

Kenneth J. Hopkins
Mayor

Jason M. Pezzullo, AICP
Committee Chairman
Director of Planning



Jim Woyciechowski
Fire Department

Stanley Pikul
Building Official

Justin Mateus
Engineering Division

Stephen Mulcahy
Traffic Safety Division

DEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE

Cranston City Hall
869 Park Avenue, Cranston, Rhode Island 02910

MINUTES 9:00 AM, WEDNESDAY, October 19, 2022 CRANSTON CITY HALL – 3RD FLOOR COUNCIL CHAMBER

1. Call to Order

Principal Planner Doug McLean called the Development Plan Review Committee meeting to order at 9:19 a.m. in the City Council chamber.

The following members were in attendance for the meeting: Justin Mateus, Steve Mulcahy, Jason Pezzullo, Stan Pikul, and Jim Woyciechowski.

The following Planning Department staff members were in attendance: Doug McLean, Principal Planner; Alex Berardo, Planning Technician; and Amelia Lavallee, Planning Intern.

2. Approval of Minutes

- 10/5/22 Meeting

(vote taken)

Upon motion made by Mr. Pikul and seconded by Mr. Mateus, the Development Plan Review Committee unanimously voted to approve the minutes of the 10/5/22 meeting.

3. “Comstock Industrial”

Preliminary Plan

(vote taken)

Location: Comstock Parkway, Assessor's Plat 36, Lot 46

Zoning District: M-1 (Restricted industry)

Owner/App: Comstock Industrial, LLC

Proposal: The applicant proposed to construct two (2) new buildings totaling approximately 270,000 square feet along with associated parking and landscaping amenities. The proposed site is to be used consistent with uses allowed in the M-1 zoning district, such as manufacturing, warehousing, and trucking activities.

Atty. Robert Murray introduced the members of the applicant team who were present for the meeting: John Walsh, of Comstock Industrial, LLC; John Carter, PLA; and Will Walter, Civil Engineer. Atty. Murray also noted that Sara Bradford, a Landscape Architect, was present for the meeting as she had conducted the peer review of the applicant's landscape plan.

Summarizing the proposal, Atty. Murray said the project would be a by-right development in an M-1 zone consisting of two buildings: a smaller, 70,000 ft² building located near Comstock Industrial Drive, and a larger, 200,000 ft² building set further back from the road.

Atty. Murray reminded the Committee that the project came before them in September 2021 for a pre-application review and went before the City Plan Commission in December 2021 for a Master Plan hearing. In the months since the applicant worked with RIDEM on securing wetland-related approvals and permits; engaged Beta Group to conduct a traffic study, which was peer-reviewed by Fuss & O'Neill (and is being

reviewed per Planning Staff recommendations because it was conducted prior to approval of the nearby Comstock Crossings project); prepared a Landscape Plan which was peer-reviewed by Bradford Associates; and engaged Tech Environmental to conduct a sound study, which has also been peer-reviewed. Atty. Murray said the Comstock Industrial project is probably the most heavily studied and peer-reviewed proposal he's worked on in Cranston, so the application is serious and well-considered.

Mr. Walter then reviewed the current site plan with the Committee. He observed the locations of both proposed buildings as well as the single driveway by which they can be accessed, whose forked design keeps truck traffic on the opposite side of the larger building from the residential abutters to the south. Tractor trailer storage, similarly, will be kept away from the residential abutters, in the northeast corner of the site.

Mr. Walter also noted that the topography of the site generally slopes downward as one proceeds eastward (away from Comstock Industrial Dr) and described how each building relates to the land. He said the floor of the 70,000 ft² building is set slightly higher than the internal driveway, but the floor of the 200,000 ft² building would be set 5 or 6 feet lower than the driveway – but still higher than the existing terrain, which makes the vegetated area between the building and the fork in the driveway a naturally-depressed retention basin. Water that collects into the retention basin would be treated and then discharge into the wetland area, which is another 8-10 feet lower than the building and roadway, at a peak flow volume that is lower than existing conditions.

Atty. Murray asked Mr. Walter to confirm that RIDEM approved the design as presented, which he did. He then invited Mr. Carter to speak to the landscaping concept for the site.

