

City Planning Department



Memo

To: Cranston City Plan Commission
From: Doug McLean, AICP, Principal Planner
Date: July 29, 2021
Re: **Dimensional Variances at 70 Plantation Drive
"Garden City Elementary School"**

Owner/App: City of Cranston/Cranston School District
Location: 70 Plantation Drive, AP 10, Lot 709
Zone: A-8 (Residential with at least 8,000 sq.ft.)
FLU: Government/Institutional

DIMENSIONAL VARIANCE REQUEST:

1. To allow the development of a new school building in which 45 off-street parking spaces are required whereas 24 are provided. [17.64.010 - Off-street parking]
2. To allow the development of a new school building in which a roof stairway enclosure will be 40 feet high whereas 35 feet is the maximum height limit. [17.20.120- Schedule of Intensity Regulations]

NEIGHBORHOOD AERIAL

(subject parcels marked in orange, 400 foot radius marked in black)



PARCEL AERIAL



3-D AERIAL VIEW



STREET VIEW (From Plantation Drive)



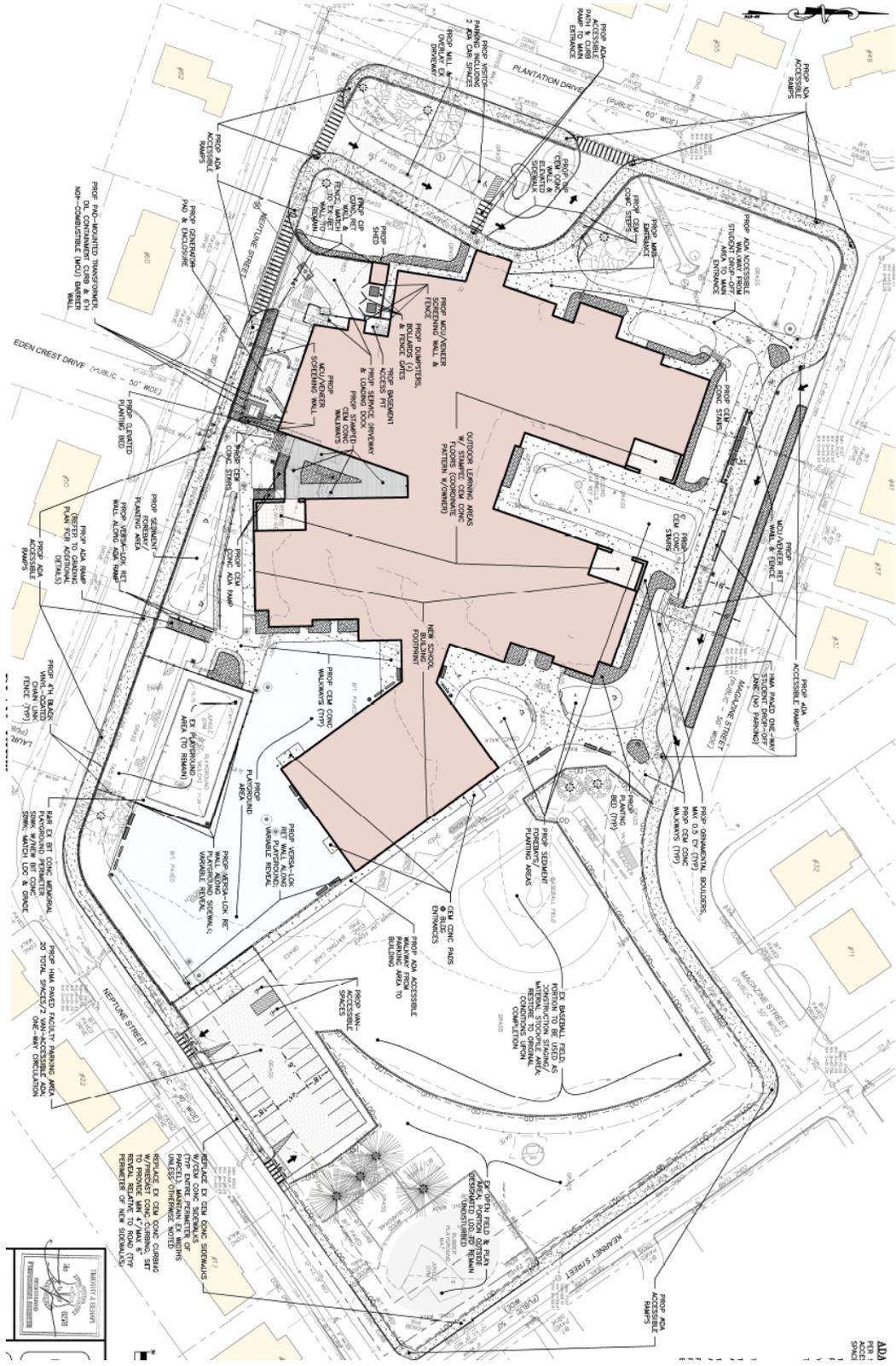
STREET VIEW (From Kearney Street)



