

Franklin Township

Somerset County, New Jersey



DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

Planning – Zoning – Affordable Housing
Planning Board – Zoning Board of Adjustment

Municipal Building
475 DeMott Lane
Somerset, NJ 08873
732.873.2500
Fax: 732.873.0844
www.franklintwpnj.org

MEMORANDUM

To: Planning Board

From: Mark Healey, PP, AICP
Director of Planning/ Senior Zoning Officer

Date: November 13, 2020

Re: 3 Ronson, LLC – Final Site Plan with “c” Variances (PLN-20-00012)
1165 Route 27 (Block 88.01; Lot 43)

As requested, I have reviewed the application materials listed below and issue the following report for the Board’s consideration:

- 17-sheet set of site plan drawings prepared by Stonefield Engineering & Design last revised 9/23/20
- 3-sheet “Passenger Car Circulation Exhibit” prepared by Stonefield Engineering & Design last revised 9/11/20
- 1-sheet “Proposed Signage Exhibit” prepared by Stonefield Engineering & Design last revised 9/24/20
- 2-sheet set of architectural plans prepared by ksd architects dated last revised 9/2/20
- Traffic Impact Statement prepared by Dolan & Dean dated 1/27/19

Site Description

The 5-acre subject site is located at the northwesterly corner of the Veronica Avenue/ Route 27 intersection¹ within the G-B (General Business) zone. The site is developed with a shopping center, known as “Veronica Plaza,” currently consisting of 2 buildings and associated parking lot.

Project History and Description

Under Docket #PLN-19-00004 the applicant received the following approvals on the site:

- *Preliminary and Final Site Plan*: Drive-up ATM:
- *Preliminary Site Plan*: 3,000 square foot fast-food restaurant with drive-thru
- *“C” Impervious Coverage*: 70% maximum permitted – 70.82% proposed

¹ Contrary to the indication in the Site Plan Application Form, the site is not located within 1,000 feet of the D&R Canal.

As a condition of Preliminary Site Plan approval, the Board conditioned the approval on the applicant returning to the Board for Final Site Plan approval for the fast-food restaurant once a tenant was secured. The Board's resolution of Preliminary Site Plan approval indicates that the following would be reviewed further at the time of Final Site for the fast-food restaurant:

- Proposed design of the restaurant facility including any associated revisions to the site design
- Proposed signage
- Compliance with Commercial Design Standards in Article XXVIA
- Review of vehicle queuing in the drive-thru lane

The Applicant has now secured Dunkin' Donuts as a tenant and is therefore seeking Final Site Plan approval. The current application consists of the construction of a 2,907 square foot building on a pad site with associated site modifications including vehicular access drive, parking areas, stormwater management facilities, utility connections, grading, landscaping and lighting. The proposed building would contain a:

- 1,748 square foot Dunkin' Donuts with drive-thru lane; and a
- 1,159 square foot space for future retail use

The majority of the site plan modifications are in the area of the proposed pad building. However, the site plan proposes the following additional site modifications:

- reconstruction of the existing detention basin located in the southwesterly portion of the site;
- a proposed planting area (with associated landscaping) in the middle of the parking area between the two existing buildings; and
- elimination of parking spaces behind the larger existing building and its replacement with curbed planting area (with associated landscaping).

The proposal requires the following approvals:

- *Final Site Plan*
- *"C" Variances*
 - *Impervious Coverage:* 70% max. permitted – 70.82% previously approved by variance – 72.5% now proposed
 - *Number of Building-Mounted Signs:* Max. 2² signs permitted – 5 signs proposed for Dunkin' Donuts

² The application indicates that 3 signs are permitted. This is not correct. Per footnote 4 in Schedule 5 one additional attached sign is permitted at rear and side entrances. Because entrances for the Dunkin' Donuts are proposed on only two sides – the "east" and "south" elevations – a total of 2 building-mounted signs are permitted for the Dunkin' Donuts. The Signage Requirements table on the site plan should be revised accordingly.

