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Jim Woyciechowski
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David Rodio
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Nick Capezza
Engineering Division

Stephen Mulcahy
Traffic Safety Division

DEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE

Cranston City Hall
869 Park Avenue, Cranston, Rhode Island 02910

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES 9:00 AM, WEDNESDAY, August 3, 2022 CRANSTON CITY HALL – 3RD FLOOR COUNCIL CHAMBER

1. Call to Order

Chairman Jason Pezzullo called the Development Plan Review Committee meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. in the City Council chamber.

The following members were in attendance for the meeting: Steve Mulcahy, Franklin Paulino, Stan Pikul, Ed Tally (on behalf of Nick Capezza), and Jim Woyciechowski.

The following Planning Department members were in attendance: Doug McLean, Principal Planner; Joshua Berry, Senior Planner; and Alex Berardo, Planning Technician.

2. Approval of Minutes

- 7/20/22 Meeting

(vote taken)

Upon motion made by Mr. Pikul and seconded by Mr. Mulcahy, the Development Plan Review Committee unanimously voted to approve the minutes of the 7/20/22 meeting.

3. “The Giving Tree Expansion”

Preliminary Plan (vote taken)

Location: 1355 Scituate Avenue, AP 36, Lot 34

Zoning District: A-80 (Single-family dwellings on 80,000 ft² lots) & M-2 (General Industry) [split zone parcel]

Owner: ARMI, LLC

Applicant: The Giving Tree Academy of RI, Inc.

Proposal: The applicant intends to construct a second building to accommodate additional children for an existing commercial day care center for newborns through pre-school age children. The new building will be approximately 3,200 square feet with additional off-street parking spaces.

Before turning the discussion over to Atty. Robert Murray to reintroduce the project, Chairman Pezzullo reminded the Committee that they heard this matter a few months ago at the pre-application stage, and at the previous night’s monthly City Plan Commission meeting, the proposal received a positive recommendation on its Zoning Board variance request.

Atty. Murray began with a recap of the Giving Tree Academy’s history and where its proposal currently stands. He said the applicants purchased the existing building with the intent to rehab it for use as a daycare. They went through the zoning process during 2018 and opened the following year. He said that they have been successful and have a waiting list of 80 families, so they want to build another 3,200 ft² building to accommodate this unmet demand. Atty. Murray noted that the expansion will require a new septic system,

reviewed the site's condition as a split zone (primarily A-80 with a rear corner of M-2), and discussed its context as an abutter to the Gray Coach Estates residential development.

Turning to progress made since the pre-app meeting, Atty. Murray noted Mr. Mulcahy's two major concerns – whether there would be adequate parking available on-site and whether the proposed queuing pattern would not cause traffic issues – were examined through a traffic study conducted by Brian & Associates and were found not to have negative impacts on Scituate Avenue. He then said the new building could be constructed within all required setbacks and added that the applicants were willing to add more landscaping along the northern property line, where it abuts several residences.

Atty. Murray then invited the applicants, Shayna and Daniello Cimarelli, to speak to their proposal. Ms. Cimarelli mentioned her background as a public school teacher and reiterated that her daycare is presently at capacity, with 87 families on the waiting list, the majority of whom are Cranston residents. She added that she has tried referring these people to other quality daycares nearby, but those are also at capacity, so she wants to meet the existing need through the expansion of her daycare.

Ms. Cimarelli said her end goal is to have two classrooms for infants, one for toddlers, and three for preschoolers. The new building would hold three classrooms, one for each pre-school age (3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds), as well as a potential fourth room for recreation. Infants and toddlers would remain in the existing building. She then said that traffic patterns for daycare facilities are not like those of schools because parents have different schedules, so there is no single peak morning/afternoon influx of traffic. She said the facility is open from 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. The new building could generate around 7 new positions, but the proposed parking scheme associated with the expansion should more than cover that increased need for parking space.

Also present for the meeting was Gina Armstrong, President of the Gray Coach Homeowners' Association. Ms. Armstrong said the HOA is fine with Giving Tree's expansion, but only requests the inclusion of a landscaped buffer as previously mentioned.

Director Pezzullo then invited the Committee members to share their thoughts.

Mr. Mulcahy asked how many employees would be on-site during the morning drop-off period. Ms. Cimarelli said there would be around two workers right when the daycare opens at 6:30 a.m., but over the next few hours, additional staff trickle in as the children trickle in. Mr. Mulcahy then asked if the teachers have assigned parking spaces; Ms. Cimarelli said no, not on an individual basis, but there are designated lots.

