



**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS  
REGULAR MEETING  
MARCH 14, 2023**

45 Lyon Terrace  
Bridgeport, CT 06604  
(203) 576-7217 Phone  
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**ATTENDANCE:** Ira Nachem, Chairman; Tiheba Bain, Mary Gaits, Paul Miller, Robin Shepard, Greg Breland

**OTHERS:** Paul Boucher, Zoning Official; Atty. Russ Liskov, Jackson Strong, Design Coordinator

**CALL TO ORDER**

Commissioner Nachem called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. He introduced the Commissioners seated. Commissioner Nachem explained that Commissioner Breland would be observing and commenting but would not be voting during this meeting.

Commissioner Nachem reviewed the process and noted that in order for a petition to be approved, it would have to receive four out of five votes in favor.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**(#1) 2101 Commerce Dr. – Petition of Extra Space Properties Two, LLC – Seeking variances of sec. 3.30.4 to increase the maximum primary street build-to-zone and the maximum allowable site coverage and of Sec. 3.30.5 to allow surface parking in the front yard for the construction of a 32,000+ sq. ft., 3-story self-service storage building and a 3,700 sq. ft., 1-story self-service storage building located in the MX2 zone.**

Atty. Christopher Russo of Russo and Rizio, LLC came forward and greeted the Commissioners. He gave a brief overview of the project and indicated where the property was located on the plan. He said that there is now a very strong demand for extra storage facilities. He noted that there had been a tremendous increase for apartments in the area, which will support the storage facility needs.

He then narrated the details of the site plan and noted the steep grade change on the property. The first variance request is to increase the maximum primary set back which allows for access to the building. With the larger set back, it would allow the building to line up with the car dealership next door.

The second and third variances are driven by the need to have the building set back further from the road. He explained the difficulties involving the coverage regulations and allowing the parking in front of the building.

Atty. Russo said that there should be no impact on the neighborhood. Across the street is a vehicle storage lot. To the west of the building is the car dealership and behind the building the railroad tracks. He said that having the buildings close to the sidewalks is done to promote walkability, but there are not many people walking to car dealerships or storage facilities. By moving the building back to match the dealership, they are preserving the appearance of the neighborhood.

He then displayed the interior site plans and explained that having drive-up units on the first floor are very popular.

Atty. Russo displayed the site elevation plans and reviewed the details with the Commissioners. He noted that there would not be a major demand for parking and there would not be any real stress in on the surrounding roadways.

He concluded his presentation by saying that the hardship was the site condition of the grade change and the existing access easement for the existing building. He then distributed photos of the site to the Commissioners.

Commissioner Nachem pointed out that there was already parking places on the site. Atty. Russo explained that his client was required to ask for the variance because they were redeveloping the property. The parking spaces and the driveway are already there.

Commissioner Nachem asked about the details of the existing easement and a utility easement that was noted on the plans. Atty. Russo said that it was for both of them. He said that the other building was original planned to have a storage facility and a retail facility, but the retail facility did not work out.

The discussion moved to the grade of the elevation on the property. Atty. Russo explained that the grade increases the closer it gets to I-95.

Atty. Russo was asked if there would be any type of living space on the site. He explained that none of the property would be used for living space and no hazardous materials can be stored on site. No vehicles can be stored in the drive-up units.

Commissioner Nachem asked if there was anyone who wished to speak in favor of the application. No one came forward. Commissioner Nachem asked if there was anyone who wished to speak against the application. Hearing none, Commissioner Nachem closed the public hearing on 2101 Commerce Drive.

**(#2) 986 Stratford Ave. – Petition of Ranbir Dhillon – Seeking variances of sec. 3.60.9 to permit the conversion of the existing nonconforming vehicle repair facility to a nonconforming retail convenience store and of sec. 3.60.4 of the minimum rear setback to construct an 8' x 37' 1-story rear addition walk-in cooler for a retail convenience variety store and three (3) fuel pump stations for a maximum of six (6) vehicles in the RX1 zone.**

Atty. Christopher Russo of Russo and Rizio, LLC came forward and greeted the Commissioners. He said that he had thought carefully about the number of gas stations on the street. He said that having a gas station in the East End neighborhood would be good. There used to be a gas station in the neighborhood and the pumps would be permitted by the regulations.