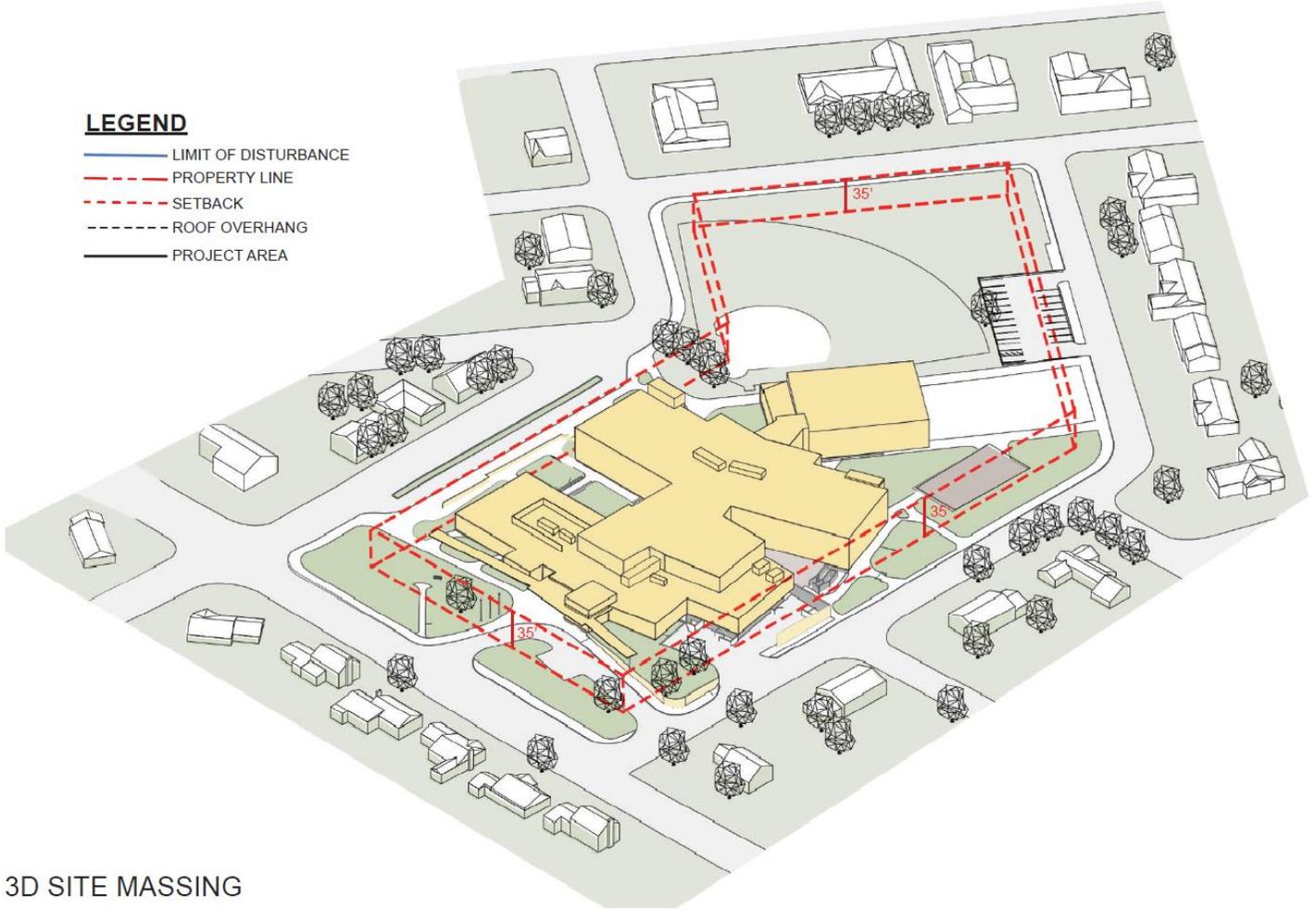
ZONING MAP



PROPOSED SITE PLAN SNIPPET



3-D SITE MASSING



3D SITE MASSING

