

Kenneth J. Hopkins
Mayor

Jason M. Pezzullo, AICP
Committee Chairman
Director of Planning



Jim Woyciechowski
Fire Department

Stanley Pikul
Building Official

Justin Mateus, P.E.
Engineering Division

Stephen Mulcahy
Traffic Safety Division

DEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE

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

MINUTES

9:30 AM, WEDNESDAY, April 5th, 2023

CRANSTON CITY HALL – 3RD FLOOR COUNCIL CHAMBER

1. Call to Order

Chairman Jason Pezzullo called the Development Plan Review Committee meeting to order at 9:36 a.m. in the City Council chamber.

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

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

2. Approval of Minutes

- 2/15/23 Meeting

(vote taken)

Upon motion made by Mr. Pikul and seconded by Mr. Mateus, the Development Plan Review Committee unanimously voted (5-0) to approve the minutes of the 2/15/23 meeting.

3. “Comstock Crossings”

Preliminary Plan

(vote taken)

Location	Comstock Parkway, Assessor's Plat 36, Lots 51, 52, & 53.
Zoning District	C-5 (Heavy business, industry)
Owner	Julian DeMarco Jr, and the successors of his 1998 Declaration of Trust, listed here individually as Dennis DeMarco, Regina DeMarco, Roberta DeMarco.
Applicant	Elizabeth Paul, 21 Stephanie Drive, Foster, RI 02825
Proposal	Applicant seeks to construct a new coffee shop/restaurant with drive-thru facility, as well as associate landscaping and parking improvements.

Chairman Pezzullo reminded the Committee that the site had received a site walk, rezone, and Comp Plan amendment last year. He then allowed the members of the applicant team who were present for the meeting – Attys. Brian LaPlante and Justin Bonnick, civil engineer Jeff Hanson, and applicants Tony and Elizabeth Paul – to discuss the status of their proposal.

For context, Atty. LaPlante first said the subject parcel was a 2-acre site comprised of three adjacent lots of record. These lots had been zoned M-2, but due to the parcel's small size, it wasn't compatible with the needs of most modern heavy industrial users, so the applicant sought a zone change last year to open the property to other uses.

Next Atty. LaPlante discussed several changes that had been made to the site plan since it had last been reviewed. The applicant has moved away from the idea of using the rear portion of the site for self-storage units and they will defer the construction of a 5,000 ft² commercial building until a later phase of development. (The commercial building would occupy an area of the site plan currently labeled "lawn and seed.") An adjacent rectangular area, delineated with dashes, will host an underground stormwater detention

basin large enough to handle runoff even if/when the commercial building is constructed in the future. The basin will be load-bearing so its surface can be paved and used for parking.

Atty. LaPlante said Latte Love's 3,000 ft² building will be located at the northern end of the site (as was originally proposed) to maximize queuing space on-site, which should in turn help with traffic on Comstock Parkway. Atty. LaPlante said a traffic study and an associated peer review had been conducted last year and accounted for the Latte Love, self-storage, and other commercial buildings all generating traffic. With only the Latte Love building remaining in the current proposal, he said the traffic generation estimates would now be highly conservative. Mr. Mulcahy said he was satisfied that the queue was long enough to handle traffic comfortably. Chairman Pezzullo then asked him if he had any concerns about the lack of bypass lane running the full length of the queueing lane. Atty. LaPlante noted that the area next to the queueing lane is paved so if vehicles wished to exit the queue, they technically could do so. Chairman Pezzullo observed there was a single pinch point at the order board, but said by that point vehicles would be unlikely to want to leave before receiving their orders.

Mr. Mulcahy asked what the applicant had decided regarding a potential mid-block crossing of Comstock Parkway, adding that he personally felt it was unnecessary. Chairman Pezzullo asked if the crossing involved only signage and striping; Mr. Mulcahy said it would also require curb cuts be made. He then asked if there were known pedestrian issues on Comstock Parkway; Mr. McLean said the idea was not a response to existing pedestrian issues, but instead a suggestion from the traffic study as to how site connectivity could be enhanced. Mr. McLean observed pedestrians could currently cross at Comstock's intersection with Plainfield Pike, but Mr. Guertin said human behavior is such that pedestrians who wanted to access Latte Love would be more likely to attempt to cross Comstock on a more direct path – regardless of the lack of crosswalk – than they would to walk several hundred feet out of the way simply to use a crosswalk. Atty. LaPlante said pedestrians aren't a large part of Latte Love's existing business, but the applicant would be happy to revisit the question at the future phase of development if it seems that they are drawing more pedestrians.

