

**WEST AMWELL TOWNSHIP  
PLANNING BOARD – REGULAR MEETING  
May 16, 2023 Minutes – 7:00 PM**

The West Amwell Township Planning Board meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Chairman Tomenchok followed by the salute to the flag.

The following statement of compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act as listed on the meeting agenda was read into the record by Chairman Tomenchok: This meeting was called pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act. This meeting was noticed as a regularly scheduled meeting transmitted to the Hunterdon County Democrat and the Times of Trenton on January 26, 2023. A copy of this notice is available to the public and is on file in the Office of the Planning Board and Township Clerk.

The following general policy statement of the Planning Board was read into the record by Chairman Tomenchok: The Board's general policy is to end the presentation of testimony on applications by 10:30 PM and to conclude all Board business by 11:00 PM. When necessary, the Chairman may permit a reasonable extension of those time limits.

**Attendance – Roll Call**

**Present:** Bob Balaam  
John Dale  
Nella Hamtil  
John Haug  
Carl Ippolito  
Joe Petrucci  
Rob Tomenchok  
John Flemming – Alt. #1  
Connor Montferrat – Alt. #2  
Attorney Tara St. Angelo  
Planner Joanna Slagle

**Excused:** Jim Cally  
Christopher Morgan

**New Business – Other**

**Capital Review: SHRSB Proposed New Middle School**

Present for the discussion was Architect Pete Campisano, Architect Carrie Zegarski, Planner John McDonough, Attorney William Sullivan and South Hunterdon Regional School Superintendent Tony Suozzo.

Architect Campisano explained the subject property is approximately 53 acres and he noted the locations of the fields, the existing school and the proposed new middle school. Architect Campisano stated the new school will be for grades 5 – 8. It will be block construction with private well and septic. Access will be off of Rocktown-Lambertville Road. There will be 60 parking spaces and be ADA compliant. The proposed school will be all electric and have sprinklers throughout. Architect Campisano indicated they are hoping to have the new school constructed for the September 2024 school year.

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Township Engineer Patrick Brennan remarked that Rocktown-Lambertville Road was just paved and Architect Campisano noted the administration will work with the Township if any repairs are needed after the school is constructed.

Engineer Brennan asked if any other locations were considered. Attorney Sullivan stated they looked at the church property on Route 518, the land behind the municipal building and the ESC school site.

With regard to traffic, Architect Campisano stated no official traffic study was done but remarked he doesn't anticipate any problems because the school will be built to accommodate 200 students and only utilize 4 buses.

Attorney Sullivan noted that the project complies with all stormwater regulations.

Attorney Sullivan stated there will be very minimal lighting on at night and the state requires a generator back-up which will be located in the rear of the building with a sound buffer installed.

Mr. Montferrat asked if any other locations on the school site were considered. Superintendent Suozzo stated they reviewed other areas on the parcel but there are wetlands challenges.

Mr. Haug asked if there will be a staggered school schedule. Superintendent Suozzo stated they are still working that out.

Attorney St. Angelo asked if local Fire and EMS have reviewed the plans. Architect Campisano said yes.

Mr. Balaam remarked 225 students were originally projected and planned for and he stated the school has been designed for less with no room for expansion. Superintendent Suozzo commented that enrollment is declining, not expanding.

Mr. Dale asked about the number of teachers and administrators. Superintendent Suozzo stated there will be 40 teachers and 1 administrator.

Chairman Tomenchok commented on his years on the school board and serving on the buildings and grounds committee. He expressed concern with the Lambertville Public School site which was listed in worse condition than the West Amwell Elementary school site and wondered how that engineering data had turned around. Superintendent Suozzo stated Lambertville Public School has good bones whereas West Amwell Elementary does not. Architect Campisano added that West Amwell Elementary is not energy efficient and has septic issues.

Chairman Tomenchok commented that the performance of the district in terms of educational outcome and fiscal responsibility is abysmal and continues a downward trend. He stated the Planning Board has adopted an Economic Element as part of the Master Plan, and in that document, there is language which speaks specifically to the relentless pursuit of efficiency in government. Chairman Tomenchok continued by saying that since roughly 66% of the resident's property taxes going to the school, he believes the performance of the district is within the Board's purview for consideration. He stated his observation is that the district provides neither a thorough, nor an efficient "system" of public education and therefore is not consistent with the Master Plan.

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Mr. Montferrat questioned the existing school square footage being around 70,000 sq. ft. and the proposed new school is expected to be 48,000 sq. ft. Architect Campisano stated they are downsizing.

Architect Campisano noted the existing girls soccer fields will be relocated to the east of the parcel with the new middle school built in a “Y” shape to include a classroom wing, a media center wing with specialty classrooms and a wing to include the gym, cafeteria and administrative offices. He also commented that there will be an outdoor fitness course on an astroturf surface, hidden behind the 2-story classroom wing and located several hundred feet away from any residential properties.

Attorney Sullivan referred to Planner Slagle’s memo and noted there will be buffering along Rocktown-Lambertville Road with various varieties of pine trees. Architect Campisano added there will also be contiguous screening wrapped around the proposed new school building.

**Exhibit S-1** was marked: A complete set of site plans dated 2/3/23 consisting of 12 pages.

Planner McDonough came forward and was sworn in. He was accepted as an expert to provide testimony on the school project. He explained the new school provides for a “good integration of land” and he noted that he believes the burden of section 31 of the Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) regarding capital reviews has been met because the school project will create a new modern facility which will enhance the overall educational environment. He also noted that the Community Service Element of the Master Plan encourages regionalization.