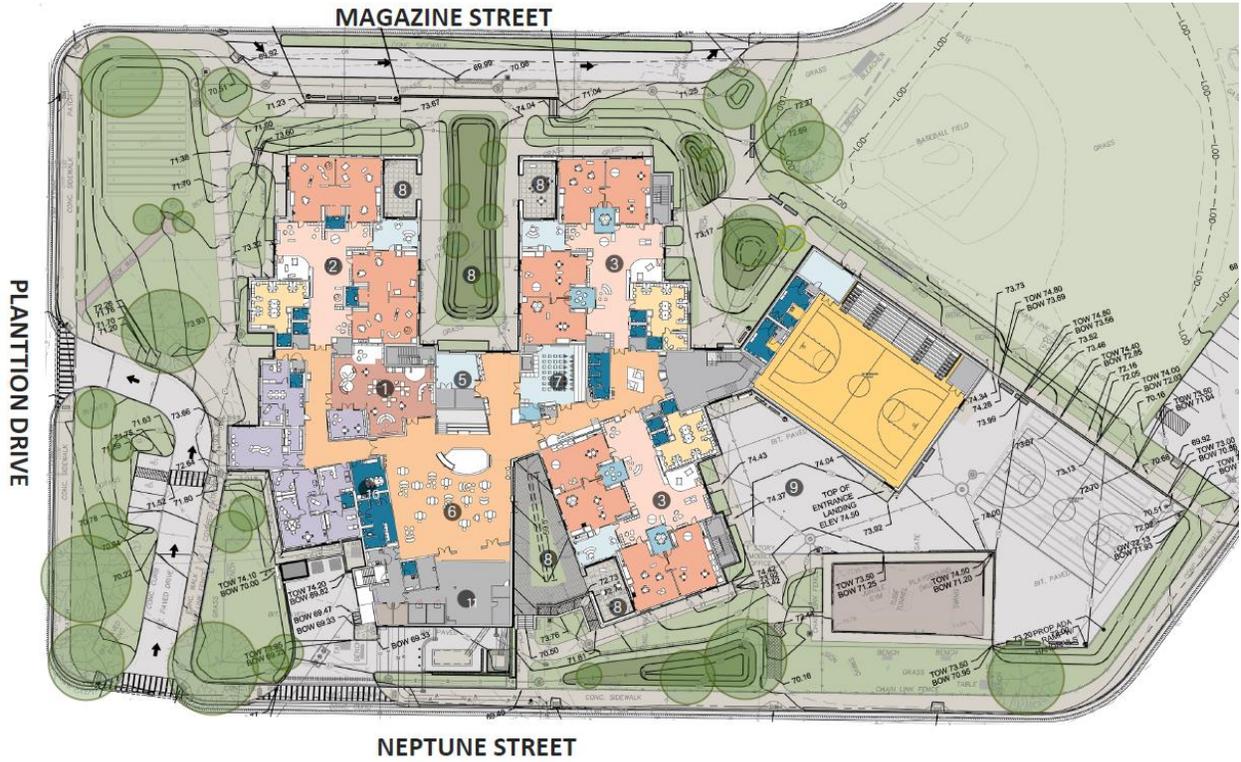
PERSPECTIVE RENDERING – BIRDS EYE



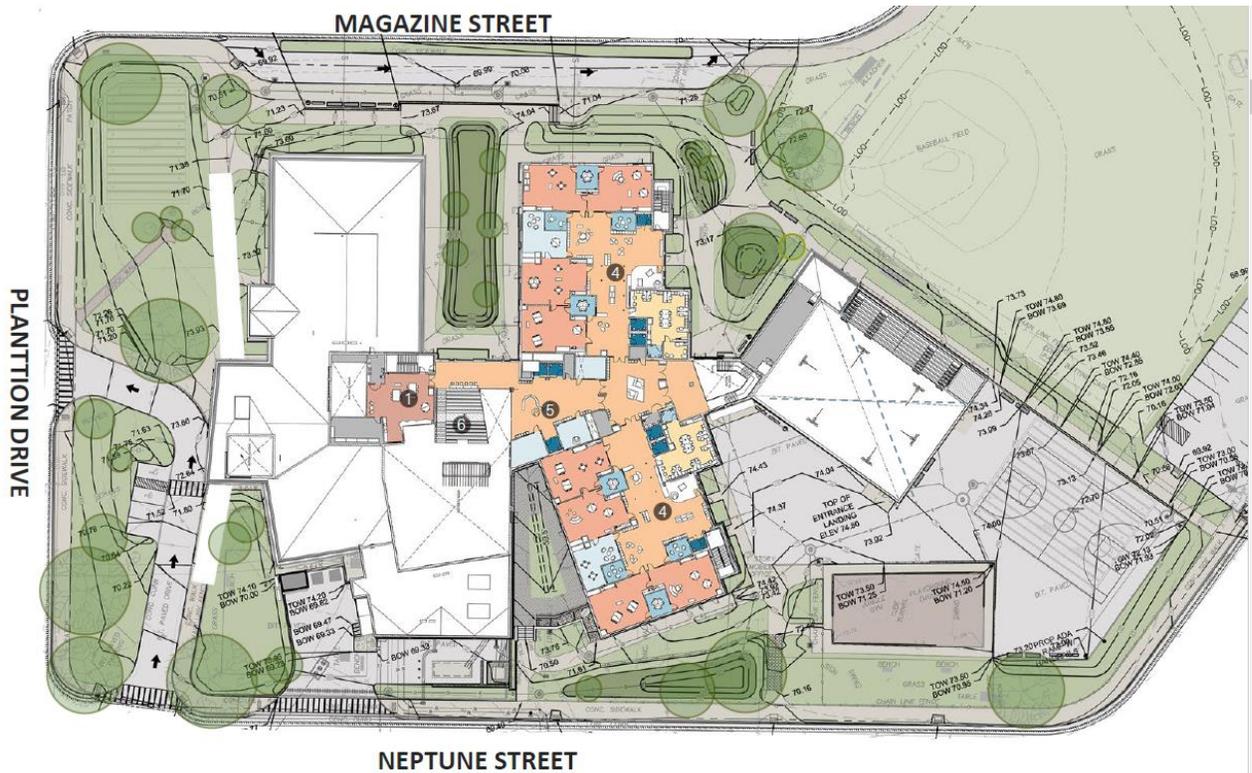
PERSPECTIVE RENDERING – FRONT ENTRANCE



FLOOR PLAN – FIRST FLOOR



FLOOR PLAN – SECOND FLOOR



FINDINGS OF FACT:

(General)

1. The project will entail the demolition and removal of the existing Garden City Elementary School building and the construction of a new 85,000 s.f. Garden City Elementary School building and associated site improvements in its place.
2. This existing structure is approximately 30,000 sq.ft. as a single story structure and houses 309 students. The proposed new school will be approximately 85,000 sq.ft. and will house 550 students.
3. The total area of the site is 5.75 acres which will contain the new school as well as “memorial” site amenities, such as a ball field, playground space, brick walkway, and bench.
4. The use of a public school and public playgrounds is allowed by-right at this location.
5. The project has been reviewed by the Development Plan Review Committee (DPRC) and received preliminary plan approval on July 7, 2021. During this meeting, DPRC members addressed all of the technical elements of the overall proposal including the public health and safety issues associated with the project.

(Parking)

1. Garden City Elementary School currently serves approximately 300 students, with a regular staff of forty-four (44) educators, administrators and support personnel. Based on Section 17.64.010 “Off-street parking” of the City’s Zoning Ordinance, one (1) on-site parking space is required for each two (2) staff members at the school; this equates to twenty-two (22) required parking spaces.
2. Presently, there are only two (2) on-site spaces located on the west side of the bus drop-off driveway from Neptune Street. They are nominally marked/posted as ADA spaces, but neither conforms to applicable geometric and accessible path standards to be so classified.
3. The applicant’s observations of the school and parking during typical school-day conditions did not note any specific problems or apparent deficiencies with the current on-street parking.
4. The proposed demolition and replacement of the Garden City Elementary School will increase the student capacity to 550 students, with a corresponding increase in regular staffing to ninety (90). At the one (1) space/two (2) employees ratio, this equates to forty-five (45) required on-site spaces.
5. The proposed site design includes the creation of a twenty (20) space parking lot along the eastern leg of Neptune Street, and the creation of four (4) new spaces along the left (west) side of the existing bus drop-off driveway, roughly opposite the main entrance to the school. Therefore, the design proposes the creation of twenty-four (24) on-site parking spaces, which leaves twenty-one (21) required on-site spaces that will not be provided under the proposed design.
6. It is anticipated and intended that those parking spaces shall continue to be available as street-side parking along the adjacent streets. In order to validate this approach, the applicant evaluated the available street-side spaces along streets where parking is allowed under proposed conditions, using the following parameters:

- Twenty-two (22) foot total stall length, comprised of eighteen (18) foot space and four (4) foot buffer.
- No parking allowed adjacent to driveways, the loading area or ADA sidewalk ramps.
- Parking only in areas without parking restrictions (see below).

It is noted that Per Zoning Ordinance Section 10.32.350 - No parking on certain streets—Near schools when school in session, the following parking restrictions currently exist on the streets around Garden City Elementary School:

Between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. on days when Garden City School is in session, no vehicle shall remain standing for any period of time on the following streets:

- Magazine Street, north side, in front of the premises numbered 41 Magazine Street.
- Magazine Street, south side, from Plantation Drive easterly for a distance of three hundred fifty (350) feet.
- Plantation Drive, easterly side, between Magazine Street and Neptune Drive.

