

MINUTES OF THE VERONA PLANNING BOARD MEETING

Thursday, January 23, 2025

PRESENT:

Chairperson Pearson
Mayor Tamburro
Mr. O'Sullivan
Vice Chair Freschi
Mr. Hyndman
Mr. DeOld

Mr. Camuti
Mr. Katzeff
Mr. Mascera, Planning Board Attorney
Ms. Miesch, Zoning Officer
Ms. Kester, Board Secretary

Absent from the meeting: Mr. Lilley; Ms. Parker; Councilman Roman..

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

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS Act Statement is read by Caitlin Kester, Board Secretary

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chair Pearson asks for a motion to approve minutes from the Regular meeting held on October 22, 2024. Mayor Tamburro moves the minutes as presented; seconded by Vice-Chair Freschi. Chair Pearson asks for all in favor; Deputy Manager O'Sullivan abstained; all other commissioners in attendance voted in favor. **Minutes Pass.**

CONSISTENCY DETERMINATION

None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: Chair Pearson opens the public participation portion of the meeting. Seeing none, the Chair closes public portion.

RESOLUTIONS

1. Resolution 2025-01: Appointing Caitlin Kester as Secretary to the Planning Board for January 23, 2025-June 30, 2025

Chair Pearson asks for a motion to approve Resolution 2025-01

Mr. Hyndman makes a motion to approve; **Vice-Chair Freschi** seconds the motion

Roll Call Vote:

	AYES	NAYS	ABSTENTION
Jeremy Katzeff	X		
Mr. Hyndman	X		
Mr. Camuti	X		
Mr. DeOld	X		
Deputy Manager O'Sullivan	X		
Mayor Tamburro	X		
Vice Chair Freschi	X		
Chair Pearson	X		

Motion Passes.

2. Resolution 2025-02: Appointment of H2M Architects + Engineers as Professional Planner to the Planning Board beginning on January 1, 2025 and ending on January 1, 2026.

Chair Pearson asks for a motion to approve Resolution 2025-02

Mr. DeOld makes a motion to approve; **Mr. Hyndman** seconds the motion

Roll Call Vote:

	AYES	NAYS	ABSTENTION
Jeremy Katzeff	X		
Mr. Hyndman	X		
Mr. Camuti	X		
Mr. DeOld	X		
Deputy Manager O'Sullivan	X		
Mayor Tamburro	X		
Vice Chair Freschi	X		
Chair Pearson	X		

Motion Passes.

SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

MASTER PLAN SUBCOMMITTEE

Deputy Manager O'Sullivan explain the Fourth Round Affordable Housing requirement Resolution was passed at the Council Meeting on January 20, 2025. The numbers initially needed to be adjusted from 173 units to 149 units. The upcoming Master Plan Subcommittee meeting is February 5, 2025. Mr. Freschi asked about the 149 units with potential open space to 66 units. Deputy Manager O'Sullivan says necessary data from council decisions to be integrated in. The Township may reduce prospective need from 149 units to as low as 66. Minimum floor is 25% based on 149 unit perspective need. Ongoing land analysis will assess further adjustments.

Realistic development potential based on:

- Vacant land analysis for development;
- Assessment with Affordable Housing Planner and Council;

Minimum development potential cannot be less than 25% of prospective need

- 25% of 149 units is approximately 37 units;
- Current assessment indicates 66 units; still a work in progress;

Chair Pearson asks if there are any questions, seeing none.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Preliminary Investigation to determine if Block 708 Lot 1, also known as 383 Bloomfield Avenue, qualifies for designation as a non-condemnation area in need of redevelopment in accordance with N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-1 et seq, as per Resolution 2024-147 of the Township of Verona Council dated August 19, 2024.

San Chavan, H2M Associates, Inc., 119 Cherry Hill Road, Suite 110, Parsippany, NJ appearing on behalf of the owners.

Lizda Cassamajor, H2M Associates, Inc.

Resolution 2024-147

Purpose of Redevelopment

- Revitalization when conventional zoning fails
- Stimulates economic development and allows for:
 - Preparation of a redevelopment plan;
 - Greater flexibility and control over development outcomes;
- Opportunity for long-term tax abatements and negotiation of development priorities;

Redevelopment Process

- Township authorizes Planning Board to conduct area in need of study;
- Planning Board or consultant determines if area meets statutory criteria;
- Planning Board makes recommendation to governing body;
 - Governing body can accept or reject the recommendation;
 - If accepted, council designates the redevelopment area by resolution;

Study Area Details

- Ms. Chavan conducted a field study on September 11, 2024, for property assessment;
- Analyzed tax maps, assessment records, accident reports and crime data. Reviewed DEP known contaminated sites information and zoning ordinances;
- Hillcrest Farms property identified as Block 708, Lot 1 is approximately 1.26 acres;
- Located at the southeast corner of Bloomfield Avenue which is a County road and Park Avenue;
- Surrounding uses include:
 - Multifamily residential to the south;
 - Single-family residential to the east;
 - Commercial to the north and west along Bloomfield Avenue;
- One-story wood frame building with attached greenhouse shows significant deterioration, with wooden shingle siding warped and rotting
- Rear yard contains an assortment of greenhouses, sheds, and storage materials with green house showing visible signs of deterioration;
- Improperly stored materials and vehicles around the building;
- Trailer located along the easterly property line is in derelict condition and has been there since 1989;
- The front parking lot has three ingress and egress points along Bloomfield Avenue;
- Area floods periodically due to insufficient drainage;

Criteria for Redevelopment Designation

- Ms. Chavan explained each criteria outlined in her handout. This property qualifies under the criteria of D and H.