Review Comments

1. Drive-Thru Queing. As indicated above, one of the issues specifically referenced in the Board's Preliminary Site Plan approval that would require additional review was vehicle queing in the drive-thru lane.
 - a. The submitted traffic study does not appear to specifically address this proposal, instead it appears to be the same traffic study submitted under Docket #PLN-19-00004.³ The traffic study should be appropriately updated to reference the application currently before the Board for Final Site Plan approval. The traffic study should specifically provide a sufficiently detailed analysis of drive-thru queing. It is noted that the Township has a Dunkin' Donuts with a drive-thru (located near the Elizabeth Avenue/ New Brunswick intersection) that experiences a significant queing problem that commonly spills into New Brunswick Road. It is recommended that the traffic engineer observe the conditions at that location and demonstrate whether or not similar issues would occur at this site.
 - b. It is noted that Sheet SK-1 of the architectural plans shows the menu board in a slightly different location than reflected on the site plan. SK-1 indicates a dimension of 81'-4" between the menu board (ordering) and the pick-up window and indicates a "5-car stack". The site plan shows the menu board as lesser distance from the pick-up window and thus wouldn't allow the same stacking as reflect on SK-1.
2. Signage Variances. The applicant needs to demonstrate whether grant of the variances would satisfy the c-1 (hardship) and/or c-2 (advancement of the MLUL) criteria.

Upon initial review of the application, it is unclear what unique conditions may exist that would support a hardship justification for the variances. With respect to the c-2 criteria, the applicant would need to demonstrate that the proposed variances would represent a better zoning alternative than compliant signage.

3. Commercial Design Standards. As indicated above, one of the issues specifically referenced in the Board's Preliminary Site Plan approval that would require additional review was compliance with the Commercial Design Standards in Article XXVIA. Following are the standards most relevant to this application.

The applicant should provide testimony addressing the degree to which the site plan complies (or does not comply) with each of these requirements. To the degree that the site plan does not comply, the applicant needs to provide justification for required design waivers to the satisfaction of the Planning Board.

³ The date of the study (1/17/19) as well as various references in the study (e.g., references the engineering firm that prepared the preliminary plans, identifies the restaurant as 3,000 square feet in size and does not reference the Dunkin' Donut use, does not reference the separate retail use, etc.) support this assumption.

I note my opinion where compliance/ non-compliance can be determined upon review of the plans.

- Section 112-206.4.B specifically addresses pad sites (as proposed).
 - B. *Pad sites:*
 - (1) *The location and design of smaller freestanding buildings, or "pads," can create a more inviting appearance in a larger development by visibly reducing the project's scale and by expanding the range of activities and businesses found within a single development.*
 - (2) *Pad sites should be clustered together to define street edges and entry points or to enclose and create intriguing places between buildings*
- Section 112-206.5.A(2) addresses building architecture.
 - (2) *Avoid the box-like, bulky appearance of commercial buildings. Use varied materials, textures and/or colors⁴, or provide visual breaks. Standard franchise design elements or corporate architectural design plans for buildings and signs should be modified where necessary to conform to these guidelines to ensure that such elements are unobtrusive and secondary to the overall architectural design.*
- Sections 112-206.4.A(1), 112-206.5.A(5) and 112-206.5.C address situations where there are several buildings in a development.
 - (1) *Buildings or portions of buildings should be oriented on a site to create a strong relationship to adjacent structures, providing visual continuity and compatibility within the overall development.*
 - (5) *Multiple buildings within a development must maintain a consistent style/architectural theme*
 - C. *Consistency of materials. Use materials that complement existing buildings when freestanding walls are used to provide security, screening and privacy. Color schemes must tie building elements together, relate separate buildings within the same development to each other, and must be used to enhance the architectural form of a building.*
- The following provisions of Section 112-206.6.D address pedestrian/ bicycle access and circulation.
 - (1) *Bicycle parking is required.*
 - (2) *Bikeways and pedestrian walkways should be separated and buffered from external and internal automobile circulation within parking lots. Pedestrians should feel comfortable that they are in a clearly defined pathway to the building.*
 - (3) *To enhance pedestrian safety and attractiveness of the walkway, internal pedestrian walkways within a parking lot or drive area must be distinguished from the driving surface by use of pavers, bricks, integrally colored, scored concrete, or other acceptable methods as determined by the Township.*
 - (4) *Bicycle and pedestrian circulation must be provided from the perimeter of the site to all buildings and all sidewalk areas designated to accommodate pedestrian activity. A pedestrian network that offers clear circulation paths from the parking areas to building entries creates a friendlier, more inviting image. By creating a safe, continuous network of*

