

Memo

To: Mrs. Ashley Neale
Verona Board of Adjustment (BoA) Administrator

From: Plan Review Committee of the Verona Environmental Commission

c: Verona Environmental Commission Chair

Date: May 28, 2021

Re: **Case # 2021-16 or Case # 2019-14**
21-25 Grove Avenue [Block 1702, Lot 22]
Verona, New Jersey

Zone: C-2 (Professional Office and Business)

The Plan Review Committee of the Verona Environmental Commission (VEC) reviewed the revised documents submitted for 21-25 Grove Avenue in Verona through a cover letter dated March 10, 2021 by Mr. Matthew Seckler, of Stonefield Engineering and Design, which we received on May 26, 2021.

We understand that the Applicant is seeking to obtain a number of variances for a proposed 4-story residential use building, where such use is not permitted. The proposed building will encroach into the rear yard setback and construction at site will disturb 100% of the site without complying with Verona's Stormwater Ordinance. Further, the Applicant seeks variance for exceeding building height limits and seeks variance to reduce the required landscaped buffer zone. The comments below are provided for the Board's consideration. Furthermore, we request a number of new submissions as the PRC finds this application to be incomplete.

- 1) The VEC PRC opines that the building is oversized for the property and too dense based upon the fact that the Applicant:
 - a) Seeks a nonpermitted use for the zone.
 - b) Plans to disturb over 100% of the property including Right-of-Way (ROW) disturbances.
 - c) Needs to encroach into the rear yard setback by 35 feet.
 - d) Needs to exceed building height limits by 1.5 stories and almost 20 feet.
 - e) Needs to reduce the minimum required planted buffer width from 15 feet to 12 feet adjacent to residential uses on the east and north sides of the site.
 - f) Needs to reduce the size of parking spots and width of driving lanes and still cannot meet the RSIS parking requirements on their site.
- 2) The entire site and portions of the public ROW are slated for disturbance. Every existing tree onsite is slated for removal. Both Verona's Stormwater Ordinance and buffer ordinance make it clear that existing trees be preserved when possible and disturbance be minimized where possible.
- 3) The drawings submitted by the Applicant do not properly address "Open Space" as an expressed intent of all residential as well as mixed-use development per the Verona Zoning Ordinance. Usable Open Space has a minimum dimension of 50 feet in length

and 50 feet in width as measured at right angles (2,500 ft²) and may not include required areas between buildings or buffer zones. By comparison, Verona's requirements for Mixed-Use developments set aside a minimum of 20 percent Open Space and landscaping for the residential occupants.

- 4) As per the Applicant's Environmental Impact Statement, revised on March 4, 2021, the development may be limited to the existing impervious surface, but that in no way qualifies as a 'minimization of environmental impact'. To realize or fulfill that step, the site's impervious footprint would need to be reduced and the stormwater management would rely upon green infrastructure on the site. Additionally, generating a tax ratable and stripping a parking lot does not minimize environmental impacts, as offered by the Applicant.
- 5) The entire Stormwater Report and the site design itself are not at all compliant with Verona's Stormwater Ordinance. Verona's Stormwater Ordinance is triggered when 0.50 acre or more land area is proposed to be disturbed. This site is 0.72 acre and seeks to disturb 0.75 acre, exceeding the site's actual square footage and disturbing the public ROW.
- 6) According to Verona's Stormwater Management Ordinance, this proposal qualifies as a major development. It is for this reason that the VEC PRC finds the current stormwater report and site design unsupportive of the requirements set forth in the Township's Ordinance.
- 7) The VEC PRC recommends that the Applicant submit a Stormwater Management report and re-submit a site plan design that comports with the Ordinance by using and largely relying upon green infrastructure for stormwater management. As currently proposed, there is little, if any, green infrastructure being used on this site for stormwater management. As currently proposed, all stormwater is being piped offsite when the Ordinance requires on-site mitigation.
- 8) One portion of the Applicant's Stormwater Report, dated March 3, 2021, cites a 2,500 ft² green roof (pg. 4) and another portion of the report cites a 3,000 ft² (pg. 5); which is the correct size? Additionally, no planting or planning details are being supplied in order to assess stormwater mitigation by the proposed green roof. The VEC PRC recommends that a detailed engineering report accompany the green roof if it is to be used as a method of stormwater management.
- 9) The variances being sought include expansion of the building footprint to extend approximately 35 feet into the required 50 feet rear setback. The VEC PRC recommends that the Applicant consider using the setback areas for green infrastructure that support stormwater management at the site. The variance for building coverage, more than doubling the allowance, is also a substantial detriment for stormwater management.
- 10) The VEC PRC thinks that the building's proposed height of 4 stories, when 2.5 stories are allowed, will unnecessarily shade surrounding neighboring properties that could change growing conditions for those sites' trees, flora, and drainage conditions. Additionally, the minimum landscaped buffer for this zone when abutting a residential property is 15 feet when the Applicant is proposing a variance allowing only a 12-foot landscaped buffer zone. The VEC PRC does not recommend a buffer less than the

required minimum 15-foot buffer. This minimum requirement should be used on both the eastern and northern sides of the site where it abuts residential zones and uses. The VEC PRC further recommends increasing the extent of the landscaped buffers.

- 11) Eastern red cedar trees, depicted on Applicant's Dwg. C-9, require full sun. Sixteen (16) of the total seventeen (17) red cedar trees proposed are being planted on the northern side of the property, which will be blocked by a 4-story building. Only one (1) red cedar, at the northwest corner of the site appears to be positioned to receive ample sunlight for survival.
- 12) Endless summer hydrangea and green velvet boxwoods require sun for the better portion of each day (Four+ hours) but are planted on the Northern and Eastern sides of the property which will be blocked by a four-story building.
- 13) Twenty (20) American arborvitae are planted on the eastern side of the site. It is not known how these trees will get their required 4-hour minimum of unfiltered sunlight per day if blocked by a 4-story building for most of the day.

[STD/JP/AC]

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