It was noted for the record that the Board and its professionals expressed concern over the following items:

1. No sidewalk is proposed in between the existing high school and proposed middle school despite the expectation to share parking
2. No traffic study was done
3. Rocktown-Lambertville Road was recently repaved
4. Economic responsibility – the original school plan was for 225 students and the proposed plan is for 200 and not enough research was done to determine if West Amwell Elementary could be upgraded
5. The increased water usage could impact neighboring wells
6. The landscape buffer needs to be increased to 25 feet in width between the school and residential properties

Chairman Tomenchok opened the floor to public comment. The following residents came forward:

Jen Batchellor of 158 Rocktown-Lambertville Road commented on the Teracon Geological Report which references the school as being a 35,000 sq. ft. single story building, not a 48,000 sq. ft. 2-story building. She also expressed concern with potential water usage and the impact on neighboring wells. Ms. Batchellor asked about the required setback distance from her driveway.

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Architect Campisano explained the September 2022 Teracon report indicates a single story structure but after reviewing the topography of the site they decided to build a 2 story wing instead of digging a cellar. With regard to the water usage he noted the following calculation: 250 students x 20 gpd = 5000 gpd divided by 24 hours = 3 to 5 gallons per minute. He noted they are at 12 to 15 gallons per minute which meets the state requirements.

Ms. Batchellor also expressed concerns with potential dust, debris and traffic.

Joel Coyne of 3 Old River Road came forward and expressed concern over water conservation measures, stormwater runoff and questioned if the building was designed to be energy efficient.

Architect Campisano explained the bathrooms will be fit with 1.6 gallon toilets, the building will utilize LED lighting, the roof will be white to reduce heat and he noted they comply with all stormwater regulations.

Seeing no other members of the public come forward, a motion was made by John Dale and seconded by John Haug to close the floor to public comment. The motion was unanimously approved by voice vote.

Attorney St. Angelo noted the 45 day period to conduct the capital review ends on 6/16/23 because the school submitted their documents on 5/5/23. She indicated this is before the next meeting and requested the Board authorize her to draft a letter noting the project is consistent with the Township Master Plan and outlining the Board's concerns. A motion was made by John Haug and seconded by Carl Ippolito finding the project consistent with the Master Plan and requesting Attorney St. Angelo to draft a letter accordingly to include the Board's concerns. The motion was approved by roll call vote with Chairman Tomenchok opposing and Ms. Hamtil abstaining.

It was noted for the record that Attorney Sullivan stated he would provide a pdf of the exhibit.

### **Discussion: Draft of Special Event Ordinance**

Attorney St. Angelo noted she and Planner Slagle had drafted the proposed ordinance and she explained that it only becomes relevant when a road is being closed, merchandise is being sold or there will be some sort of festival or outdoor concert. She indicated government agencies are exempt from the ordinance along with schools, fire and rescue (*unless a road is being closed*), any events governed by the State Agriculture Development Committee or the County Agriculture Development Board, residential private parties (*backyard weddings*) and any activity approved by the Planning or Zoning Board (*unless a road is being closed*).

Attorney St. Angelo noted the permit fee is \$250 and \$50 for preserved farms which is the maximum allowed by the State.

The Planning Board took no issue with the proposed ordinance and requested Attorney St. Angelo provide a clean draft to be sent to the Township Committee for their consideration.

### **Approval of Bill List**

A motion by John Dale, seconded by Nella Hamtil to approve the 5/16/23 bill list was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

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### **Open to the Public**

Chairman Tomenchok opened the floor to public comment. Joel Coyne of 3 Old River Road came forward and referred to the special events ordinance stating the Zoning Board did not put any limits on the recent approval for a hotel and restaurant on the property next door to him. He expressed concerns over noise and quality of life. Attorney St. Angelo commented that the Board gave the applicant an approval to hold events because the site is an event venue. Chairman Tomenchok noted the Planning Board cannot speak to the actions of the Zoning Board.

John Martorana of 34 Old River Road came forward and referred to the special events ordinance questioning the parking for a recently approved application commenting that the overflow will likely close down Old River Road. He stated they have 25 spots on site but received an approval that will allow up to 70 guests on the property.

Mr. Dale remarked that 50 cars on Old River Road would be problematic.

Harry Gordon of 17 Old River Road came forward and stated he is going to call the police every time there is an issue on Old River Road.

Guita Martorana 34 Old River Road came forward and referred to the special events ordinance asking if the Board would consider a “3 strikes and you’re out” policy. She also asked who’s responsible for educating the vendors who come on-site for events.

There was some discussion amongst the Board Members suggesting a tiered fine structure and all venues shut down by 11 PM in the special events ordinance.

Mr. Haug pointed out letter J of the proposed special events ordinance requests references for the promotion. The Board suggested that requirement be removed from the ordinance.

Seeing no other members of the public who wished to speak, a motion was made by John Dale and seconded by Connor Montferrat to close the floor to public comment. The motion was unanimously approved by voice vote.

### **Minutes**

A motion by John Haug, seconded by John Flemming to approve the Board’s 3/21/23 meeting minutes with no revisions noted was unanimously approved by voice vote.

### **Adjournment**

A motion by Carl Ippolito, seconded by Nella Hamtil to adjourn the meeting was unanimously approved by voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 9:18 PM.

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Maria Andrews, Planning Board Secretary