7. There are no restrictions on parking along either Neptune Street or Kearney Street; therefore, the available space on each is as follows:
 - Neptune Street: 595 linear feet = 25 spaces
 - Kearney Street: 248 linear feet = 11 spaces
 - Total Available Street-Side Parking: 36 spaces
 - Total Available On-Site & Street-Side Parking: 24 on-site + 36 street-side = 60 total spaces, 4 ADA
8. The applicant has provided a rationale for why additional acreage of the property was not dedicated to increase the amount of on-site parking in order to meet the City's code. In summary, the applicant has attempted to balance the needs of the property, which is to account for a necessary increase to the size of the school structure, the need to maintain some of the existing "memorial" community amenities, and the need to provide for some amount of on-site parking.
9. The proposed site design includes a number of elements that are necessary to the general and educational function of the school, including the playground area adjacent to the gymnasium, the loading area off Neptune Street, and the dedicated student drop-off lane along Magazine Street.
10. There are a number of existing ancillary site elements within the school parcel that are of a significant and sensitive nature to the school and the broader community, which have been prioritized to be preserved; these include the memorial brick walkway and bench along Plantation Drive, the memorial playground along Neptune Street, the baseball field, and the community play area at the intersection of Neptune Street and Kearney Street.
11. After excluding these various necessary elements from the area available for parking on the lot, proposed on-site parking has been provided both off of Neptune Street, and along the existing (to remain) bus drop-off driveway. These parking areas have been designed to provide the maximum number of spaces possible that comply with City of Cranston parking standards and applicable ADA requirements.

12. It should be noted that the adjacent Neptune Street and Kearney Street do have sufficient space to accommodate more than the required off-street parking for what is expected as a result of this school improvement. The adjacent streets are currently, and have historically, been used for the vast majority of the staff parking at the school.
13. The use of on-street parking for school staff is not unique to Garden City Elementary School among the schools in the Cranston Public School District; many other neighborhood schools around the City rely heavily on street-side parking for their staff.

(Building Height)

1. There is one small section of the building that exceeds the maximum height requirement of 35 feet as defined by the zoning code. In the north east corner of the building, a single stairway extends above the roof for maintenance access purposes. In this one case, the height is forty feet 40'-0" above grade. Please see the diagram below for additional visual context the stairway (labeled "NE Stair Tower")



2. At the NE Stair Tower location of the building (where the height exceeds the zoning maximum), the structure is sixty feet from the property line (40 ft more than the required 20 ft yard setback) and is only an additional five feet of height to be over 35 feet. Additionally, it is located towards the center of the property along Magazine Street.

3. The stair enclosure is not near any adjacent properties, and only faces an adjacent baseball field, therefore we do not see that this is creating any harm to nearby residences.
4. The relief for the height will also greatly benefit the functionality of the building as the stair is also the primary roof access for maintenance and provides a safe path for maintenance staff.

(Comprehensive Plan/Community Character)

1. The Cranston Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Map designates the subject parcels as "Government/Institutional". The proposed use fits within this designation and it should be noted this use entails reasonably expected impacts to the surrounding area, thus the project is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.
2. Staff reviewed the Cranston Comprehensive Plan for policies relating to building height. There are no specific policies relating to these items. Staff did identify a limited number of policies relating to community character and visual impacts within residential neighborhoods that provide some direction with regard to the subject application:
 - Land Use Element; Principle 4 (page 34): "Protect and stabilize existing residential neighborhoods by basing land use decisions on neighborhood needs and quality of life. Protect the natural, historic and **visual resources** that define the neighborhoods. In addition, support the existing residential development patterns in order to stabilize the residential blocks and neighborhoods."
 - Land Use Element - LU-2 (page 47): "Continue to amend subdivision regulations to promote land development patterns that minimize site disturbance, **minimize visual impacts**, and retain rural features and community character."
3. Based on the above cited Comprehensive Plan policies, with consideration of the visual mitigation efforts noted in the overall project design, staff finds that the proposed application is consistent with the intent of the Comprehensive Plan with regard to minimizing visual impacts in residential neighborhoods.
4. Staff finds that need for the requested relief is legitimate and such relief would be well-mitigated by the scope and design of the project. The applicant has provided sufficient evidence that the overall development will not negatively impact the general character of the surrounding neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATION:

Due to the finding that the application is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, and due to the finding that the application will not negatively impact the general character of the surrounding neighborhood, staff recommends the Plan Commission provide a **positive recommendation** on this application to the Zoning Board of Review.