

**MINUTES
CLIFTON PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MAY 22, 2025**

Minutes of the regular meeting of the Planning Board of the City of Clifton, New Jersey, held at the City Hall, Clifton, New Jersey on May 22, 2025. Pursuant to the “Open Public Meeting Act” all notice requirements were satisfied. The time, place, date, and form of notice was announced as well as advising all applicants that formal action may be taken on the matters on the agenda.

Those present: Comrs. Binaso, Korbanics, Lataro, Fragapane, Welsh, Brian Rodgers, Councilman D’Amato, Mayor Grabowski, Vice Chair Withers, Chair Susan Kolodziej

Those absent: Comr. Gurkov

The Board approved the minutes of April 24, 2025, regular meeting

RESOLUTIONS:

1. Giovanni & Tina Caggia
75 Luisser Steet & 506 Mt. Prospect Avenue
Block 65.05 Lots 30.01 & 32
Minor subdivision/lot line adjustment between 2 adjoining properties in common ownership.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Resolution approving the application was adopted.

NEW HEARINGS:

- A. Islamic Center of Passaic County, Inc.
257-259 Pershing Road
Block 47.02, Lot 37.01
Amendment to site plan with bulk variances and design waivers

Sean McGowan, Esq. represents the applicant. This is an application for preliminary and final approval for an amendment to their site plan. There are three bulk variances requested with this application for some aisle widths of 20 feet where 24 feet is required, parking aisle size of 9’X18’ where 9’ X 19’ required, and parking and drive aisle in the front yard. Mr. McGowan stated that the existing facilities are too small. This plan will bring more cars off the street and eliminate outdoor services. He stated that the use is permitted. The applicant will demolish most of the existing building. There will be a footprint of about 20,000 sq. feet. There will be two prayer rooms, one for men and one for women. There will

be 230 parking spaces. The applicant meets the conditions of the conditional use. The applicant will call as witnesses, a member of the Mosque, an engineer, a traffic engineer, an architect, and a professional planner.

A member of the public, Mary Simmons, came forward to deliver an opening statement. She stated that the notice was defective and that the Board has no jurisdiction to hear the case. Counsel explained to Ms. Simmons that the Planning Board had jurisdiction over this matter and that the notice is not defective. Mr. McGowan stated that houses of worship are permitted to have accessory uses.

The first witness was Mr. El Moussi, who was sworn and qualified as a professional engineer. He looked at and designed the site. He took into consideration the impact to the neighborhood. Mr. El Moussi described the existing conditions. He described the building, the ingress, and the egress. There exist 88 parking spaces. There is no drop-off or loading zone. EV parking will be relocated away from the building. The occupancy road is estimated at 837 congregants, which requires 210 parking stalls. The applicant is proposing 230 parking spaces.

The witness then described the proposed conditions. Proposed are 230 Parking spaces which exceeds the requirements. EV parking will be relocated away from the building. The occupancy load is estimated at 837 congregants, which requires 210 parking stalls. The applicant is proposing 230 parking spaces. There are two means of egress on Pershing Road. There is a bus drop off zone. Some drive aisles are 20 feet and some are 24 feet. Comr. Binaso asked if the applicant had complied the drive aisle requirement, how many parking spaces would they lose. The parking stalls are proposed at 9 X 18 feet. Again Comr. Binaso asked the witness to advise how many parking spaces they could have if they totally complied. There is ADA accessibility. There is also an elevator inside. During times of worship, there will be no formal programming scheduled for any of the accessory spaces. Fire truck circulation will be shown. There is a playground proposed on the southeast of the property. 33 trees are being removed, and 25 trees are being planted. The applicant will work with the Board to increase landscape coverage. There will be shrubbery on Lawrence Court and Pershing Road. A stormwater management plan has been provided. It is an underground storage system. Vice Chair Withers asked if they could expand the system since they will be digging the area anyway. The witness stated that the applicant will work with the Board Engineer to see what could be done. The witness stated that the applicant will get a letter of compliance from the State. A video inspection of the existing sewer system will be performed. There will also be an inspection schedule for the stormwater management system on the site. The witness stated that even though the building will be larger, that, with the system, the stormwater discharge will be less than currently exists. The building will be sprinklered. A fire hydrant will be added to the site. The parking layout was reviewed. The witness stated that cars can get out of the 20-foot aisle stalls. The witness stated that the City's Fire Truck can maneuver the site and marked Exhibit A1 which is a traffic circulation plan. 8 trees within the building footprints are being removed. 25 trees are provided for the site plan, along with shrubbery on Lawrence Court and the northern property line. The witness will work with the Board engineer to maximize landscaping. The lighting plan was reviewed. There is visibility throughout the site, and neighboring properties are not subject to light spill. Comr. Fragapane asked about a dumpster. The witness stated that there will be a private hauler, and trash will be wheeled out from the kitchen area. The lighting will meet the City Ordinance as to the temperature of the LED lighting. The applicant will work with the Board engineer regarding the type of lighting. The exit at Lawrence Court needs to be striped for no street parking. The applicant will work with the Board Engineer about this. The applicant stated that in determining the ability to circulate the site, that the