He then displayed the site plan and indicated how the traffic would flow on the property. The variance request is for converting the three bay garage to a retail store, which virtually every gas station has these days. While there are a number of retail businesses on Stratford Avenue, with the new zoning map, those businesses are now non-conforming. Previously the area was ORG, which did allow retail. While this use is not conforming with the zone, it is conforming with the neighborhood and the retail uses along Stratford Avenue.

This request would also result in a reduction in intensity of a non-conforming use. Many of the vehicles parked on the property are not in repair and the site is in need of a revamp. Replacing the business with the gas station will be an improvement. This site is going to be under new ownership. Atty. Russo then gave an overview of the site plans and indicated where the pumps would be located.

The second variance has to do with an existing shed on the property. The shed will be demolished and replaced with a building extension to house a walk in cooler, storage area and the rest rooms. The RX1 rezoning requires a larger buffer rear setback. The fueling station is a re-establishment of a non-conforming use.

The applicant is request a variance for a retail store in conformity with the neighborhood and a decrease in the intensity of the non-conforming uses, with the change from the repair bays to a retail store. The back area setback will allow the applicant to square off the building. There will be no storage of vehicles or repairs done on the site. There will be five parking spaces, six pumps and the by-pass lanes.

Atty. Russo was asked what the rear setback would normally be. Atty. Russo indicated where that would be on the site plans.

Mr. Jackson Strong, the Design Coordinator for the City, came forward and said that he had reviewed the petition for the concept review because it is located in the commercial district. He noted that they were planning on making some improvements. He then listed two modifications that were recommended that request planting a tree in an existing tree pit in front of the property and they also recommend that the landscaped areas located on the right hand side of the property

and adjacent to I-95 be planted with a few trees to provide additional buffering and reduce particulate matter from the highway. Mr. Strong then indicated where he felt they should plant a minimum of two trees by the highway.

Discussion followed regarding the details regarding the rear set back. It was also noted that DOT may have to approve the replacement of the tree along the Stratford Avenue.

Commissioner Nachem asked if there was anyone who wished to speak in favor of the application.

Mr. Keith William, East End NRZ President, came forward and greeted the Commissioners and stated that the NRZ was in favor of the project.

Mr. Ralph Ford of Mill Hill Avenue came forward and greeted the Commissioners. He said that it was refreshing to hear that someone was willing to do something with that parcel. It has been an eyesore for years. He said that everyone will be happy to see something like this.

Mr. William Coleman, the OPED Deputy Director, came forward and said that his Department was in favor of this project. Mr. Strong performs a separate, analytical review and his department is more in an advocacy role. He said that it would be important to choose the right trees and to give the City a softer, healthier and more aesthetically pleasing appearance.

Mr. Coleman said that his department is supporting this for the reasons that Mr. Ford stated. The East End NRZ have been advocating for improvements on Stratford Avenue for many years. This is genuine progress and a good example of this. He asked the Commission to positively consider this application.

Commissioner Nachem asked if there was anyone who wished to speak against the application. When no one came forward, Commissioner Nachem noted that they had received a letter of opposition from Felicia Rosenbaum of Stratford Avenue, who opposed the application because there were too many accidents in that area due to drunk driving; there were no stop signs, lights or crosswalks nearby; and finally there a lounge nearby that was problematic.

Commissioner Nachem asked if there was anyone else who wished to speak against the application. No one else came forward.

Atty. Russo came forward and explained that the lounge was not the applicant's property. Stratford Avenue was a state right of way, so they can't put in a crosswalk. It is controlled by the State. The T intersection has a curve going into Stratford avenue and drivers would not be able to see anyone in the crosswalk. The next intersection is located several hundred feet away.

