

Kenneth J. Hopkins
Mayor

Jason M. Pezzullo, AICP
Committee Chairman
Director of Planning



Jim Woyciechowski
Fire Department

David Rodio
Building Official

Nick Capezza
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, May 4, 2022 CRANSTON CITY HALL – 3RD FLOOR COUNCIL CHAMBER

1. Call to Order

Chairman Jason Pezzullo called the Development Plan Review Committee meeting to order at 9:09 a.m. in the City Council chamber.

The following members were in attendance for the meeting: Nick Capezza, Stephen Mulcahy, Franklin Paulino, Stan Pikul, and Jim Woyciechowski.

The following Planning Department members were in attendance: Jason Pezzullo, Planning Director, and Alex Berardo, Planning Technician.

Also attending: Atty. Bob Murray and Dan Whitney for DE Foods, LLC.

2. Approval of Minutes

- 3/16/22 Meeting (vote taken)
- 4/20/22 Meeting (vote taken)

Chairman Pezzullo asked whether the Committee preferred to vote to approve both sets of minutes at the same time or two vote on each set individually. The Committee preferred the former option, so Chairman Pezzullo asked for a motion to approve the slate of minutes from the Committee's two previous meetings.

Upon motion made by Mr. Pikul and seconded by Mr. Capezza, the Development Plan Review Committee unanimously voted to approve the minutes of the 3/16/22 and 4/20/22 meetings.

3. "Nico Bella Restaurant"

Preliminary Plan (vote taken)

Location: 1350 Park Avenue, AP 11, Lot 1768

Zoning District: M-1 (General Industry)

Owner: Park Avenue Realty, Inc.

Applicant: Nico Bella Cranston, LLC

Proposal: The applicant is proposing to locate a restaurant in an M-1 zone. The project includes interior renovations. Minor site modifications for parking, traffic flow and landscaping are proposed. The project will require a special use permit.

Chairman Pezzullo told the Committee that the owner had not submitted MLCs along with its application, and until such time that it does, the application cannot be considered. Therefore, the matter was deferred.

4. "KFC Redevelopment" *

Pre-Application (No vote taken)

Location: 822 Reservoir Avenue, AP 9/5, Lot 599

Zoning District: C-1 (Office Business)

Owner/Applicant: DE Foods, LLC

Proposal: The applicant is proposing to relocate the building and add a drive-thru component to an existing KFC restaurant on the property. The applicant is also proposing to add parking and landscaping amenities. The project will require a use variance and dimensional variances.

Atty. Murray provided some context as he introduced his client's application. He said that DE Foods, LLC acquired the property at the intersection of Hazelwood St and Reservoir Ave towards the end of last year. The existing building was built in 1971 and no longer conforms to KFC's standards, so the applicant intends to update the property, most notably by adding a drive-thru. Atty. Murray said variances will be required for the project and pointed to the drive-thru as well as the residential abutters to the rear, the status of Reservoir Ave as a state road, and the lot's substandard size as areas the Committee will need to examine. Finally, he added that he and Mr. Whitney met with Planning staff last week to explain the project and have engaged engineers at GPI to help develop the plans, so they welcome any input the Committee might have to offer.

Mr. Whitney (representing DE Foods, LLC) then addressed the Committee. He said he has been involved with KFC for 31 years and noted that DE Foods owns 63 KFC restaurants. Of these, 58 currently have drive-thrus; Cranston is one of only five that does not. Mr. Whitney explained that DE Foods believes that drive-thrus and digital infrastructure will remain relevant in a post-pandemic fast food environment, and as such a drive-thru would be an essential component of an update of the property (which needs additional work anyway).

Addressing the site's constrained size, he said they intend to build the smallest standard building (1,500 ft², perhaps five seats for dining inside) to ensure sufficient circulation on the property. He mentioned various measures intended to mitigate the impacts on residential abutters, among them facing the speakers toward Reservoir Avenue, raising the fence in the rear of the property to screen the KFC from the houses, planting trees where space allows, regrading and reworking the retaining wall for better drainage, and closing one of the two existing curb cuts to keep restaurant traffic off neighborhood streets. He also shared a version of the project that included a 1,900 ft² building (enough space for a vestibule, an additional restroom, more seating space, and two more parking spots); Atty. Murray said this would probably be their preferred layout, but they wanted to find out if the Committee thought it was viable.

Chairman Pezzullo opened the comment portion of the review by wondering if the state would require a traffic study. Atty. Murray said he was unsure if it would be necessary in this case, as in his prior experience a letter from a traffic expert can sometimes be sufficient. Chairman Pezzullo also said he thought a landscaping plan would be required at the Preliminary stage, as the site needs a strong buffer to the residential abutters.

Mr. Paulino asked how the renovations would increase business and whether the increase would lead to hiring more employees. Mr. Whitney said if the business does as well as they expect it will, they could employ up to 30 workers at that location.

Mr. Mulcahy said his primary concern with the proposal is whether the KFC's turnaround time will be fast enough to ensure that there are minimal traffic impacts during peak hours. He asked what the average turnaround time would be and how many cars can stack at once in the drive-thru lane. Mr. Whitney said the standard turnaround time is budgeted to be 130 seconds – 70 seconds to place an order and 60 seconds at the window. He explained that the size and configuration of the building, as well as the operational model, are focused around in-and-out service. He then said that in the current plans, the site could handle up to 16 cars queuing. Director Pezzullo suspected few people would choose to join a drive-thru lane with 16 cars waiting, which would naturally ensure that traffic doesn't spill into the road. Mr. Mulcahy asked if they could supply any data on peak-hour traffic; Atty. Murray said he could ask GPI to contact him. Finally, Mr. Mulcahy asked how many employees work per shift and where they park. Mr. Whitney said about 5 or 6 work at the same time during a given shift and they would park onsite.

Mr. Mulcahy and Mr. Capezza both wondered how much of the site would be regraded and how that would affect the existing retaining wall and drainage situation. Mr. Capezza also noted that the applicant provided for 10-foot by 20-foot parking spaces when only 9-foot by 18-foot are required, so he encouraged them to review their plans and see if they could gain any additional parking spots by revising to the correct size.

Mr. Woyciechowski said he would be glad to have a new building that is fully up-to-code. He said he would be interested to know the occupancy of whichever version of the building is ultimately chosen, and he also wondered where the dumpster would be located and what sort of fencing would be used, as both could affect the potential risk posed by a dumpster fire. Atty. Murray said the applicant team would follow up with responses once they have them.

Mr. Pikul echoed the other Committee members' interest in changes to the grading and retaining wall as well as the dimensions of the driveways and curb cuts. He asked to have the front setback shown on the plans because he suspected there would be an encroachment given the lot's size, and he also asked to know what the signage plan would be. Atty. Murray said they would provide a sign package that corresponds to the size of the building, but noted for the time being that the signage would not be electronic.

Director Pezzullo concluded by noting the application's path forward would proceed to the Preliminary Plan stage through DPR, and then move on to the ZBR.

Upon motion made by Mr. Capezza and seconded by Mr. Mulcahy, the Development Plan Review Committee unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:50 a.m.