applicant used worst case scenarios. The applicant advised that they will comply with all of the comments and requests from the Board engineer, planner, and the police and fire departments. Comr. Lataro asked about the variances for the 20-foot aisles. Comr. Lataro stated that to comply with the aisle size, the applicant would have lost about 20 spaces, which Comr. Lataro stated would still comply. The witness stated that the applicant tried to maximize parking to ensure parking is removed from the street. The witness stated that he did not think that more than 210 cars would be parking there, but that the object of the applicant was to take as many cars off the street as possible, and that the applicant is not looking to expand the congregation. The witness stated that it is common to have 20-foot drive aisles and 9/18 parking spaces. The witness stated that the Clifton police department had no issue with the 20" drive aisle and stated that 20-foot drive aisles are in use in the United States. The witness stated that there are also multiple drive aisles so that a driver can use a different drive aisle if one is blocked. Comr. Binaso asked that a communication be sent to the police to obtain additional information regarding parking and traffic violations in the area. Comr. Binaso asked about making the building smaller. The meeting was opened to the public.

Dawn Buzzie stated that the notice was to accommodate the existing congregation and not with the intent to expand. She asked if the applicant can promise that they will not increase the congregation size. Mr. McGowan stated that was a question for another witness. Ms. Buzzie stated that most of the time there is one person per car attending the mosque. The applicant stated that the applicant is meeting the ordinance criteria. Ms. Buzzie asked about the water table and that the mosque is on the highest area. She asked what will stop the water from being pushed off the property and on the adjoining property. The witness stated that stormwater management on the site will result in less runoff than currently exists. Ms. Buzzie asked about emergency vehicles not being able to get to properties of adjoining property owners. Mr. McGowan stated that the traffic engineer will address this. Ms. McGimpie asked about two full long blocks of cars exiting the site. She wants to know how the site will function with all the cars only containing one person. The Board's planner explained that this use requires one space for four seats, or 210 spaces. She stated that the ordinance does not address how many people are in one vehicle. Karen Tizzio stated that her husband is quadriplegic and has seizures and she wants to know that an ambulance will be able to reach her husband in time. Mr. McGowan stated that the use in the zone is permitted and therefore the applicant must meet the parking requirements but is not required to address off site conditions. Mr. McGowan stated that their traffic engineer will testify about the ability of emergency vehicles to service the neighborhood. Judy Gergatz says that the traffic study says that there is one parking space for four seats. The Board Counsel's explained that the required parking is determined by dividing by four the number of seats. The attorney for the applicant stated that the applicant is not looking to increase occupancy by providing more parking but merely providing for the possibility that more than 210 cars will arrive. The Vice Chair stated that there are 88 parking spaces on site. He stated that there should be more spaces on the site but that they are parking on the streets. He says that by putting in the extra parking spaces, the vehicles will come off the street and on to the site. Vice Chair stated that if there are two people in a car, there will be extra parking spaces because the applicant is seeking to provide an extra 20 spaces. Ms. Gergatz stated that there were 346 cars at the Ramadan services and asked if the parking will be sufficient. The traffic consultant will address this. Gina Tidudo asked about praying outside. Mr. McGowan stated that the proposal would eliminate outside prayer and there will be a witness to testify about this. Other questions were deemed best for the other witnesses. Mr. Tidudo asked about the fire truck that was used for the applicant's analysis. The applicant stated that they used the largest fire truck. She asked

whether their taxes would go up. Robert Simerati said he lives adjacent to the site and asked, during the construction, what type of controls there would be. The witness stated that there are procedures that the applicant must follow for this purpose. Mr. Simerati asked about the hours of operation for construction. The witness stated that they would follow the Clifton ordinance. Robin Urbanowitz asked about construction and what is the timeline for how long the construction will take. The witness stated that, conceptually, it would take about 12 to 18 months. She also asked what the congregation will be doing while the construction is going on. Mr. McGowan stated that the applicant's representative would address this. Comr. Binaso stated that the Board's engineer will monitor any approved application. Mr. Kilroy asked if the building will be completely demolished. Mr. McGowan stated that the architect will be able to answer that question, but that a portion of the building will remain. Vice Chair asked if the proposed pipe is a closed system and the applicant said it was and that it was not a perforated pipe. There will be an irrigation system on site.