Master Plan Analysis

- Goals include promoting growth in areas meeting current and future land use trends;
- Ensuring zoning regulations align with township development goals;
- Maintain vibrant and attractive downtown and thriving commercial districts;

State Plan and Smart Growth

- Study areas designated as an area in need of rehabilitation;
- Located on the main Bloomfield Avenue corridor, linking ETC and TC zones;
- Consistent with smart growth planning principles for future redevelopment;

Site Functionality and Design Challenges

- Property layout inconsistent and modern land use planning standards;

- Undefined parking and access to driveway, lacking clear signage for circulation;
- There's no separate loading area for delivery vehicles which impacts site functionality;

Ingress and Egress Points

- Ms. Chavan pulls up slides of pictures in her handout that show three ingress and egress points;
- Driveway begins in parking lot accessed from Bloomfield Avenue;
- Access drive and parking areas on the eastern side of the large wood pergola;

Redevelopment Criteria

- Study area is eligible to satisfy the redevelopment criteria due to obsolescence;
 - Focuses on accessory buildings and site improvements;
- Majority of the property and accessory structures are in poor condition;
- The site meets the criteria because it's in a PA1 area;
- Ms. Chavan states there are two 550-gallon underground storage tanks that will be removed;
- Chair Pearson asks if there was testing done on the tanks
- Ms. Chavan states there has not been a discussion on testing yet. The owner has been forthcoming with the information and will remove them. LSRP (Licensed Site Remediation Professionals) will be needed.
- Phase one assessment is part of the State requirements;

Flooding and Drainage

- Discussion on environmental contamination risks;
 - There were no specific risks obtained from the owner;
- Mr. Freschi makes note the northwest corner barn is newer;
- Ms. Chavan explains not one aspect determines if it qualifies, the entirety of the site does;
- Board Attorney Mascera reiterates Ms. Chavan's statement that the overall site gets factored and the Board is looking at the lot as a whole;
- Mr. DeOld walked on the property in the Summer of 2024 and believes it needs redevelopment;

Chair Pearson asks if any further questions, seeing none.

Board Deliberations

- Mr. Camuti believes the report is thorough but doesn't believe it is in need of redevelopment. He believes the charm and history in Verona should remain;
 - Criteria D – dilapidated but safety, health, welfare to public – those items are fixable;
 - Owner should take better care of it. It's a thriving business.
 - Non condemnation has negotiation rights;
 - Mr. Camuti asks where the owner of the property is if they are in agreement with redevelopment;
- Board Attorney Mascera says condonation part of statute is determined in the beginning;
 - Chair Pearson asks Mr. Camuti if he has walked the site;
 - Mr. Camuti says he has not but does not see it as a public harm;
 - Ms. Chavan states that even though she is hired by someone, she will not write something that is not found to be true as it is her license and integrity on the line;
 - Mr. Katzeff asks why can't the owners remove the trailers to stop causing "self-inflicted harm";
 - Board Attorney Mascera stated that self-inflicted hardship would apply if an application was before the Board seeking a variance, but it doesn't apply similarly for a determination of an area in need of redevelopment;
 - There was a discussion if they owners went before Verona Boards for variances instead;

- Board Attorney Mascera states this would be considered as looking through the municipalities eyes;
- Chair Pearson refers to an application with the similar conditions which to Board found had met the criteria. The use wasn't obsolete, and sentimentality taken out of the decision making;
- Mayor Tamburro says he agrees with Ms. Chavan on Criteria D and H. The property owner has agreed to change and the redevelopment plan benefits the municipality;
- The property owner has expressed a desire to develop the property and it will not remain a garden center in any way;

Chair Pearson asks for a motion to recommend to the Governing Body the area meets the criteria of an area of redevelopment more particularly meeting Criteria D and H. **Mr. DeOld** makes the motion; **Mayor Tamburro** seconds the motion

Roll Call Vote:

	AYES	NAYS	ABSTENTION
Dr. Katzeff	X		
Mr. Hyndman	X		
Mr. Camuti		X	
Mr. DeOld	X		
Deputy Manager O'Sullivan	X		
Mayor Tamburro	X		
Vice Chair Freschi	X		
Chair Pearson	X		

Motion Passes.

Chair Pearson asks Board Attorney Mascera to draft a Memorialization for the next meeting as well as formally notify the Governing Body of the determination in writing.

Discussion of a new audio and recording system for meetings. Deputy Manager O'Sullivan states it is being included in the 2025 Budget with offsetting money to reduce the cost. Timeframe is six months or longer due to budgetary timing that needs to be lined up. Board Attorney Mascera makes mention there are certain requirements that need to be reviewed prior to opening up meetings to Zoom.

Mayor Tamburro makes a motion to adjourn

Chair Pearson approves motion.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:50PM

Respectfully submitted,

Caitlin Kester
Verona Township
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 973-857-4773