Mr. Woyciechowski asked if Latte Love would have a commercial kitchen, which Atty. LaPlante confirmed. Otherwise, Mr. Woyciechowski said Fire had no concerns.

Mr. Mateus noted that the sewer line is located further south than the water and gas lines, adding that if the applicant chooses to open multiple curb curbs, a curb-to-curb repaving will be necessary.

Mr. Pikul asked to know the curb cut widths. Atty. LaPlante said the southern opening would be 24 feet wide, while the northern opening had two lanes, each 14 feet wide, separated by a small island to ensure right-turn only movements. Mr. Pikul asked the applicant to relay its signage plans, especially as they related to on-site circulation (such as the right-turn only movements). Atty. LaPlante said the applicant wanted to install a monument sign just south of the northern curb cut along Comstock. Mr. McLean suggested there be a condition of approval regarding signage.

Finally, on the topic of parking, Mr. Pikul observed that the parking calculations appeared to have been based on the needs of Latte Love, so the applicant would need to be able to provide for additional parking spaces when they decide to pursue construction of the 5,000 ft² commercial building in a future phase. Atty. LaPlante said there would be sufficient space for the necessary additional parking spots above the retention basin. Mr. Mateus reminded the applicant team that the basin will need annual maintenance. Mr. Mulcahy said the applicant will need to provide another handicapped parking space. Mr. McLean said alterations to the parking layout would be considered minor changes, but the DPRC will require a new application be submitted for the future commercial building to be built.

Upon motion made by Mr. Pikul, and seconded by Mr. Woyciechowski, the Development Plan Review Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the Preliminary Plan application subject to the following conditions:

- The applicant will provide an additional handicapped-accessible parking space
- The applicant will either submit a conforming signage plan or apply for variances as needed
- The Traffic Safety Division will approve revisions to the right-turn only area of the northern curb cut

- The DPRC will accept landscaping waivers as proposed

4. “Cranston MECU” Preliminary Plan (vote taken)

Location: 1224 Oaklawn Avenue, Assessor’s Plat 15, Lots 1012 & 1014
Zoning District C-4 (Highway Business)
Owner: RICA Realty, LLC, of 481 Atwood Avenue, Cranston, RI 02920
Applicant: Cranston Municipal Employees Credit Union of 1615 Pontiac Avenue, Cranston, RI 02920.
Proposal: To construct a new Cranston Municipal Employees Credit Union bank branch with a drive-thru, along with associated parking and landscaping, on two adjacent vacant lots. A portion of the proposed site plan has been included on the back of this notice for illustrative purposes.

Attys. Dan Meyer and Zachary Darrow, along with Melissa Flaherty of NES Group, gave the Committee a description of their progress in the development of their proposal as representatives of the applicant team.

Atty. Meyer said he met with some abutters the previous day. He reported that two direct abutters (Haruki Japanese restaurant and the residential lot to the rear of the site) expressed support. In particular, the residential abutter is looking forward to the site being cleaned up because it will offer her a better buffer than the one she currently has. Mr. McLean asked if he’d heard any negative responses; Atty. Meyer said he hadn’t, but at the same time he hadn’t yet gotten ahold of all abutters. Mr. McLean also suggested that it could be a nice gesture on the applicant’s part to improve that abutter’s dilapidated fence as part of the future buffer.

Next, Atty. Meyer said NES Group has just forwarded specs on the speaker equipment to the applicant team, which will be happy to pass those along to Staff afterwards (he said they are working on determining the decibel counts for that equipment). As far as noise mitigation, Atty. Meyer said buffering will be their main technique, but they suspect that the site configuration and the hours of operation should also help to reduce the impacts.

