

MINUTES
ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT
CITY OF CLIFTON
June 18, 2025
7:00 P.M. REGULAR MEETING

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

NOEL PEREZ (2A)
GRACE ROBOL (1A)
AVRAHAM EISENMAN
DAVID BRAID
ALESSIA ERAMO
VICE CHAIRMAN MOLNER
CHAIRMAN ZECCHINO

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

MAUREEN O'CONNOR
GEORGE FOUKAS

ALSO PRESENT:

Nicholas Graviano, P.P., Board Planner
Anthony Kurus, P.E., Board Engineer
Liana Bolcato, Asst. Zoning Officer
Joseph M. Wenzel, Esq., Counsel/Secretary

Chairman Zecchino called the Meeting to Order at 7:03 p.m.; he led the entire assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America. Pursuant to the "Open Public Meeting Law" public notice of the Board's 2025 regular meeting schedule was published in the Herald News on December 11, 2024. All notice requirements were satisfied. Chairman Zecchino announced the time, place, and form of notice as well as advising all applications that formal action may be taken on the matters set forth on the Agenda. Said opening statement is incorporated herein by reference and made a part hereof.

NEW HEARINGS

1. Yousef Wolf, 217 Rutherford Blvd., Bl. 60.11, Lot: 2, Zone RA3

Applicant, **Yousef Wolf**, appeared on his own behalf to present the application.

Applicant's architect, **Jacob Weiss**, was called forward, sworn in and qualified as an expert in the field of architecture. Weiss provided an overview of the current conditions and outlined the expansion of the home from a one story to a two story residence. The addition stays within the footprint of the home. There will be dormers at the roof line to allow access to the attic from stairs.

Chairman Zecchino questioned the height of the attic and why pull-down stairs are not used. Weiss noted that the attic is about 6-7 feet high at the ridge line but lower towards the outer walls.

Stairway to the attic allows the best means of access and that there is no area to place the pull-down stairs. Weiss agreed that there will be no living space in the attic as a condition of approval.

Vice-Chair Molner questioned about the status of reinforcing the home walls to stop vehicles from driving into the home. Wiess indicated that would be part of the work.

Commissioner Eramo questioned the placement of parking spaces. Weiss noted that there will be two spaces in the driveway and one in the garage after renovations.

No interest parties appeared on this matter.

Commissioner Braid moved to approve. Commissioner Robol seconded the motion.

Commissioners Perez, Robol, Eisenman (noting that the addition was keeping in the character of the neighborhood), Braid (agreeing that expansion is in character of neighborhood), Eramo, Vice Chair Molner, and Chairman Zecchino voted for approval. Motion passed 7-0.

2. **JLM Chestnut Street LLC**, 22-36 Chestnut St., Bl. 15.12, Lot: 14 & 16, Zone RB1 & M1

Attorney, Dominic Iannarella, Esq., for the Applicant explained the nature of the project. Iannarella also noted that the plans had been slightly changed since the original submission based upon comments from the Board professionals.

Applicant's engineer, **David Fantina**, was called forward, sworn in and qualified as an expert in the field of engineering. Fantina provided an overview of the current conditions and outlined the proposed subdivision and variances. Fantina introduced Exhibit A-1 which is a revised site plan (1 page). Fantina noted that based on comments from the Board professionals, the proposed new residence on the subdivided lot was moved forward. This placed the proposed residence in line with neighboring homes. There was also a reduction in the width.

Commissioner Eramo asked about the effect on the former lot. Fantina noted that the subdivision largely remained the same and that the new proposed lot with the proposed residence would need certain variances. Those variances would be for lot area, side yard and combined side yard. Eramo asked why the property was being subdivided in this manner because the area looked like a large side yard would be left. Fantina noted that was to make the property in line with other lots in the area.

Commissioner Braid asked about the density of the property and Fantina noted that this would only be a proposed two-family residence.

Commissioner Eisenman asked about the zone elements. Fantina stated that the planner would address that issue but that this commercial and industrial zone is adjacent to residential zone.

Chairman Zecchino asked why the applicant was not requesting a single-family home which would meet more of the zoning requirements. Fantina noted that there are a lot of two-family homes in the area and that this would fit in with others in the neighborhood.

Commissioner Eramo expressed concern that the plans would result in further straining an overpopulated area with more families.

Chairman Zecchino asked if the applicant would consider a single-family home. Fantina stated that was not considered by the applicant.

Commissioner Eramo asked about the number of off-street parking and Fantina confirmed that there would be two.

Commissioner Braid expressed concern about the overall size of the property and meeting the zoning requirements.

