



TOWNSHIP OF VERONA
COUNTY OF ESSEX, NEW JERSEY
MINUTES OF THE VERONA
PLANNING BOARD MEETING
OF THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 25, 2025

Meeting held in the Ballroom of the Verona Community Center @ 880 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona, NJ 07044 @ 7:30PM

<u>PRESENT:</u>	
Chairperson Pearson	
Vice Chair Freschi	
Deputy Mayor McEvoy	Ms. Sarfeen Tanweer – Town Engineer
Mr. Lilley	Mr. Mascera, Planning Board Attorney
Mr. Katzeff	Ms. Miesch, Zoning Official
Mrs. Parker	Mrs. Carpinelli, Acting Board Secretary
Absent from the meeting: Councilman Roman; Town Manager O'Sullivan; Mr. Camuti, Mr. Hyndman	
Also in Attendance: Tree Experts: • Rich Wolowicz- Richview Consulting • Dr. Alvaro Gonzalez- Boswell Engineering	

CALL TO ORDER - The meeting was called to order at 7:33 PM by Chairperson Pearson.

ROLL CALL

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT STATEMENT - Read by Mrs. Carpinelli, Acting Board Secretary

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – Chair Pearson asks if anyone from the public would like to make a statement or ask a question – seeing none the Chairperson closes general public participation.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chair Pearson asks for a motion to approve minutes from the Regular meeting held on June 26, 2025.

Vice Chair Freschi: makes motion to approve; seconded by **Chair Pearson**.

Chair Pearson asks for all in favor; all eligible commissioners in attendance voted in favor.

Minutes Pass.

RESOLUTIONS- NONE

SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES - No Updates

NEW BUSINESS

PB Application 2025-02: 1 Wedgewood Drive; Block 1712, Lot 1: Application Hearing for Tree Removal.

Board Attorney Mascera announces that this is a revised application and applicant was required to re-notice since they carried to the July 24, 2025 meeting; but no testimony was heard as that meeting was cancelled due to lack of a quorum. Notice was sufficient for this hearing.

Mr. Heinkel – Attorney for Wedgewood Gardens Condominium Association – reads statement addressing the reason for the request to remove 17 trees from the property as they are in interference with their state mandated repaving project. He states that it will put undue hardship on his client if the request is not granted.

**Witness: Greg Danielli- Fairfield, NJ – Property Director Cedar Crest Management –
Certified Property Manager - Community Association Institute**

Mr. Mascera swears in Mr. Danielli

Mr. Danielli explains a Reserve Study – A study that identifies all the components on a property requiring maintenance overtime. Gives useful life, life span and costs for replacement based on a 3- year plan. 30 year outlook in the study. Compliance is mandatory.

For the record: the Board takes judicial notice of the law NJSA 45:22A-44.2, NJSA 45:22A- 44.3

Mr. Heinkel directs the board's attention to page C-7- Capital Reserve Replacement Analysis Expenditure Schedule. Column for 2024, line 50- Road/Parking Areas- asphalt reconstruction.

Mr. Danielli reads that Present value of line-item expenditures in time window = \$ 816,060.

Mr. Mascera interjects that the Board will accept a stipulation that the Reserve Study is the most recent Reserve study of the Association and believes that to be in compliance with current NJ law the association must make repairs in accordance with current regulations.

Mr. Heinkel asks Mr. Danielli if it is his understanding that this project begin immediately? He replies Yes.

Board Questions of Mr. Danielli:

- Mr. Freschi asks in what capacity is he associated with the project. He is the property manager overseeing the contractors doing the work that was submitted and approved. He has overseen similar projects also dealing with stormwater management.
- Mr. McEvoy asks when was the prior Reserve Study done before the 2024 study. Mr. Danielli did not know.
- Chair Pearson wants to know why the urgency when applicant has delayed submitting revised plans. Mrs. Parker also adds that since the paving needs to be completed in 2025, why was the application only submitted in March 2025. Mr. Heinkel responds that the work would have been done in 2024 if it was not necessary to get approval from the Board. It took time to coordinate various professionals and have site meetings with Foresters.
- Mr. Freschi asks why a tree expert from a tree removal company was hired instead of an independent arborist. Mr. Danielli did not know and stated that he has only been employed by Cedar Crest for 2 months.

Chair Pearson asks if there are any further questions or comments from the public – seeing none; public comments are closed.

Expert Witness: Robert Laner, Jr- Warren, NJ – Falcon Group – Sr. Project Engineer

Mr. Mascera swears in Mr. Laner.

Education: Civil Engineering Degree- NJIT; Masters in Construction Engineering- NJIT. Professional background: 20 years' experience in engineering consulting firms, 20 years' experience in the construction industry. Licensed Civil Engineer in NJ.