Mr. Carter said the stormwater detention areas will be heavily planted and the front parking area will be landscaped in accordance with City regulations. He observed that the highest-priority area for landscaping is the southern property line that the applicant shares with abutters. Much of the southern side hosts existing wetlands, which the applicant will leave undisturbed; the upland portion of the southern boundary will be planted. He also said a dry swale would be located along the southern side of the 70,000 ft² building. As for the employee parking area on the southern side of the 200,000 ft² building, Mr. Carter noted that some 20- to 30-foot-tall trees already buffer the condos to the south from the site. The applicant proposes to build on this existing buffer by filling in gaps with more plantings on its own land and by erecting a 6-foot-tall fence to fully block headlights and vehicle noise. Finally, he noted that the houses abutting the southeast corner of the parcel have decent wooded areas on their own properties, but the applicant intends to plant evergreen trees to supplement.

Turning to the property's use, Atty. Murray said that Mr. Walsh has not yet identified an end user for the property and briefly explained that prospective tenants for facilities of this size typically don't express interest until the project is further advanced in the approval process. He confirmed that the property's use will be allowed in the M-1 zone and comply with City regulations. Mr. Walsh said the site design gives away the future use, which will be traditional warehousing, and added that the site would have been designed differently if it were destined for a parcel delivery or manufacturing use.

Chairman Pezzullo then opened the discussion to the Committee.

Mr. Pikul said he had no concerns at this time since the project's use would be allowed in the M-1 zone.

Mr. Mateus said he saw no issues with the stormwater design. He called attention to the 53-foot turning movement out of the parcel to the north onto Comstock Industrial Drive, which shows trucks would cross over the curb/sidewalk. Mr. Walsh said the applicant intended to have the curb/sidewalk level with the roadway to accommodate those turns, but Mr. Mateus said he wanted to work with Mr. Walter to find the best solution, since he felt it would be unsafe to make it a standard concrete sidewalk. Mr. Mateus said he heard about sewer issues (a 1.5-foot drop) at that location and recommended a condition of approval specifying the new sewer tie-in be as close to invert as possible. On a similar note, Mr. Mateus said if the applicant is trying to tie in three utility connections to the site, DPW will want to see the road repaved curb-to-curb, as opposed to three separate road disturbances.

Mr. Mulcahy said he had some uncertainty about the project's traffic impacts since the end user (and its precise scheduling volume and hours of operation) isn't known. He said that left turning movements out of Western Industrial Drive can already be tough, and he felt that any future off-site improvements (such as traffic signals) should be taken care of by the end user if they ultimately prove necessary. Atty. Murray said he'd spoken with Richard Bernardo, DPW Director, the previous week about this topic and he understood the preference of having the developer approach the City to discuss potential improvements.

Mr. McLean relayed that Jim Woyciechowski (Fire Marshal), who was unable to attend, wanted a condition of approval to be added that would ensure the Fire Marshal can review and approve the Final Plan prior to recording. Atty. Murray said he had spoken with Mr. Woyciechowski prior to the meeting as well and has no issues with the details Fire would like to see.

After being invited to offer her perspective as a peer reviewer, Ms. Bradford said the current version of the site plan satisfies her remaining concerns, especially considering the site is difficult to plant in a way that would accommodate the ideal buffers. She asked that one of the two parking "bump-outs" in the southern employee parking area be widened from one to two parking spaces in width to better accommodate the tree roots; Mr. Walsh and Mr. Carter both agreed that they could make both bump-outs two parking spaces wide. She also asked that they consider the impacts of their intended lighting scheme on abutters, as a vegetated buffer would not completely mitigate light impacts. Addressing the plantings on the southern side of the property, Mr. Carter said a berm will be established for the small area where the grades of the 200,000 ft² building and the abutters meet. A fence will be placed on top of this berm to further mitigate the visual impacts. Some abutters expressed interest in extending the fence further eastward, but Mr. Walsh said the land rises rather sharply at the southeast corner and space constraints could make it an either-or choice between the fence or the existing vegetation. Ms. Bradford said for screening purposes, the vegetation should be adequate.

Chairman Pezzullo then opened the matter to public comment.

Steven Disciullo, of 9 Sweet Pea Drive, raised questions surrounding the basis of the sound study (which assumed two trucks idling), whether a 25-foot vegetated buffer had been provided, the present challenges of traffic on Comstock Industrial, and whether vegetation would be sufficient for noise mitigation.

Jason Barry, of 1039 Scituate Avenue, thanked the applicant for being willing to reevaluate its traffic study to account for the proposed Comstock Commercial project and then offered several thoughts regarding landscaping. He voiced a preference for the fence to be extended eastward along his shared property line and requested an increased density of tree plantings (mix of two arbor vitae species) to further supplement the buffer. He asked if the applicant had looked into fence maintenance yet and said he also hoped they would consider taking Ms. Bradford's comments regarding lighting in the southern employee parking area into consideration.

