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City Planning Director

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Robert Coupe
Vice-President



Thomas Barbieri
John Colasante
David Exter
Kathleen Lanphear
Lisa Mancini

Frank Corrao P.E.
Public Works Director

Robert Strom
Finance Director

CITY PLAN COMMISSION

City Hall – 3rd Floor, Room 309
869 Park Avenue– Cranston, RI 02910

Minutes CENTRAL LIBRARY – GILES COMMUNITY ROOM 6:30PM – TUESDAY, MAY 12, 2026

CALL TO ORDER

Commission President Frias called the meeting to order at 6:40 p.m. in the Giles Community Room.

The following Commissioners were in attendance for the meeting: Commission President Steven Frias, Robert Coupe, Kathleen Lanphear, Lisa Mancini, John Colasante, and Frank Corrao, Director of Public Works.

The following members of the City Planning Department were in attendance: Beth Ashman, Planning Director; Jonas Bruggemann; Assistant Director, Brianna Valcourt, Senior Planner; Jamie Ray, Planner Technician; and Toby Arment, Housing Expert.

SUBDIVISIONS/LAND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS – OLD BUSINESS

▪ “1016 Park Ave Venue”

PUBLIC HEARING

Proposal: Change of use to event venue requiring a variance for one (1) parking space.

Zoning: C-4 (Highway business)

AP 9, Lot 95

1016 Park Avenue

The applicant, Katherine Gomez and her representative, Jenny Alcantaro, were present to answer questions.

Senior Planner Brianna Valcourt presented the staff report regarding the proposed change of use from a dance studio to an event venue located at 1016 Park Avenue in the C-4 Highway Business zoning district. The proposal included thirty-five (35) seats and required relief for one (1) off-street parking space. Staff further noted that the application included waiver requests for sidewalks, curbing, and landscaping. Ms. Valcourt explained that the site currently contains existing parking facilities with eleven (11) conforming parking spaces and that the requested parking relief was considered minimal in nature. She further stated that the proposed business would primarily operate during evenings and weekends when surrounding businesses are generally inactive. Staff also confirmed that the applicant had secured overflow parking access from the adjacent property owner at 1020 Park Avenue. She stated the proposal was found to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the surrounding area.

Commissioners discussed the procedural aspects of the application, including clarification regarding Unified Development Review procedures, Development Plan Review jurisdiction, and the distinction between the requested variance, waiver requests, and preliminary plan approval. Questions were raised regarding prior agency comments, accessibility compliance, parking operations, and legal notice requirements.

The following motions were made:

Motion: Commissioner Coupe moved to grant the requested variance for one (1) off-street parking space based upon the findings of fact contained within the staff recommendation memorandum. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mancini and approved unanimously with a (5-0) vote.

Motion: Vice President Coupe moved to grant waivers for sidewalks, curbing, and landscaping associated with the Development Plan Review application. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Colasante and approved unanimously with a (5-0) vote.

Following additional discussion with the Planning Department and Solicitor regarding notice requirements for preliminary plan approval under Unified Development Review procedures, the Commission determined that a continuation would be necessary in order to properly notice the preliminary plan vote.

Motion: Commissioner Coupe moved to continue the matter to the June 2, 2026 regular meeting for properly noticed preliminary plan consideration. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Lanphear and approved unanimously with a (5-0) vote.

- Commissioner Corrao abstained due to arriving after the commencement of discussion on the application.

DISCUSSION OF COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS

Planning Director Beth Ashman presented a detailed overview of the draft Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan and explained that the Housing Element would serve as a guiding policy document for future housing and land use decisions through the Comprehensive Plan horizon year. Staff stated that the City must demonstrate policy actions capable of meeting State Housing 2030 requirements, including accommodation of future housing production targets and low- and moderate-income housing goals.

Staff reviewed existing housing conditions within the City, including increasing housing costs, declining household size, vacancy rates, affordability challenges, and demographic trends. Staff further discussed projected housing production targets through both the 2030 benchmark period and the twenty-year Comprehensive Plan horizon. The presentation included discussion regarding mixed-use redevelopment strategies, inclusionary zoning concepts, accessory dwelling units, adaptive reuse of existing structures, neighborhood consistency zoning, redevelopment of underutilized commercial corridors, and limited rezonings intended to support housing production while preserving neighborhood character and minimizing development pressure within western Cranston.