Board Planner Graviano clarified that the property abuts the RB1 zone. He also noted that permitted two family homes in the City require a lot size of 75 feet by 100 feet. Lastly, he clarified that there would be no density variance required by this application.

Board Engineer Kurus asked about stormwater drainage and use of drywells. Fantina responded and noted that the applicant would comply with all conditions in the Neglia review letter.

Applicant's planner, **Alex Dougherty**, was called forward, sworn in and qualified as an expert in the field of planning. Dougherty provided Exhibit A-2 to the Board which was a 8 sheet document of photographs of the area and maps. Dougherty explained that the area has been traditionally commercial in nature. It abuts the RB1 zone which has many residences including two-family. This is a transitional area, so residential on this lot would flow into the neighboring zone. Dougherty explained that a use variance would be required as a two-family residence is not allowed in the zone. Dougherty pointed out that the proposed subdivided parcel is vacant land and has not in recent times been used for commercial or industrial purposes. Dougherty stated that there are several two-family homes in the immediate area. These homes exist on lots which are less than 75x100 in size and some are even less than 50x100. Dougherty opined that this proposed lot and two family would be indistinguishable from the others which exist on similarly sized lots. Dougherty added that a two-family home will have less impact than a larger one family. He also shared that a two-family home makes more productive use of a residence than a normal one-family home.

Dougherty opined that the use variance can be granted as the two-family home is a better planning alternative. The proposed structure is a better building than expanding current commercial use. There is also a general need for good housing choices in the City of Clifton. Dougherty believed that there are no negative effects on the area from this variance. The parking will be off-street, stormwater controls will be enhanced, and it will serve as a buffer between current commercial and residential uses. This is in conformity with MLUL goals under sections (a), (i) & (g). Dougherty continued that the placement of a home on this site is better than complying with the M-1 zone which allows significantly more impactful industrial uses proximate to homes. The property should be used as a transition between the two zones.

Chairman Zecchino asked about the Graviano report and the recommendation that the two family

be limited to two bedrooms per unit. Applicant agreed that would be a condition of approval to have that deed restriction included. Dougherty had no other objections to complying with the Graviano report.

Commissioner Eramo questioned the prevalence of two-family homes in the area and that lot sizes are smaller than allowed. She wondered if it was better to leave the property open to be a better buffer than another home. Dougherty responded that the RB1 zone standards are guideline, but this site cannot meet each of those. This is a unique site in consideration of its proximity to both commercial and residential use and some consideration for relief from the code should be given to that. Eramo asked for planting of native trees in replacement for the ones to be removed, and Applicant agreed to that as a condition of approval.

Commissioner Eisenman asked about the existence of larger conforming lots in the area and that some lots were left vacant. Dougherty conceded that some do exist.

Applicant's attorney made a closing statement asking for approval.

No interest parties appeared on this matter.

Vice-Chair Molner moved to approve. Commissioner Eisenman seconded the motion.

Commissioners Robol (stating that residential is a better use for the site than industrial or commercial), Eisenman (sharing that the Applicant did their best to make this proposal work for that site), Vice-Chair Molner (agreeing that residential was a better alternative) and Chairman Zecchino (also noting that residential was better) voted for approval and Commissioners Perez (stating that the residential concept was fine but that the proposed two-family home was too large requiring additional variances), Braid (identifying that he was not satisfied that the Applicant showed special reasons for the relief), and Eramo (relying on the current overcrowded area and placing additional strain on municipal resources) voted against approval. Motion failed 4-3.

ADOPTION OF MEMORIALIZING RESOLUTIONS/MINUTES

1. Resolution memorializing the approval of the application by Mo Salman, 15 Priscilla Street, Bl.: 40.01, Lot: 35, Zone RA2 to construct a new front porch which required bulk variances.

Vice-Chair Molner made a motion to approve. Commissioner Perez seconded the motion; voting in favor are Commissioners Perez, Robol, O'Connor, Vice Chair Molner, and Chairman Zecchino voted for approval. Motion passed 5-0.

2. Minutes of the June 4, 2025 Regular Meeting.

Commissioner Robol made a motion to approve. Vice-Chair Molner seconded the motion; voting in favor are Commissioners Perez, Robol, Braid, Eramo, Vice Chair Molner, and Chairman Zecchino. The motion passed 7-0.

There being no further business before the Board, Commissioner Braid moved to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Eisenman, with the unanimous approval of all Board members present, the meeting was adjourned at 8.07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

JOSEPH M. WENZEL, ESQ.,
COUNSEL SECRETARY