Mr. Mulcahy and Mr. Tally then asked for details on drop-offs, particularly whether COVID protocols had changed the normal procedure from vehicles stacking in the turning loop to vehicles parking on-site for brief periods. Ms. Cimarelli said the front loop has space for about four vehicles, and that in the height of the pandemic, they limited drop-offs to five minutes to move people through quickly and minimize people's exposure to one another. Mr. Mulcahy explained that he was concerned about the possibility of a larger loop forming that would spill into Scituate Avenue, which would consist of parents circling through the site after finding that there was neither queuing space in the front loop nor parking spaces to the south for quick drop-offs. Mr. Cimarelli said the new building and lot, located to the north of the existing building and loop, will provide another outlet for parents to drop off their children without having to cause any traffic issues.

Mr. Tally noted there were no topographic lines shown on the plans, but he could say at this point that DPW would not want the runoff to end up in Scituate Avenue. Director Pezzullo agreed that the topographic lines and other important engineering details were not present on the plan before the Committee and would need to be added prior to Final Plan recording. Atty. Murray agreed to that condition. Mr. Cimarelli said there is a drainage channel running along Scituate Ave and said they were planning to engage a civil engineer on the design of the septic system as well as runoff mitigation measures. Mr. McLean asked if the project was large enough to require a RIPDES permit, but both Mr. Tally and Atty. Murray thought it was too small to trigger that permit as a requirement.

Mr. Pikul asked if there were any building designs or new signage being proposed. Atty. Murray showed him an elevation drawing that gave an impression of the building's intended appearance; the applicants said there would not be new signage. Mr. Pikul also asked if there was a dumpster present on-site. The applicants said yes, but it was not screened, so Mr. Pikul said they would need to add a dumpster enclosure.

Mr. Woyciechowski asked if the building would have a basement, but Ms. Cimarelli said it would sit on slab.

Mr. Paulino asked how many jobs the project would generate; Ms. Cimarelli estimated perhaps 12-14.

Mr. McLean asked if the Committee should condition a minimum number of trees to be planted in the vegetated buffer. Ms. Cimarelli said the property line is partially wooded at present and in practice, the establishment of the buffer will amount to filling gaps. He also asked if the securing of an ISDS permit should be made a condition of approval, but Director Pezzullo said the condition should simply be to see the results of a percolation test. Mr. McLean then asked what the occupancy limits might be for the classrooms. Ms. Cimarelli said the maximum would be 18 children per classroom, so the entire daycare would hold around 102. Mr. Pikul added that the occupancy standards would also be determined by the Building Department.

Director Pezzullo then opened the meeting to public comment.

Paul and Maria DiRocco, who own a lot across Scituate Avenue from the daycare, were the only ones to speak. They were concerned about the traffic increases that could result from the expansion of the daycare and wondered if they could sell their lot as commercial land since the daycare site had a commercial use. To the first point, Atty. Murray said the project would not lead to a significant increase in vehicles on Scituate Avenue, but would instead generate "pass-by traffic" – its customers would, in many cases, be parents who were already driving to work on Scituate Avenue and simply pull off the road to drop off their children. Mr. McLean added that Planning Staff and Mr. Mulcahy reviewed the traffic study and agree with its findings that the traffic impacts will be minimal. To the second point, Mr. Pikul and Mr. McLean said the DiRoccas could seek a use variance in the same way that the Cimarellis did, and Director Pezzullo observed that the DiRoccas' lot was an even smaller site.

Upon motion made by Mr. Pikul, and seconded by Mr. Mulcahy, the Development Plan Review Committee unanimously voted to close the public comment period.

Finally, upon motion made by Mr. Pikul, and seconded by Mr. Mulcahy, the Development Plan Review Committee unanimously voted to approve the Preliminary Plan application subject to the following conditions being met prior to Final Plan:

- Civil Engineer drawings showing drainage and roof rainwater capture must be supplied
- Results of Site Suitability Assessment (percolation test) must be sent to Planning Dept.
- Arbor vitae vegetated buffer must be added to Final Plan
- Dumpster enclosure must added to Final Plan

4. "20 Goddard Drive Warehouse"

Preliminary Plan (vote taken)

Location: 20 Goddard Drive Warehouse, AP 13, Lot 39

Zoning District: M-2 (General Industry)

Owner/applicant: 20 Goddard, LLC

Proposal: The applicant proposes to demolish the existing building (ex-prison) and construct one (1) building totaling approximately 210,000 square feet to be used consistent with uses allowed by right in the M-2 zoning district. The site is designed for a distribution/warehouse use but a specific use and tenant are not known at this time.