⁴ Testimony must address proposed exterior building materials, textures and/or colors with the elevations revised accordingly.

pedestrian/bicycle pathways within and between developments, pedestrians will feel more inclined to safely walk (rather than drive) between stores.

Note: The site plan does not comply with Sections 112-206.6.D(1) and (3). No bicycle parking is proposed and the crosswalks are not distinguished from the driving surface by use of pavers, bricks, integrally colored, scored concrete, or other such treatment.

- The following sections of Section 112-206.9.A(1) address interior parking lot landscaping.
 - (a) *Use parking lot landscaping to minimize the expansive appearance of parking lots, provide shaded parking areas, and mitigate any negative acoustic impacts of motor vehicles.*
 - (b) *Provide trees and other landscape screening to shield large parking areas from adjacent lots.*
- The following sections of Section 112-206.9.A(2) address perimeter parking lot landscaping.
 - (a) *Provide an attractive, shaded environment along street edges that gives visual relief from continuous hard street edges, provides a visual cohesion along streets, helps buffer automobile traffic, focuses views for both pedestrians and motorists, and increases the sense of neighborhood scale and character;*
 - (b) *A low continuous landscaped hedge;*
 - (c) *A low decorative masonry wall in combination with landscaping.*

Note: The table on Sheet C-10 indicates that a masonry wall is proposed but no such wall is proposed on the site plan.

- Sections 112-206.9.A(3)(b) and 112-206.9.A(5) address provision of outdoor seating areas.
 - (b) *Articulate building facades with landscaped seating areas to provide visual interest and pedestrian-friendly places;*
 - (5) *Site furnishings include benches, waste receptacles, planters, railings and bollards. Visual consistency of these elements is desired throughout each development. All components of outdoor site furniture should be low maintenance, highly durable and resistant to vandalism, graffiti and theft.*

Note: No outdoor seating area is proposed.

- Sections 112-206.9.C(2) and (3) address the placement and screening of trash storage and service areas.
 - (2) *No areas for outdoor storage, trash collection or compaction, loading, or other such uses must be located within 20 feet of any public street, public sidewalk, or internal pedestrian walkway.*
 - (3) *Loading docks, truck parking, outdoor storage, trash collection, trash compaction, and other service functions must be incorporated into the overall design of the building and landscaping so*

that the visual and acoustic impacts of these functions are fully contained and out of view from adjacent properties and public streets. Screening materials must be the same as, or of equal quality to, the materials used for the primary building and landscaping.

Note: The site plan does not comply. The dumpster enclosure is not located out-of-view and is located only 11.1 feet from the front property line along Veronica Avenue (where 20 feet is required). The applicant should address whether it can be relocated to a compliant location.

The site plan indicates that the masonry trash enclosure would “match the building façade.” The detail on Sheet C-12 indicates the use of split face block. Since exterior building materials are not identified for the proposed building consistency with the building materials cannot be confirmed. The applicant should clarify in testimony and revise the plans accordingly.

- Sections 112-206.9.D. addresses the screening of mechanical equipment.

D. Mechanical equipment screening. All mechanical equipment, whether on the roof, sides of the building, or mounted on the ground, should be screened from public view. Screening should be architecturally integrated with the building through materials, color, texture, shape, size, and with design features, such as facade parapets. Mechanical/utility screening must be an integral part of the building structure and architecture and not give the appearance of being "tacked on" to the exterior surfaces. The building parapet must be the primary means of screening roof top equipment.

- Section 112-206.10.A(3) addresses minimizing off-site light spillage including into the right-of-way.