Housing Fellow, Toby Arment, presented research and analysis regarding the fiscal impacts of multifamily housing development, municipal service costs, school enrollment trends, and tax revenue generation associated with denser development patterns. Staff emphasized that the proposed housing strategies focused primarily on directing development toward already developed areas served by existing infrastructure, rather than expansion into undeveloped portions of the City. Particular attention was given to the Elmwood Avenue corridor and other mixed-use areas identified as having redevelopment potential.

Commission President Frias raised concerns regarding the population growth assumptions utilized within the draft Housing Element and questioned whether statewide planning population projections, which anticipate long-term population decline of about 5 percent, should instead serve as the basis for the City's planning assumptions. He indicated that if lower population growth numbers were used, the projected housing goals after 2030 would significantly decrease. President Frias also indicated he wanted to use the Housing 2030 rates for what are a healthy housing and rental vacancy rates. He noted with already approved projects and the Meridan projects, the city is already within reach of the state's housing target by 2030 without needing to adopt neighborhood mix use and splitting oversized lots policies. He also expressed concern about building so much housing if the population actually declines. President Frias expressed support for the redevelopment of underutilized commercial areas like Elmwood Avenue.

Public Comment:

- Annette Bourne (51 Community Drive) expressed support for continued advancement of the Housing Element and stated that the Comprehensive Plan serves as an important tool for statewide planning coordination. Ms. Bourne emphasized the distinction between overall population trends and household formation trends, noting that declining household size and an aging population continue to create housing demand even where population growth may remain limited. She discussed regional migration patterns, including residents relocating from Massachusetts due to housing affordability pressures, and stated that additional rental housing and mixed-use development would help support workforce mobility, young adults, and professionals seeking housing opportunities within Cranston. Ms. Bourne further expressed support for redevelopment along the Elmwood Avenue corridor and encouraged the City to continue evaluating neighborhood-consistent housing strategies within historically denser areas of Cranston.
- Marcia Fowler (35 Milton Avenue) discussed her experience as a multifamily property owner and landlord within Cranston. Ms. Fowler stated that her experience demonstrated that multifamily housing does not always generate significant school enrollment impacts, noting varying household compositions across different neighborhoods. She further discussed migration patterns from Massachusetts into Cranston neighborhoods and encouraged consideration of additional senior-oriented housing opportunities, including smaller-scale residential developments designed for older residents wishing to remain within the community. Ms. Fowler also recommended that the City provide additional public education regarding voucher-based rental housing programs in order to encourage broader landlord participation and increase affordable housing opportunities. She expressed support for multifamily housing development, stating that three-family and multifamily housing types provide efficient land use and support additional housing opportunities without requiring outward suburban expansion.

Additional discussion followed regarding the fiscal impacts of urban density, historical zoning practices, neighborhood consistency standards, and the relationship between density regulations, stormwater management, parking capacity, and infrastructure design standards. President Frias stated some small lots in the city were platted pre-automobile, but these lots are too small today because of the need for cars. He indicated he was not interested in changing density until other issues related parking and stormwater on small lots are addressed. Commissioner Lanphear was supportive of mix-use on Elmwood Avenue. She, however, expressed a concern about school capacity if more housing is built there. She also expressed concern about the burden that will be placed on the older, denser areas of the city. Commissioner Lanphear worried about the impact on neighborhood character if lot sizes are reduced. She also did not support going beyond state law. Commissioner Coupe indicated that property owners should be able to build houses on smaller lots if their neighbors are able to have a house on comparable small sized lots. He was supportive of developing Elmwood Ave but wanted to move forward cautiously. No formal action was taken by the Commission regarding the Comprehensive Plan Housing Element discussion. Staff indicated that additional revisions, policy discussions, and future public meetings would continue prior to submission of the draft Housing Element to Statewide Planning for review.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Motion to adjourn made by Commissioner Mancini. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Lanphear and the motion passed unanimously with a (6-0) vote.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.