The Board accepts Mr. Laner as an expert witness.

Mr. Laner has been hired by Wedgewood Gardens to oversee their paving project.

Through independent research it was determined that a complete removal of asphalt, adding proper sub base and curbs is needed. This requires excavating 22" deep down from the curb and 2' on each side of curb. Mr. Laner participated in the site-visit performed in August 2025 with Richview Consulting, Dr. Gonzalez, Ms. Tanweer, Mr. Burgess(arborist) and the project's Landscape architect.

It was determined that the paving project could not be completed without damaging the 17 trees.

Mr. Heinkel asks Mr. Laner how this work might disturb the trees. He responds that they like to mitigate any cutting, grading, and fill around the drip-line of the trees, however in this instance it would require excavation about 2' in depth directly adjacent to the tree stump, which will cause harm to the tree. Mr. Heller will speak more to this point later.

Drainage issues were discussed with township Engineer concerning the grade of the project and adjacent streets to the NE that there is a large amount of water that comes over the curbs and onto other streets. Falcon installed 3 additional catch basins to help mitigate the runoff coming from the site, not necessarily due to the removal of trees.

Board Questions of Mr. Laner:

- Chair Pearson asks if Mr. Laner was involved from the beginning of the project. He missed the first month and did not hear the first testimony heard in March. Chair Pearson states that a lot of paving work has already been completed in the lower portion of the property and around the garages.
- Mr. Mascera adds that the original plan requested the removal of many more trees and that some of the roadwork has been completed without having to remove those trees, so how was that road work able to be done without removing those additional trees?
- Mr. Laner replies that the trees around completed work were not in the way of the project and not in need of removal.
- Chair Pearson asks for Mr. Laner to show on the drawing where the 3 catch basins were added.
- They were added where the road "boomerangs" by Bldg 6. The lowest portion of the topography
- Mr. McEvoy ask where the water collected by these basins is draining.
- Dr. Gonzalez explains idea was to catch runoff before it runs all the way down. Mr. Laner adds they are piping underground, collect it sooner, which also does less damage to the asphalt. No change to existing drainage patterns
- Mr. McEvoy asks if there was any consideration to curb cuts and rain gardens in the court yard area prior to entering or having a need to collect more water. Or would the applicant be willing to add rain gardens to reduce runoff onto Cumberland?
- Mr. Laner says that rain gardens were not discussed and additional catch basins were installed solely to deal with existing run-off and not possible runoff from tree removal.
- Mr. Heinkel clarifies the catch basins are being added for existing run-off.
- Mr. McEvoy suggests that the center island would be an ideal spot for a rain garden for runoff mitigation.
- Mr. Freschi asks for clarification about how 2' of excavation site is actually measured.
- Mr. Laner explains that it is 1' into the land from the curb and 1' out into the road from the curb.

Chair Pearson asks if there are any questions from the public

Stephanie Brachfeld- Verona, NJ - As resident of Wedgewood Gardens she is concerned about pitted look of the asphalt and the base layer being damaged by freeze.

- Mr. Laner says that now they have only Base coarse asphalt down which is more granular rock and is more porous. It is the intention to get the surface course down as soon as possible and pave the roads prior to winter. There is a potential of having the Base course breaking down during winter if the base course is left uncovered for an extended period of time.

Witness – Matthew Burgess, Denville. NJ is sworn in by Mr. Mascera.

Arborist in New Jersey, 32 years, licensed tree expert with NJ Dept of Environmental Protection since 2009, ISA (International Society of Agriculture) TRAQ qualification (tree risk qualification).

Board accepts Mr. Burgess as an expert witness

Mr. Burgess refers to Wedgewood Gardens Tree preservation Report prepared by Keith Bimby of Bartlett Tree Service. He is a consulting arborist.

Mr. Burgess reviewed the report and participated in the August site-visit. After walking the property and inspecting each tree, the report was revised based on input from all the participants. The revised version was submitted to the Board.

Mr. Heinkel directs the Board to page 9 of the report and Mr. Burgess testifies that there are 17 trees on the report for removal.

Each of these trees along the curb line was inspected at the site-visit and all the trees would be significantly damaged during the paving project. Mr. Burgess testifies that it is his opinion that these 17 trees need to be removed to complete the paving project.

It is noted by Mr. Heinkel and Mr. Burgess that tree # 8 in the table is to be retained by the suggestion of Rich Wolowicz and Tom Purtell during the site visit.