Atty. Murray, joined by Steve Garofalo (P.E. with Garofalo & Associates) and Richard Baccari (owner/applicant), discussed the proposal with the Committee. Atty. Murray said the subject site was formerly home to a medium-security prison and is today in the middle of an industrial park. The applicant is

proposing to tear down the existing building on-site and replace it with a 210,00 ft² warehouse building. Atty. Murray noted that Garofalo & Associates did the engineering for the site, while Beta Engineering did the traffic study, which Mr. Mulcahy reviewed at the Master Plan stage. Since Master Plan approval, they have added more landscaping and drainage details to the site plan, and the RIDEM permit for stormwater would be submitted as a condition for final approval.

As for the site's ultimate vocation, Atty. Murray stressed that there was no end user yet, and compared the situation to the proposed Comstock Industrial site in that tenants may not display interest until the site is fully permitted. Mr. Baccari said it is helpful to be able to work with the maximum footprint allowable and then, later on, modify it slightly according to the needs of whoever is selected as the end user. For that same reason, Mr. Garofalo added that they are also proposing the maximum number of parking spaces and do not have any elevations to share. Mr. Berry said the site plan shows 292 proposed spaces but includes a note saying they may only need half of that amount. Director Pezzullo felt such adjustments could be a minor amendment.

Mr. Berry noted that there were no pedestrian features proposed for the façade facing Goddard Drive, and although he understood it was an industrial park, he wanted to ensure it wouldn't be a windowless wall. Mr. Baccari said they could add a front door and windows at the front corner if the office is put there. Mr. Berry also asked about the inclusion of 15 parking spaces at the southwest corner of the building; Mr. Garofalo said those spaces would theoretically be occupied by warehouse workers, but they are shown simply to maximize the available parking space for the reasons discussed previously. Mr. Berry similarly said that he (and apparently the Engineering Dept.) was satisfied with the landscaping plan as proposed, given that it is an industrial park, but he asked when the vegetation on the site would be removed and whether that would take the slopes into account. The applicant team said they would ensure it is coordinated properly.

Mr. Mulcahy said MS4 (stormwater) reporting would have to be submitted on an annual basis. He asked if a manhole was found on the site, as had been the rumor, but the applicant team said no such manhole had been found. Mr. Mulcahy also noted that the traffic report suggested looking at the signal at the intersection with Pontiac Avenue, but he otherwise had no concerns.

Mr. Pikul asked if the detention basin covers the entire site; Mr. Garofalo said yes. He asked if any signage was being proposed, but Mr. Baccari said not yet. He added that the signage is probably not going to bump up against the maximum limits because this sort of use won't need to advertise to the public.

Mr. Woyciechowski asked about sprinkler requirements. Mr. Garofalo said Providence Water informed them in a letter that there is adequate water for a tie-in, but the applicant will need to provide demand calculations. There are not there yet; Atty. Murray said once they know more about the selected end user, they will be able to get that finalized.

Mr. Paulino asked for an estimate on job creation. Mr. Baccari said it is difficult to provide a precise estimate at this point. He gave a ballpark guess of 100-200 employees for a manufacturing use, and fewer if a warehouse use.

Mr. McLean asked when they would begin marketing the site. Mr. Baccari said they've been marketing all along and have seen some interest, but there should be much more interest after Preliminary Plan approval is secured. He explained that large end users who would be interested in a site like this plan their needs 2 to 3 years in advance and will not conduct that sort of planning for sites that aren't fully permitted.

Director Pezzullo said the only outstanding item to address is the RIDEM permit, and otherwise he has no concerns.

Upon motion made by Mr. Mulcahy, and seconded by Mr. Pikul, the Development Plan Review Committee unanimously voted to approve the Preliminary Plan application, subject to the condition that they secure a RIPDES permit prior to Final Plan.

5. “Tasca Expansion” *

Pre-application (no vote taken)

Location: 1300 Pontiac Avenue, AP 13, Lot 76
Zoning District: C-5 (Heavy business, industry)
Owner/Applicant:: TASCA ENTERPRISE INC
Proposal: The applicant is proposing to expand upon the existing building on the property in 2 different locations, as well as adding one (1) additional new building, as well as associated site plan modifications.

Brian Thalmann, Senior Project Manager with DiPrete Engineering, said the Tasca family was approached by Mazda to expand their dealership and want to address other items – such as expanding intake centers and servicing – at the same time. They are proposing to increase the building area on site by about 15,000 ft². This will include extension of data, water, gas, and electric connections. They also intend to add another fire hydrant on the southern side of the east building for Fire’s convenience. Mr. Thalmann noted that the existing underground stormwater system was oversized and the new roof areas would run through a pre-treatment before being routed into the detention basin. Finally, he said that the proposed arc-style parking arrangement would more efficiently separate pedestrians from vehicles.