Haley Ramos, of 1025 Scituate Avenue, echoed Mr. Barry's comments regarding fencing, vegetated buffer plantings, and illumination for the southern parking area. She also spoke to several species of trees that are currently found on or near the subject site's southern boundary and asked that the applicant take special care to ensure those trees are preserved whenever possible as work progresses.

James Lantini, of 1 Sweet Pea Drive, expressed doubt in the accuracy of the traffic study as it currently stands and noted the current traffic issues in that area.

Vincent Masino, of 14 Sweet Pea Drive, said that until the end user would be known, the hours of operation and number of employees cannot be known, which means it remains to be seen whether the mitigation plans will be effective. He also asked if architectural renderings had been finalized and whether the plantings would be mature, and voiced a general concern that the project would have detrimental impacts on abutters.

Robert Guarino, of 140 Comstock Parkway, expressed concerns about drainage and asked what runoff mitigation measures (if any) were planned to ensure runoff would not impact his property as it currently does.

John Puleo, of 12 Sweet Pea Drive, said he opposed the project because he believed it would negatively impact the quality of life and traffic for its neighbors.

Addressing some of the concerns that members of the public stated, Mr. Walsh said the project's traffic impacts would be less than 3% of the total traffic that exists on Comstock Industrial today. The applicant team re-reviewed its traffic study and maintains that the findings still bear out. The sound study's reference to two idling trucks was intended to describe a hypothetical, worst-case-scenario situation in which vehicles are making continuous noise; Mr. Walsh said this sort of situation will rarely occur in practice. As for noise mitigation, most of the mitigating impact will come from the sound and not the vegetation. Regarding HVAC, Mr. Walsh said only about 10,000 ft² of the 200,000 ft² building will be air-conditioned, and for such a small area, it can be handled with a residential-sized rooftop mini-split. Mr. Walsh said he would be happy to speak with Mr. Barry and Ms. Ramos about which sort of buffer treatment would be best for their property lines, and finally regarding lighting, Mr. Walsh said the lighting plan bears out as currently envisioned, and to go any deeper in analysis will entail a fixture-by-fixture review.

Mr. McLean asked Ms. Bradford if any three would be harmed by extending the fence to the east. She said she didn't expect it would harm the trees, but also said it wouldn't make much of an impact for screening, either. She said the benefits of fence extension would essentially be improved noise mitigation.

Upon motion made by Mr. Mateus, and seconded by Mr. Mulcahy, the Development Plan Review Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to close public comment.

Mr. McLean said Staff was supportive of granting the applicant's request for a waiver for 20% canopy coverage of the parking area. Chairman Pezzullo then asked for a motion.

Upon motion made by Mr. Mateus, and seconded by Mr. Pikul, the Development Plan Review Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the Preliminary Plan application subject to the following conditions:

- Fire will have an opportunity to review and approve the plans prior to Final Plan recording
- The sewer lateral will tie into the main line at invert or as close to invert as possible
- The fence proposed to mitigate noise will be constructed in a manner consistent with the noise study
- Both planted "bump-outs" in the southern employee parking area will be widened to two parking spaces each
- The applicant will demonstrate that all turning radii will work, particularly with the plans showing a solution for the 53-foot turning radius that would pass over a curb/sidewalk
- Utility connections will be covered with a curb-to-curb repaving

4. "Natick Avenue Solar" Preliminary Plan (vote taken)

Location:	Natick Avenue, AP 22, Lots 108 & 119
Zoning District:	A-80 (Single Family on 80,000 ft ² Lots)
Owner:	Ronald Rossi
Applicant:	Revy Energy, LLC
Proposal:	Applicant seeks a one-year extension of the Preliminary Plan application to expire on 11/19/23.

Upon motion made by Mr. Mateus, and seconded by Mr. Pikul, the Development Plan Review Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to extend the Preliminary Plan application for one year, with a new expiration of November 19, 2023.

5. “Garden City Center Infill”

Final Plan

(vote taken)

Location:	78 Hillside Road, AP 10, Lot 740
Zoning District	C-3 with conditions
Owner/App	Garden City Owner LLC
Proposal	Applicant seeks a one-year extension of Final Plan approval to expire on 11.19.23

Upon motion made by Mr. Pikul, and seconded by Mr. Mateus, the Development Plan Review Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to extend the Preliminary Plan application for one year, with a new expiration of November 19, 2023.

Finally, upon motion made by Mr. Mulcahy, and seconded by Mr. Mateus, the Development Plan Review Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to adjourn the meeting at 11:20 a.m.