Board Questions for Mr. Burgess:

- Mr. Freschi wants to know about root system for Honey locust and how it was determined that their roots will be irreparably damaged.
- Mr. Burgess explains the project will be come within 1 to 2 feet from the trunk of the tree, catastrophically damaging the anchoring roots.
- Mr. Katzeff asks why there is a discrepancy in the number of trees between what town calculated and what applicant has
- Mr. McEvoy states that there are only 16 trees listed for removal so is it 16 or 17 trees in the plan.
- Mr. Heinkel explains that they have added a Pine tree for removal because of its poor health, but the tree is not part of the tree replacement plan as it is not impacted by the paving project.
- Ms. Miesch states that the Pine tree listed on the Root Landscape Plan is listed as Fair and because it is 37" it is classified as an extraordinary tree that would warrant Town Council approval for removal.

Discussion of what the actual condition of the Pine tree is actually. It is determined that it would be better to take the Pine tree off the current application and deal with it separately. Applicant will be requesting 16 trees for removal, applying for a separate tree removal permit for the 37" Pine Tree.

- Mr. Burgess testifies that some of the curbs are damaged from tree roots and the pavement is buckling due to root damage;

Chair Pearson asks if there are any other questions from the Board; seeing none;

Chair Pearson asks if there are any questions from the public; seeing none. Public question portion is closed.

Witness- Ben Heller, Licensed Landscape Architect, Root Landscape Architecture, 105 Dean Rd Mendham, NJ. Licensed Landscape Architect in the State of New Jersey, New York and Connecticut, graduate of Rutgers University; licensed since 2017; license in good standing with the State of NJ; Former Chairman of the Planning Board of West Orange.

Mr. Heller Is sworn in by Mr. Mascera as an expert witness.

Mr. Heller directs attention to the tree removal plan on the easel and included with the application. (Existing Conditions and tree removal plan- page 1) The 17 trees slated for removal are highlighted in red. Explaining existing conditions on the property.

Chair Pearson asks why trees shown for removal are all listed as 17" in diameter. Mr. Heller states that is the information provided by the tree expert and Mr. Heinkel points out that page 2 shows the trees with actual diameters.

During site-visit it was determined that leaders go to underground drainage systems leading to inlets in the streets from each building across the lawns. He noticed tree roots causing damage to roadways and sidewalks have lifted at the joints- signs that roots are coming to the surface.

His plan calls for replanting the appropriate and responsible trees so that roots will not cause future damage to sidewalks and roadways. His plan does not include large deciduous shade trees to be planted close to buildings so the roots do not infiltrate the foundations.

Decided that the best planting space is not between the sidewalk and curbing, but farther into the lawn, except where the appropriate amount of space is available.

His plan does not disturb existing drainage on the property. His plan includes shade trees and flower trees, and understands that some flowering trees may not meet the mitigation requirements, but is for the aesthetics of the property.

His plan is responsible given the drainage locations, topography, proximity to streets and sidewalks and residents themselves.

He will explore the possibility of including rain gardens as suggested by Mr. McEvoy.

Mr. Heller can include a tree protection detail in his plan as are noted in the Bartlett Report.

Mr. Heinkel asks about any negative effects of removing the 17 trees:

Soil erosion or increased dust concentration? **No, the large trees may actually be providing soil erosion**

Deleterious effect on land's physical condition based on trees removed and their replacements?

No, he can add trees as recommended by Board as long as the species are responsible for the space they have

Would there be a decrease in soil fertility? **He will defer to tree expert.**

Destroy buffer between residential and non-residential use? **No**

Create any condition that can cause harm to residents or property? **No**

Board Questions for Mr. Heller:

- Mr. Katzeff asks if only 22 trees will be replanted and the rest of the mitigation will go into the tree fund. Yes – that is what has been proposed by Mr. Heller.
- Chair Pearson questions the variety of species selected for the replacement plan asked at last meeting for Mr. Heller to look at the town's list of recommended species. **He did review the list, but after meeting with arborists and town engineers this is the number and types of trees he feels will responsibly fit on the property.**

- Mr. Katzeff – If the Pine comes down, that will open up that space for a couple more trees.
- Mr. McEvoy- makes statement that in 1960 people loved the Honey Locust, this is a perfect example why planting a variety is necessary because having too many of the same species causes the same problem throughout the complex. He feels by the NW corner of property there are plenty of courtyards to add additional trees. Again, behind the building, that area is a river with heavy rain and would benefit from more trees. From the plan (9/24/2024) it looks like trees may have been removed at some point. Zoning Officer confirms that 9 trees were taken down in the early stages of the paving project. That could possibly be a spot for more trees to be planted. This is why more trees should be planted rather than just paying the mitigation into the fund.
- Discussion of how many trees should be replanted. Mr. Mascera interjects that first the board needs decide if they will approve the removal of 16 trees.
- Mr. Freschi finds that some of the 16 trees slated for removal are farther than 2' from the curb, can some of these trees also be saved? Mr. Wolowicz replies that the majority of those trees are declining or dead or the root system could be closer to the curbs than the trunk and would be severely damaged by the project. So, it is safe to say that not all 16 trees are within 2 feet of the curb and in my opinion need to be removed.