Atty. Russo agreed with Mr. Ford that the property has been an eyesore for a long time. It is one of the first sights people see when coming into the East End. Adding the landscaping will be no

problem. This will be a major improvement to the area. It is surprising that there are no gas stations on this section of Stratford Avenue. The use is in line with the current businesses on the street.

Atty. Russo was asked about the lighting on the site. It was noted that there was no lighting indicated on the plans. Atty. Russo said that the pump canopy and the store will have lighting.

Commissioner Nachem closed the public hearing on 986 Stratford Ave.

**(#3) 214 Central Ave. – Petition of DLTC Equipment, LLC – Seeking a certificate of location approval under sec. 14-54 of the CT General Statutes for a motor vehicle dealership license to include the sale of trailers in the existing landscape materials and equipment sales and service business in the RX2 zone.**

Mr. Jonathan Sweeney came forward and greeted the Commissioners. He stated he was the owner of DLTC Landscaping and also DLTC Equipment, which are two businesses that are located at 214 Central Avenue. He is also the property owner. He is seeking an DMV license because many of his commercial clients come for product and also wish to have repairs done. They are not a retail operation. They will not be changing anything on the property. The State requires the ZBA to approve a DMV license.

His company will be selling trailers, but the licensing category for trailers is included in the licensing for cars, trucks and a variety of other vehicles, which is dealerships. They will not be selling cars or truck but only trailers to the landscaping community. The trailers will be stored in an area where bulk contracting materials were stored. He said that they did not know how many trailers they would sell. He said that they may have about 30 on site. He repeated that they would not be selling cars or trucks. Discussion followed.

Mr. Jackson Strong came forward and greeted the Commissioners. He noted that a recommendation had been made regarding a sidewalk. He said that normally when there are expansions of a business, there are provisions that would require the placement of a sidewalk. This applicant is not making any physical alterations to the building, so those provisions don't apply. However, he said it was their desire to see sidewalks along that side of Central Avenue. He is recommending that the applicant construct a sidewalk along the property's frontage if either of the neighboring parcels construct a sidewalk in accordance with the provisions of Section 7.60.4 of Zone Bridgeport, which stipulates the type of sidewalks desired. He said that they were not requiring or suggesting that the applicant construct this sidewalk immediately because there is no connecting sidewalks. This is an effort to fill in the gaps in the sidewalk system. Discussion followed.

Mr. William Coleman, the OPED Deputy Director, came forward and said that he was present to speak in qualified support of the project. Mr. Sweeney has had a very positive business at this location for a number of years. He thanked Atty. Liskov for clarifying the number of trailers that

would be on the site. He also requested the Commissioners consider a condition that there be no storage of the trailers in front of the building. Mr. Sweeney has always kept his property very clean and all the landscaping equipment he has is currently stored behind a concealing fence.

Mr. Coleman noted that there were City owned pieces that were located nearby such as Mt. Growmore and some other parcels. He said that some businesses have taken over some of the City parcels and his department is okay with that until such time as the City works on an environmental easement for a board walk by the marsh area.

Mr. Coleman said that it was his understanding that the license that would be granted is not a license that would run with the land, but is particular to the owner.

Commissioner Nachem asked if there was anyone else who wished to speak against the application.

Ms. Deborah Sims, the East End NRZ Vice President, came forward and greeted the Commissioners. She said the NRZ was in favor of the project. She lives down the street from the site and sees it every day because developing Mount Growmore is underway. The building and landscaping on the site is beautiful. It is one of the few facilities on Central Avenue that is well kept and free of trash. The NRZ was worried about having another junk yard or similar type of business there. She said that Mr. Sweeney respects the neighborhood.

Mr. Cesar, the store manager, came forward and said that he lived in Norwalk but has moved to Bridgeport. He explained that many of their customers have followed them from Norwalk and Stamford and Westchester County to Bridgeport for his business. He said that Bridgeport has a lot to offer. Customers go to Bass Pro and Starbucks, so it helps the community.