The next witness was the applicant's architect, Mr. Steven Considine who was sworn and qualified. The architectural PDF exhibit was marked as A-2. Mr. Considine prepared it. He described the existing conditions. He was charged with evaluating the existing building, and based on the client's program, how to turn the building into a functioning mosque. The current building does not meet the needs of the current congregation. He stated that in a mosque there are no pews, but individual prayer mats. They are spaced apart and not crammed together. He stated that the only place to expand was toward Lawrence Court and to the rear. He tried to incorporate as much of the existing building as possible. He says the most important part is the prayer hall. The existing congregation has separate prayer spaces for men and women. He said the second most important part of the project was that previously there were tents out back and the children would be in the rear of the building. So they wanted a place for the children. There are accessory spaces that are related to any house of worship. Most of the accessory spaces are in the basement. The gym is at grade level in the rear. The second floor will house the women's prayer area. Above the gym is a roof top green space. Mr. Considine says that the building is as tight as you can get and that the building cannot really be made smaller. A prayer hall is two stories high. There is a minaret and a tower common to Islamic architecture. The exterior walls are translucent, which allows light to come in. The rest of the building is a stucco like finish. The light that comes out of the wall is minimal as the light in the building is generally dim. The walls are not reflective. The mechanicals are on the roof and baffled by the parapet wall. The green roof will be for meditative purposes. Access to the green roof is through the second floor. The green roof is not intended as habitable space. The green roof will reduce the heat and the load capacity. It will be irrigated and maintained. Comr. Lataro questioned the height and number of stories. He says that it is not clear if there are two or three stories. Board planner, Jill Hartmann, stated that the zone permits 3 stories and 35 feet. So, even if the basement is considered a story, the project still conforms. Ms. Hartmann also discussed the green roof. She says there needs to be a landscape plan and, if it is a green roof, it must not be habitable, and access should only be for those who are going to maintain it. Mr. McGowan stated that the applicant would address this. The green roof designation should come off the plan because it is not a green roof if it is to be used for meditative purposes. The meeting was opened to the public. Ms. Gergatz asked if there would be spill over from the prayer room to the green roof when it was full. Mr. Considine said that it will not be used for spillovers. Ms. Buzzie asked if the high tower will have the capacity to be used for a call to prayer in the future. Mr. Considine said that the minaret is strictly decorative and cannot be accessed. There will be no retractable walls inside or walls that can be moved to make prayer rooms bigger in the future. She asked about children. Mr. Considine stated that no one

would be on the green roof. He stated that sound will not emanate from the translucent walls in any way that will affect the neighbors. Judy Gergatz asked about the walls in the multipurpose and prayer room . Mr. Considine stated that those walls are not moveable and are permanent walls. Mr. Kilroy asked about whether the mosque will be used during construction. Mr. Considine stated that you have to take apart most of the existing building to construct the proposed structure. William Gibson asked if the first and second floor are the same dimensions. Mr. Considine stated that the women's prayer room only covers a third of the first floor prayer room. Sal Brancato lives behind the building. He asked about lighting. There will be wall sconces pointed down and shielded. He asked if there will be a dimmer. The applicant indicated that they will work to accommodate Mr. Brancato. There is a perimeter walking surface around the building. Gladys Finkster asked about noise level from the translucent walls. She also said that during Ramadan, up to 2 a.m. people are congregating outside. Mr. Considine stated that the translucent wall will not emit sound transmission because of the way the panels are made. There will not be any outside speakers. There will not be any more speakers or tents outside after the construction of the proposed development. The public portion was closed. Mr. Considine estimates that construction would take 12-18 months to complete. Comr. Fragapane talked about contractors getting a Critical Path Method in order to show how the project would progress over time. Comr. Binaso asked if the building could be smaller and maintain the 24 foot aisle.

The hearing was adjourned to the June 26, 2025 meeting at 7:00 p.m. The applicant waived the time in which the Board must act.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert A. Ferraro, Esq. Secretary/Counsel