. He stated that the order point is the slowest position in the drive-thru operation. In response to concerns on the merge point of the two lanes, Mr. Cottreal responded that there are cameras mounted that will assist the staff with directing cars to pull up.

Mr. Cottreal stated that the general manager of this location will be present at the next meeting for additional testimony on the operations, if needed.

Mr. Cottreal noted that the peak hours of business are 12pm-2pm when the drive-thru will service up to 250 cars. If customers see a long line, they will leave and go elsewhere. This dual drive-thru will help with getting the cars in two lanes in an orderly fashion and reduce the single lane back-up.

In response to linked pay question, Mr. Cottreal responded that the customer would show his receipt or code at the pay window.

Michael Miceli asked for the application to be carried to a future meeting so that he can have revised plans drawn up showing the change in the trash enclosure location.

Mr. DeAngelis called for a motion.

Mr. Guerin made a motion to carry the application to the March 13, 2023 meeting second by Mr. Hegan  
Roll: On a roll call vote all members present and eligible voted to carry the application.

### **Public Hearing:**

10. **Preliminary Investigation Report for the 165 Park Avenue Redevelopment Study Area (Block 1401, Lot 5.01) as a "Non-Condemnation Area in need of Redevelopment"**.

#### *Public hearing*

Board Planner Michael Mistretta stated that on September 15, 2022, the Borough Council directed the Planning Board to perform a study on the subject property to determine whether it meets the criteria for a "non-condemnation area in need of redevelopment". The study was undertaken by Board Planner Katherine Sarmad.

John Wyciskala noted that all public notice has been in order. This is the public hearing on the matter.

The subject property is an undeveloped two-acre parcel between Route 24 to the north, and adjacent to Park Avenue to the south. It is near the Madison Borough boundary line. It has been vacant for many years. A Phase 1 environmental assessment report proves that the property history records show that is undeveloped since records of the 1930's.

The land is in the C-1 zone. The minimum lot area for this zone is 5 acres. This parcel is 2 acres. The required setback is 150ft in the front and 50ft in the rear. It is an undersized lot. There are no NJ DEP records on file for this site. Upon a search of municipal records, there was only one response from the Engineering Department, which was the Phase 1 Environmental study.

The Planning Board must consider whether this property satisfies one or more of a possible eight criteria to be considered a “non-condemnation area in need of redevelopment”. Katherine Sarmad’s report indicates that two of the needed criteria are satisfied.

*Criteria “C”. The land is owned by the municipality, county or is unimproved vacant land for at least 10 years that is not likely to be developed due to its location, remoteness.* Records reveal that the parcel has been vacant for more than 90 years and is not likely to be developed. It is remote and inaccessible to other portions of the municipality. It is located by Route 24 and the Park Avenue collector road and on the boundary line of Florham Park and Madison. The parcel would need multiple variances in order to be developed in the C-1 zone.

*Criteria “H”. The area is consistent with smart growth planning principles pursuant to law. Development should be encouraged in appropriate areas and discouraged where it may impair natural resources.* This would provide Florham Park with an opportunity for economic growth by reusing land that is away from environmentally sensitive areas and natural resources that must be protected. It is an area where redevelopment should be focused.

Mike Mistretta said that in summary, it satisfies the criteria to be considered a non-condemnation area in need of redevelopment due to its history, location and vacant state. The next step, if formalized by the Council, would be to prepare a redevelopment plan.

Jeff Noss asked if the land is in private hands, would the owners have to agree. He asked how it would benefit the Borough.

John Wyciscala responded that at this point, the Planning Board must only focus and decide if they agree or disagree on whether the area meets the qualifications.

If the Borough Council agrees, a redevelopment plan would be prepared which is similar to a zoning ordinance.

Mike DeAngelis thought that it qualifies for a redevelopment area. He concurred and stated that tonight’s decision does not contemplate a potential use. The Planning Board will only decide if it meets the criteria.

There were no other questions or comments. Mike DeAngelis asked for a motion on the study. He then stated that he would make the motion.

Mr. DeAngelis made a motion to recommend to the Borough Council that Redevelopment Criteria C & H are applicable in support of the designation of the area as a “non-condemnation area in need of redevelopment, second by Mr. Noss.

Roll: DeAngelis, yes; Noss, yes; Guerin, no; Taylor, yes; Santoro, yes; Roberts, yes; Dvorkin, yes; Hegan, yes.

Mr. DeAngelis commented that in the future, if something is proposed on this property that the Planning Board does not like, we could voice our opinions at that time.

John Wyciskala agreed and added that assuming this moves forward as a redevelopment plan, the Planning Board will see this again.

On a motion duly made and seconded the meeting was adjourned at 9:15pm.

Marlene Rawson  
Board Secretary

February 13, 2023