(3) Every attempt should be made to consider the impacts the additional lighting will have on the surrounding environment. Off-site glare onto adjacent properties or right-of-way is not permitted and over-lighting areas and high contrast between properties should be avoided. Concealment of the light source should be a design consideration.

Note: The site plan proposes light spillage into the Veronica Avenue right-of-way.

- The following provision of Section 112-206.11 address design of building-mounted signage.

Signage must be subservient to the overall design and impression of the architecture. Signs should be consistent with overall project design but should be subordinate to architectural and landscape elements.

A. Tenant signage may be prohibited on the back/rear elevation of buildings that are visible from other non-retail commercial properties or public streets, with the exception of signage necessary for delivery or door identification that will not exceed two square feet and be nonilluminated.

4. I offer the following comments on the landscape plan:

- The site plan satisfactorily addresses the tree replacement requirements of Chapter 222.

- The applicant should consider a tree with a columnar shape along the side of the drive-thru lane (instead of the eastern red bud).
5. The applicant needs to confirm the parking calculations. It would appear that 155 spaces are proposed (not 157 as indicated).
 6. The development will be subject to collection of Non-Residential Development (“COAH”) Fees equal to 2.5% of equalized assessed value.

Figure 1: Site Location

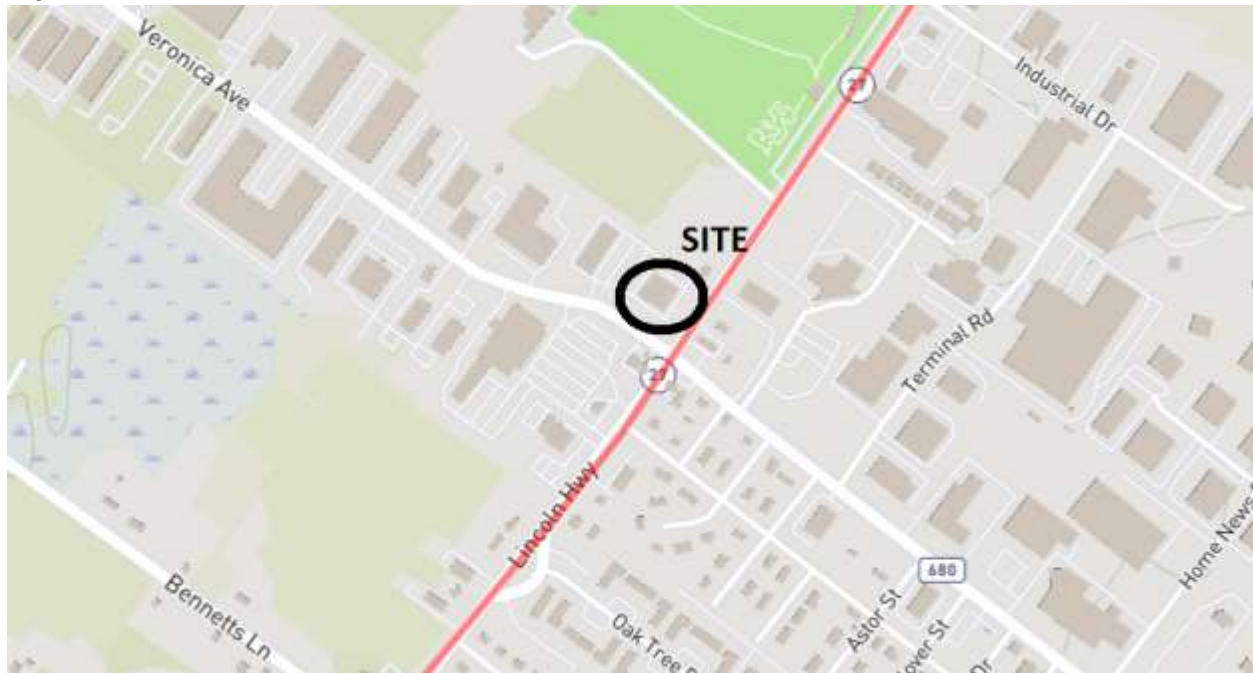


Figure 2: Site and Surrounding Area



Figure 3: Site Frontage