Director Pezzullo said the proposal felt like a Major Land Development, or a combined Master-Preliminary Plan, but that this question could be determined later. He then invited the Committee members to share their thoughts.

Mr. Pikul asked the applicant team to review their plans for signage and suggested they might need a Master Sign Plan. Mr. Berry said the site had been rezoned in the past and wondered if the rezone included conditions that could impact signage or other matters. He added that if those conditions exist, any request to avoid complying with them would imply a trip to the City Council and not the Zoning Board.

Mr. Mulcahy said he had no traffic-related concerns.

Mr. Paulino asked how many new jobs would be created; the applicant team guessed between 25-50.

Mr. Berry wondered if the applicant would consider any rooftop solar installations or electric vehicle charging stations. He then suggested inventorying the landscaping and if they are already in compliance with the minimum landscaping standards, nothing further should be needed on that front.

Mr. Berry also said he thought it was unusual that two buildings were shown on the plan to be located just 6 feet apart from one another. Mr. Thalmann said they were originally going to be connected, but the different auto makes wanted their own separate buildings. Mr. Woyciechowski asked if there would be any doors opening onto the 6-foot alleyway, but Mr. Thalmann said no.

Mr. Woyciechowski also asked if there would be a separate fire alarm system from the Mazda building, to which Mr. Thalmann said yes.

6. “Park Ave Condominiums” *

Pre-application (no vote taken)

Location: 1455 Park Avenue, AP 11, Lots 269, 2822, 2823
Zoning District: C-2 (Neighborhood Business)
Owner/Applicant:: A Lisi, LLC
Proposal: The applicant is proposing to convert the existing residence into a first floor commercial (office) building with a residence above, and then construct two additional buildings, a three-family home and a two-family home.

Louis Gentile, E.I.T. with InSite Engineering Services, presented the development concept to the Committee members on behalf of the applicant. Mr. Gentile said there was an existing two-family house on Park Avenue on a C-2 zoned lot. He said the proposal was to convert the existing two-family house to a mixed-use building with roughly 1,000 ft² of ground-floor commercial, add another two-family building, and add a three-family building to the same site.

Mr. Gentile asked if the six residential units proposed for the site would trigger Major Land Development. Each unit requires 2,000 ft², and the calculation begins with a baseline of 6,000 ft²; for its part, the subject site is about 24,000 ft² in size. Mr. Gentile said it meets the mixed-use density standards, but Director Pezzullo noted it would be undersized for purely residential standards. Mr. McLean observed that the question is whether the proposed mix of uses is sufficiently balanced to consider the proposal a mixed-use development, and that the final decision likely lies with Mr. Pikul.

Director Pezzullo said the City Plan Commission approved a Major Land Development – Master Plan for the site back in 2007 which also proposed locating two buildings to the rear of the site. He suggested it may be worthwhile to review that approval to see which stances the City took toward the proposal then.

Mr. Pikul suggested splitting off the mixed-use building from the two purely residential buildings, which then led to a discussion of where to draw the baseline minimum lot area. Mr. McLean said the proposal seemed likely to need dimensional relief, but with a buffer along the shared lot line with the residential abutter, Staff could be supportive of infill housing on that site. Mr. Mulcahy asked if the applicant envisioned the residential units as condos or apartments, explaining that the City could collect trash for condominiums but not apartments once you had as many as six units. He also asked about the address scheme. Director Pezzullo said that part of the discussion could wait until the Zoning Board allows the proposed density.

Mr. McLean said the applicant should also ask for relief for parking, but the applicant was proposing 16 spaces, which does meet the minimum requirement. The Committee felt that the space closest to the right-of-way might not have sufficient turning radius to be counted, but they agreed they would allow additional spaces to be striped in front of the garage at the rear of the site (Building C on the site plan).

Mr. Woyciechowski said he hoped people wouldn't park in the driveway, given its width, but Mr. Gentile suggested painting a fire lane onto the driveway to prevent parking. Mr. Woyciechowski agreed with that idea as a preventative measure.

Mr. Pikul asked if the applicant was proposed decks on the back of the residential buildings, which Mr. Gentile affirmed. Mr. Pikul said he would have to review the Attached Accessory Structures section of the City's Code to determine whether they would represent an encroachment into the setback. He also said he'd need to see the lighting plan at the next phase and would have to determine whether it should be treated as a Major Land Development.

Upon motion made by Mr. Pikul, and seconded by Mr. Woyciechowski, the Development Plan Review Committee unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 11:25 a.m.