Chair Pearson asks if there are any questions from the public.

Stephanie Brachfeld, Verona, NJ – Q: For the species that are on site how far from the trunk do the roots extend out?

A: Generally speaking, the root extension is measured by the Drip Line- the circle around the tree where the canopy extends.

Q: For the site behind back of building 2 and backyards of Hamilton is there a chance of roots disturbing the foundation?

A: It depends on the species. As stated, I have recommended more upright trees, varieties that are Reasonable and responsible.

Carol Thomas, Verona, NJ- Verona Shade Tree Commission

Q: The species you have chosen are more columnar is this because of the drip line and root extensions. A: Yes

Q: Mr. Wolowicz due you believe these columnar, ornamental trees are a better species for these areas? A: Yes

Ms. Thomas states that with much smaller trees replacing the bigger ones that water run-off could be a problem.

Chair Pearson asks if there are any more questions from the public, seeing none. Public questions closed

- Mr. Freschi asks for clarification on tree replacement size. A new tree is 2 ½ inches in diameter is standard.
- Chair Pearson asks Mr. Wolowicz- looking at the backyard, there are two pretty open areas with no shade tree cover. Mr. Wolowicz
- Mr. McEvoy looking at driveway going up to SE – three trees remaining, but looks like some space available from trees being removed. Mr. Heller states that one of those trees has a very large canopy.

Chair Pearson reopens questions from the public.

Carol Thomas, Verona, NJ- Verona Shade Tree Commission

Q: Can you look at adding shrubs along back of residents along Cumberland to make up for the 5-6 trees that were taken down in the previous paving.

A: We can add some shrubs, I don't think there is space for trees- there is at most 3 feet -but do shrubs count toward the tree replacement.

Mr. Mascera adds that it can be a condition of the approval to add shrubs in that area.

Chair Pearson closes public questioning.

Chair Pearson asks if there are any comments from the public.

Stephanie Brachfeld, Verona, NJ- a map of the sewer lines should be made available when the planner and arborists walk the site.

Carol Thomas, Verona, NJ- Verona Shade Tree Commission- The STC sent a resolution to the Planning Board outlining their suggestions to utilize full size shade trees. If they are going to pay mitigation, the STC would like to see more trees in the area, we are losing wildlife habitat, air filtration. The STC can work with VEC and landscape commission in town. The STC is happy to see that the large Pine is coming down as it is dangerous. To address some of the drainage issues, we urge the Landscape architect to consider rain gardens.

Chair Pearson closes public comments.

Mr. Heinkel gives closing arguments for this case.

Board discussion for a condition of the approval to be either a specific number of trees or a minimum number of trees to be replanted, taking into account the input from the community and the Board, the list of recommended replacement species. They want to see as many trees planted as possible, before the mitigation is paid. They also want to diversify as many different species as possible. The Board will rely on Mr. Wolowicz and Mr. Heller's professional opinion, as to how many trees can be planted, after walking the site. Mitigation will be paid on the difference in the number of trees required for replanting (45) and the actual number replanted that meet mitigation requirements. The final plans will need to be presented prior to any tree removal.

Mrs. Parker makes a motion to approve:

- Wedgewood Gardens to remove 16 trees as identified on the plans submitted, subject to
- The agreement that replacement number of trees is 45 as outlined in the Zoning Officials letter
- Minimum Baseline for replacement number on the site is 22 trees
- Applicant will use best efforts to maximize the number replaced and diversity of species, based on the list in township's ordinance and
- Working with Town's Arborists increase as close as possible to 45 trees replanted.

Board amends motion: Minimum baseline is 33 Replacement trees.

Mr. McEvoy seconds

- **Roll Call Vote:**

	AYES	NAYS	NOT ELIGIBLE	RECUSED	ABSENT
Mrs. Parker	X				
Mr. Katzeff	X				
Mr. Lilley	X				
Mr. Hyndman					X
Chair Pearson	X				

Mr. Camuti					X
Township Manager O'Sullivan					X
Councilman Roman					X
Deputy Mayor McEvoy	X				
Vice Chair Freschi	X				

- **Motion Passes**

EXECUTIVE SESSION – Not Necessary

Chair Pearson makes the motion to adjourn. **Mr. Katzeff** seconds

Meeting Adjourned at 10:34 PM

Respectfully submitted,



Dolores Carpinelli
Verona Township
Acting Secretary – Planning Board

PLEASE NOTE: Meeting minutes are a summation of the hearing. If you are interested in a verbatim transcript from this or any proceeding, please contact the Board Office at 973-857-4772