Circulation-wise, Atty. Meyer said the site currently has two curb cuts; the applicant plans to close the northerly one and improve the southerly one. Mr. Pikul asked for the curb cut dimensions to be shown on the plan; Atty. Meyer said it would be 24 feet, but they would add that detail to the plan.

Finally, regarding variances, Atty. Meyer said signage is being designed to comply with Zoning standards, but they will need relief for other factors, such as not being able to space the driveway 40 feet away from the next closest curb opening (the abutting Superior Bakery site does not have a defined curb for the majority of its frontage, which he described as “parking lot meets street”).

Chairman Pezzullo then opened the matter to comments.

Mr. Guertin said he had been working with the applicants and had no comments of his own.

Mr. Mateus also said he had no new comments to offer

Mr. Woyciechowski asked if the drive-thru canopy only extended as far as the dashed lines indicated, which Atty. Meyer confirmed. Mr. Woyciechowski then said Fire had no other concerns.

Mr. Mulcahy said the proposal seemed good to him and reminded the applicant team that they would need a Physical Alteration Permit from RIDOT. Atty. Meyer said it was already in the works.

Mr. Pikul asked if neighbors had expressed any concern about the emergency generation’s proposed location. They said they hadn’t, but Ms. Flaherty said the generator cycles for a 15-minute period once a week. Mr. Pikul asked if a photometrics plan could be completed prior to Final Plan submittal to confirm that light will not be impacting properties off-site.

Upon motion made by Mr. Mulcahy, and seconded by Mr. Pikul, the Development Plan Review Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the Preliminary Plan application subject to the following conditions:

- The applicant will submit a photometrics plan as part of the Final Plan application
- The applicant will either submit a conforming signage plan or apply for variances as needed ZBR relief
- The applicant will request landscaping waivers as needed
- Approval will be conditioned upon granting of relief by the Zoning Board of Review for all associated variance applications

5. 846 Oaklawn Ave CDP Pre-Application

(no vote taken)

Location:	846 Oaklawn Avenue, Assessor's Plat 15, Lot 361
Zoning District	C-3 (General Business)
Owner:	Domain Realty, LLC, of 800 Oaklawn Avenue, Cranston, RI 02920
Applicant:	Domain Realty, LLC, of 800 Oaklawn Avenue, Cranston, RI 02920
Proposal:	To create a paved parking area and infiltration basin on the Southern portion of the lot with the potential to create a future addition on site.

Chairman Pezzullo introduced the discussion by recalling that this site had last been the subject of a DPR pre-application review a little over one year ago and stalled out afterwards because key details were not shown on the site plan. He then invited Richard Pastore (project engineer) and Gloria DiZoglio (representing the owner/applicant, Domain Realty, LLC) to present their revised pre-application concept.

Mr. Pastore began by noting the zone change to C-3 was approved and the applicant wants to ensure the future development of this parcel is completed in accordance with the new zone. He highlighted several aspects of the site design. Most of the area currently covered in grass would need to be paved, particularly in the rear of the site, to provide for parking; the site plan currently shows seven parking spaces, but Mr. Pastore noted the applicant is considering building a retaining wall to gain four more parking spaces in the rear of the site. Mr. Pikul asked if the existing garage would continue to provide parking for the site, but Mr. Pastore said he believed the applicant intended to convert it into additional commercial space in the future. Chairman Pezzullo asked if the use was known; Ms. DiZoglio said the current intention is to accommodate a retail tenant, namely a hair product provider which currently occupies the second floor of the existing house on the site. Chairman Pezzullo asked that the "garage" and "breezeway" labels be removed from the site plan and relabeled to reference how those spaces will be used in the future.

