

Franklin Township

Somerset County, New Jersey



DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING
Planning – Zoning – Affordable Housing
Planning Board – Zoning Board of Adjustment

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning Board

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

DATE: November 23, 2021

RE: Saint Peter's University Hospital, Inc. – Relief of Condition & Parking Variance,
562 Easton Avenue, Block 262 Lot 1.01 (ZBA-21-00016)

I have received the above application for relief of conditions submitted to the Franklin Township Planning Board as shown on:

- the application forms
- 562 Eason Avenue Parking Study prepared by THA Consulting, dated 11/19/21
- Traffic & Parking Assessment Report prepared by Stonefield revised 11/19/21
- 4-sheet set of floor plans prepared by McGuire Group Architects dated 3/21/21

Property Description

The 1.668-acre site is located at the corner of Easton Avenue and Reeve Street within the OP Office Professional district. The existing office building is two stories in height. The building currently houses a sports medicine office and a sports physical therapy facility on the first floor and an ambulatory eye surgery facility on the second floor. Surrounding land uses consist of Saint Sharbel Maronite Church on the opposite side of Reeve Street, while single-family homes abut the other sides of the site.

Project History & Description

Previous Applications

- May 1986 - A resolution was passed which approved development of a 21,700 square foot office building on the site. A condition of the resolution stated that, due to parking concerns, use of the building was restricted to non-medical offices.

- January 1989 – A resolution was passed which denied an application for modification of site plan approval to lift the medical office restriction.
- October 1993 – A resolution was passed which granted a modification of the non-medical office condition to permit an ambulatory eye surgical facility on the second floor of the building.
- March 2005 (PLN-2005-0004) - The applicant received relief of conditions to allow a sports medicine office and a sports physical therapy facility on the first floor of the existing building. Proposed improvements include a new 6-foot high wooden fence near the southern border of the property, a new parking lot light, the addition of several new parking spaces including van-accessible handicapped parking spaces, and an additional transformer pad. No external modifications to the building were proposed.

Current Application

The applicant has provided the following description of the proposal and the requested approvals¹:

Explain, in detail sufficient for the Board to understand the nature of the proposal, the exact nature of the proposed application and proposed physical modifications to be made to the site and/or building(s) including the proposed use of the premises.

Applicant is requesting a modification of condition of site plan approval (i.e., Condition #4 of May 7, 1986 resolution) that prohibits medical office use on the premises. The tenant on second floor (Somerset Eye Institute) has relocated and Applicant proposes to relocate non-acute care medical offices from Applicant's hospital in New Brunswick to the second floor, consisting of Audiology, ENT (Ear, Nose & Throat), Pediatric Therapy and other therapies. Applicant also requests a variance for insufficient parking spaces - where 147 spaces are required, and 76 are provided.

Planning Comments

1. Parking Variance.
 - a. The applicant will need to present testimony explaining the assumptions, methodology and results of the THA Consulting report.
 - Even with the detail accounting of staff in the revised THA report it is still unclear how THA arrived at the future parking demand figures in the table on page 13.
 - It is assumed that the future parking demand table on page 13 represents the entire building (i.e., that it includes the sports medicine use *and* the portion proposed to be changed). The applicant needs to clarify.
 - b. The applicant cites a written agreement with the Saint Sharbel Maronite Church, located

across Reeve Street, for sharing of parking resources. The application notes that with the 33 spaces on the church property (which would be available for their use during weekdays) the applicant has the capability to supply a total of 109 spaces. I offer the following:

- The attached agreement is dated 1/5/18 and indicates it continues for a period of 1 year and that it “shall automatically renew”. The applicant needs to confirm that it is still in effect.
- The agreement indicates that “either party may terminate” the agreement “for any reason upon thirty (30) days prior written notice to the other party.” We question the validity of an agreement (offered in support of a parking variance) that can be terminated, at any time, by an entity that is not part of the application.
- Saint Sharbel has made an application to the Zoning Board (ZBA-20-00007) for variance and site plan approval to construct a new church building on the site. If approved, development of that application may leave the parking lot unavailable for an extended period of time.

- c. The THA report acknowledges that “due to the unique characteristics of medical services, we have found that base demand ratios can vary significantly.” The report indicates that this ratio may range anywhere from 3 spaces/ 1000 square feet up to 20 spaces/ 1000 square foot. The Township ordinance requires 6.67 spaces per 1000 square feet, while the applicant is proposing 3.44 spaces per 1000 square feet.

At 3.44 spaces per 1000 square feet, the applicant is proposing near the bottom of the 3 to 20 space per 1000 square foot range cited in their report. The concern that arises is: what happens if there are changes in staffing, services, etc. that differ from the very specific mix cited in the report?

2. The following improvements reflected and/or required via a previous approval need to be addressed:
- Three of the parking lot trees are dead and need to be replaced.
 - In front of the 6 westerly-most parking spaces evergreen trees need to be replanted consistent with the previous approval.
 - Two sections of the fence along the westerly property line need to be repaired or replaced.,