Atty. Liskov asked Mr. Sweeney about sidewalks. Mr. Sweeney said that he felt that Bridgeport should rebuild the bridge to Pleasure Beach and is willing to build the sidewalks. It is time to get this done.

Commissioner Nachem closed the public hearing on 214 Central Ave. Commissioner Nachem then closed the Public Hearing portion of the meeting.

### **DECISION SESSION**

**(#1) 2101 Commerce Dr. – Petition of Extra Space Properties Two, LLC – Seeking variances of sec. 3.30.4 to increase the maximum primary street build-to-zone and the maximum allowable site coverage and of Sec. 3.30.5 to allow surface parking in the front yard for the construction of a 32,000+ sq. ft., 3-story self-service storage building and a 3,700 sq. ft., 1-story self-service storage building located in the MX2 zone.**

Discussion followed regarding the existence of the easement.

**\*\* COMMISSIONER GAITTS MOVED TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM (#1) 2101 COMMERCE DR. – PETITION OF EXTRA SPACE PROPERTIES TWO, LLC – SEEKING VARIANCES OF SEC. 3.30.4 TO INCREASE THE MAXIMUM PRIMARY STREET BUILD-TO-ZONE AND THE MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE SITE COVERAGE AND OF SEC. 3.30.5 TO ALLOW SURFACE PARKING IN THE FRONT YARD FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A 32,000+ SQ. FT., 3-STORY SELF-SERVICE STORAGE BUILDING AND A 3,700 SQ. FT., 1-STORY SELF-SERVICE STORAGE BUILDING LOCATED IN THE MX2 ZONE WITH THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS:**

- 1. APPROVED AS PER PLANS.**
- 2. NO OUTSIDE VEHICLE STORAGE ALLOWED.**
- 3. NO RESIDENTIAL USE ALLOWED.**

**FOR THE FOLLOWING REASON:**

**THE EXISTING EASEMENTS ACROSS THE PROPERTY REQUIRE THE BUILDINGS TO BE SET BACK FROM THE REQUIRED BUILD-TO-ZONE.**

**\*\* COMMISSIONER BAIN SECONDED.  
\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**(#2) 986 Stratford Ave. – Petition of Ranbir Dhillon – Seeking variances of sec. 3.60.9 to permit the conversion of the existing nonconforming vehicle repair facility to a nonconforming retail convenience store and of sec. 3.60.4 of the minimum rear setback to construct an 8’ x 37’ 1-story rear addition walk-in cooler for a retail convenience variety store and three (3) fuel pump stations for a maximum of six (6) vehicles in the RX1 zone.**

**\*\* COMMISSIONER SHEPARD MOVED TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM (#2) 986 STRATFORD AVE. – PETITION OF RANBIR DHILLON – SEEKING VARIANCES OF SEC. 3.60.9 TO PERMIT THE CONVERSION OF THE EXISTING NONCONFORMING VEHICLE REPAIR FACILITY TO A NONCONFORMING RETAIL CONVENIENCE STORE AND OF SEC. 3.60.4 OF THE MINIMUM REAR SETBACK TO CONSTRUCT AN 8’ X 37’ 1-STORY REAR ADDITION WALK-IN COOLER FOR A RETAIL CONVENIENCE VARIETY STORE AND THREE (3) FUEL PUMP STATIONS FOR A MAXIMUM OF SIX (6) VEHICLES IN THE RX1 ZONE WITH THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS:**

- 1. NO VEHICLE REPAIRS OR VEHICLE STORAGE ALLOWED.**
- 2. INSTALL APPROPRIATE SAFETY LIGHTING ON SITE.**
- 3. ANY BARBED WIRE ON THE PROPERTY SHALL BE REMOVED.**

4. AT LEAST TWO TREES SHALL BE PLANTED ON THE PROPERTY IN THE LANDSCAPED AREAS.
5. AN ADDITIONAL TREE TO BE PLANTED IN THE SIDEWALK RIGHT-OF-WAY IF D.O.T. GRANTS PERMISSION.

**FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:**

1. A RETAIL USE IS A LESS INTENSE USE THAN THE PRE-EXISTING 3-BAY REPAIR GARAGE.
2. THE REAR ADDITION REPLACES THE OLDER STORAGE SHED IN THE SAME LOCATION.

**\*\* COMMISSIONER GAITS SECONDED.  
\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**(#3) 214 Central Ave. – Petition of DLTC Equipment, LLC – Seeking a certificate of location approval under sec. 14-54 of the CT General Statutes for a motor vehicle dealership license to include the sale of trailers in the existing landscape materials and equipment sales and service business in the RX2 zone.**

**\*\* COMMISSIONER MILLER MOVED TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM (#3) 214 CENTRAL AVE. – PETITION OF DLTC EQUIPMENT, LLC – SEEKING A CERTIFICATE OF LOCATION APPROVAL UNDER SEC. 14-54 OF THE CT GENERAL STATUTES FOR A MOTOR VEHICLE DEALERSHIP LICENSE TO INCLUDE THE SALE OF TRAILERS IN THE EXISTING LANDSCAPE MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT SALES AND SERVICE BUSINESS IN THE RX2 ZONE WITH THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS:**

1. TRAILERS ARE TO BE STORED ON THE SIDE OR REAR OF PROPERTY, NOT IN THE FRONT OF THE BUILDING. A MAXIMUM OF 30 TRAILERS ON SITE AT ANY GIVEN TIME.
2. THERE SHALL BE NO NEW OR USED VEHICLE SALES ON SITE EXCEPTING TRAILERS.
3. THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS A SIDEWALK INSTALLATION ON CENTRAL AVENUE AT SUCH TIME AS OTHER PROPERTIES ON EITHER SIDE OF THE SITE ARE INSTALLING THEIRS.

**FOR THE FOLLOWING REASON:**

**THE NEW USE COMPLIMENTS THE EXISTING LANDSCAPING EQUIPMENT SALES BUSINESS.**

**\*\* COMMISSIONER SHEPARD SECONDED.  
\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**



## **OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no additional business to consider at this time.

## **OTHER MATTERS THAT MAY PROPERLY COME BEFORE THE BOARD**

There were no additional matters to consider at this time.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- **Approval of ZBA Minutes for August 10, 2022 – Present: Acting Chairman: Ira Nachem. Commissioners: Tiheba Bain, Mary Gaits and Robin Shepard.  
ZBA Clerk: Paul Boucher**

**\*\* COMMISSIONER GAITS MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 10, 2022 MEETING.**

**\*\* COMMISSIONER NACHEM SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 10, 2022 MEETING.**

- **Approval of ZBA Minutes for October 11, 2022 – Present: Acting Chairman: Ira Nachem. Commissioners: Mary Gaits, Paul Miller, and Robin Shepard.  
ZBA Clerk: Paul Boucher**

**\*\* COMMISSIONER GAITS MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 11, 2022 MEETING.**

**\*\* COMMISSIONER SHEPARD SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 11, 2022 MEETING PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

- **Approval of ZBA Minutes for January 10, 2023 – Present: Acting Chairperson: Robin Shepard. Commissioners: Charles “Greg” Breland, Mary Gaits, Paul Miller, and ZBA Clerk: Paul Boucher**

**\*\* COMMISSIONER GAITS MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 10, 2023 MEETING.**

The following correction was noted:

Page 1, under D-1, paragraph 1, line 2, please change the following from:

“a location approval for customer build vehicles”  
To: a location approval for custom build vehicles”

**\*\* COMMISSIONER MILLER SECONDED.  
\*\* THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 10, 2023  
MEETING AS CORRECTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* COMMISSIONER BAIN MOVED TO ADJOURN  
\*\* COMMISSIONER SHEPARD SECONDED.  
\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes  
Telesco Secretarial Services