Continuing, Mr. Pastore said the applicant proposed to locate a drainage basin at the corner of Oaklawn Ave and Weaver St to capture stormwater, which would run off in a sheet-flow style over the new pavement. (The applicant did not propose new landscaping as part of the development concept.) Access onto the site would primarily be via a curb cut on Weaver St to facilitate safer movement of traffic from/to Oaklawn Ave. Mr. Mateus said the increased impermeable surface area that would result from paving could present a problem if it increases stormwater runoff. He asked if the catchment basin was sized for a 50-year storm; Mr. Pastore said it was sized for a 100-year storm. Mr. Mateus advised the applicant to confirm their asphalt grading will direct the sheet-flow to the basin as proposed if they want to go that route and suggested the applicant install rip-rap or bollards along the edge of the detention basin to better delineate its edge and deter motorists from accidentally driving into it. Mr. McLean said the applicant would need to request a waiver from the landscaping standards.

Mr. Mulcahy noted that the dimensions for both traffic aisles and parking stalls were not shown and would need to be added to the site plan. He questioned whether there would be adequate space to accommodate the proposed configuration and said he suspected the ADA parking space was undersized, as it needed to be large enough to accommodate a van. Mr. Mulcahy noted that the inter-parcel access that exists between the subject parcel and its neighbors to the north was another matter to consider, as was his suggestion that the curb be better defined for the entire length of the site, particularly along Oaklawn Ave.

Chairman Pezzullo and Mr. Pikul recalled that the sign located at the corner of Oaklawn and Weaver was an unresolved issue that had been identified as not complying with zoning standards (specifically that it was set too close to the intersection and interfered with the line-of-sight) in the previous pre-app review and would

need to be addressed. Pastore asked whether the sign would be considered grandfathered if left in its current place; when Mr. Pikul said no, Mr. Pastore then asked if maintaining the sign's location while changing the sign type from monument (standing on a wide base) to freestanding (elevated on a single pole) would address the line-of-sight problem. Chairman Pezzullo said he believed resolving the sign issues had been a condition of approval in the zone change ordinance, but Ms. DiZoglio said the sign was not referenced in the zone change. Upon review, Chairman Pezzullo said it appeared the City Plan Commission's positive recommendation included a condition relating to the sign which the Council left out of their final approval. That being the case, Chairman Pezzullo said any plans to deviate from the signage standards in the City code would require a variance application with the Zoning Board of Review.

Mr. Pikul then asked that the applicant submit a lighting plan, but Mr. Pastore said the applicant may not put any lights at all on the building. Mr. Pikul said they may not need a lighting plan in that case, but advised they consider putting lights over the building's main entrance, which Mr. Pastore said would be along the front of the building. Mr. Pikul also asked whether the existing streetlight poles are in the state's right-of-way. Ms. DiZoglio said she'd been in touch with RIDOT and would ask for a written statement confirming they have no issues with the development as proposed. Chairman Pezzullo noted that RIDOT would probably need to comment on the concrete blocks currently closing off some neighboring parcels' curb openings onto Oaklawn Ave, given the existing inter-parcel access.

Mr. Pikul also asked the applicant to show two other details on the site plan, namely the location in which they propose to place the dumpster and the width/type of the buffer to the residential abutter in the rear. To the latter request, Mr. Pastore said the direct property boundary would probably be two-foot-thick concrete blocks that would form the future retaining wall, while Ms. DiZoglio said the abutting neighbor had requested a fence, and she was happy to provide one.

Mr. McLean returned to Mr. Mulcahy's observation that inter-parcel access existed between the subject parcel and its neighbors. He asked how the applicant envisioned the circulation pattern changing, if at all, and specifically asked whether the curb cut on the subject parcel's Oaklawn Ave frontage would continue to be exit-only. Mr. Pastore said the applicant hadn't yet decided how to handle that element. Mr. McLean confirmed with Ms. DiZoglio that the applicant owned those neighboring properties as well and then advised they consider addressing the traffic pattern in a unified, coordinated manner and ensure that circulation pattern is accounted for in the subject parcel's site design. Mr. Mateus further confirmed the applicant would need to seek a Physical Alteration Permit from RIDOT given that the property is located along a state highway and has multiple curb cuts and inter-parcel access.

6. Adjournment (next meeting date TBD)

(vote taken)

Upon motion made by Mr. Pikul, and seconded by Mr. Mulcahy, the Development Plan Review Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn the meeting at 10:10 a.m.