

MINUTES
ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT
CITY OF CLIFTON
November 19, 2025
7:00 P.M. REGULAR MEETING

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

GRACE ROBOL (1A)
AVRAHAM EISENMAN (*arrived 7:10 P.M.*)
DAVID BRAID
ALESSIA ERAMO
GEORGE FOUKAS
VICE CHAIRMAN MOLNER
CHAIRMAN ZECCHINO

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

NOEL PEREZ (2A)
MAUREEN O'CONNOR

ALSO PRESENT:

Liana Bolcato, Asst. Zoning Officer
Richard Hawkins, Esq., Acting Counsel/Secretary
Nicholas Graviano, Board Planner
Neglia Engineering, Board Engineer

Chairman Zecchino called the Meeting to Order at 7:02 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. Samuel Rijo, 84 East 7th Street, Bl. 1.29, Lots: 29, Zone RB1

Applicant, Samuel Rijo, was present.

Applicant **Samuel Rijo** was called forward and sworn in. He explained the purpose of the project. Applicant explained that there is an already existing gazebo on site. The gazebo creates a variance condition for lot coverage of 39.7% where 25% is the maximum allowed in the zone.

Applicant explained that they were not fully aware of the need for permit approval or zoning violation gazebo would cause. Applicant had obtained permits in the past for other projects and

offered this not as an excuse only an explanation. Gazebo has been securely placed and within setback lines. Applicant stated that the gazebo causes no disturbance to neighboring properties and cannot be seen from the street. Gazebo will positively enhance the property as a safe outdoor social gathering space, especially for elderly resident reliant upon medical equipment subject to environmental conditions. Applicant argued that this is better to have permanent structure than less visually desirable alternatives, such as disposable tents.

No interest parties appeared on this matter.

Commissioner Foukas and **Chairman Zecchino** expressed positive comments about the gazebo.

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

Commissioners Robol, Braid, Eramo, Foukas, Vice-Chair Molner and Chair Zecchino voted in favor. Motion passed 6-0 and the application was approved.

2. **David & Devra Markowitz**, 29 Edgewood Avenue, Bl. 58.13, Lots: 20, Zone RA3

Applicant, **David & Devra Markowitz**, were present.

Applicant **David & Devra Markowitz** were called forward and sworn in. He explained the purpose of the project. David Markowitz stated that this is only a small addition on back of home. They have a growing family with the addition of a new family member. The addition will be no wider than the current home. However, the current home violates the combined side yard setback. The addition will follow the existing lines and thereby continue along the same setbacks. The addition will also increase lot coverage but this is needed to create larger kitchen and living space.

No interest parties appeared on this matter.

Commissioner Foukas moved to approve. Commissioner Eisenman seconded the motion.

Commissioners Robol, Eisenman, Braid, Eramo, Foukas, Vice-Chair Molner and Chair Zecchino voted in favor. Motion passed 7-0 and the application was approved.

3. **Fawzi Abelgani**, 1610 Main Ave, Bl. 9.07, Lots: 26, Zone BC & M2

Counsel, **Dominic Iannarella, Esq.**, appeared and presented the application.

Board Planner Graviano commented that the lot is split between two zoning districts. The building is in the BC district and the parking lot is in the M2 district. The reason for the use variance is not the change in use of the building structure as a restaurant, which is permitted in the BC zone. The parking lot, in the M2 zone, is accessory to restaurant use which is not permitted in the M2 zone. This is a unique situation.

Applicant's architect, **Anwar Alkhatib**, was called forward, sworn in and qualified as an expert in the field of architecture. Architect explained that the prior bank use is now vacant. This project

seeks no exterior improvements, and the footprint would remain the same. There are only interior changes from bank use to restaurant use. Architect explained building layout, including kitchen and eating areas. Parking lot will be for restaurant patrons. Architect showed proposed renderings of the refurbished building with signs (three in total). Sign sizes are in line with code. Signs were originally requested to be internally lighted which would cause a variance. However, after review of the Board Planner report, the signs will now be backlit and revised plans will be provided accordingly as a condition of approval. All mechanicals will be on the roof.

Commissioner Eisenman sought clarification on the type of operation. Architect explained that this is a pre-made sandwich and coffee shop. There will be no table service component to this but there will be customers to sit down.

Commissioner Foukas inquired if the variance is for restaurant or fast food operation. Architect noted that the variance is for a restaurant use not a fast food operation. There is a former bank drive-thru that is not being converted as part of this operation. Planner Graviano noted that the Applicant could stipulate that no drive-thru will be placed on site, and Applicant agreed to same as a condition of approval.

Violet Serekian, West Second Street, asked about the intensity of lighting and type of sign lighting.

Coral Silfa, West Second Street, asked about the parking and flow of traffic. Silfa also asked about garbage controls and screening of dumpster.

Jada Lassiter, West Second Street, asked about the garbage storage and street traffic flow.

Applicant's engineer, **Giovanni Manilio**, was called forward, sworn in and qualified as an expert in the field of engineering. Engineer presented Exhibit A-1, an aerial of vicinity, explained history of lot uses and the split zoning. Engineer stated the physical aspects of the property and the neighboring uses. Site is currently a one-story bank. There are two driveways on West Second Street. The exits are only left turns onto West Second as it is a one-way street. The existing drive-thru exits out onto Main Avenue and this is a right turn only. Several pre-existing setback variances will be unchanged by this application.

Exhibit A-2 is color rendition of the proposed plan with the zone districts highlighted.

Engineer noted that the proposal will eliminate one curb cut along West Second Street. Patrons will come onto the site from the remaining West Second Street entrance and then exit the site onto Main Avenue. The patrons can also exit onto West Second Street. Parking lot will be marked accordingly to show parking spaces and turn movements.

The proposed parking lot will have 12 parking spaces total. This is an increase from the current 10 as one access point from West Second Street is being eliminated. There will be an appropriately sized refuse area which will be enclosed with gates. The refuse enclosure will be a solid material.

Chairman Zecchino questioned whether they could eliminate the exit onto West Second. Engineer explained that he had conducted a traffic study and found that the proposed use will have less

intensity of use than prior use, so there is no need to eliminate the exit onto West Second.

Board Planner Graviano asked for more plantings to increase buffer to residences. Applicant consented to same as a condition of approval

Light poles will remain but changed out to LED and eliminate light spillage onto neighboring properties, but driveway needs lighting for safety. The proposed signs are below the size, but one of them is not allowed in the back of the building. Engineer noted that is better to have three signs around the building than one large sign. There will also be an enhancement of stormwater control. Applicant will otherwise comply with the Board professional reports.

Parking requirement for this use is 49 spaces, but only 12 are proposed.

Engineer argued that only 1185 sq feet will be used for customers but the ordinance uses total building space. This artificially increases the parking need. The calculation should reflect only an area for customers which would reduce the requirement from 49 to 20 spaces.

Commissioners Foukas and Eramo asked about the number of employees. Applicant noted that a total of 4 employees will be on site at any one time. There is area for more employees, but only 4 employees will be needed.

Vice-Chair Molner asked about the width of driveway. The Engineer noted that it is 24.5 feet. Engineer added that this is a walkable area within a large downtown. There are also bus stops nearby.

Chairman Zecchino asked about hours of operation and was informed it is open 7 days a week, from approximately 11am to 10pm.

Commissioner Eisenman asked about delivery trucks. Engineer stated that the use will have box trucks arrive prior to hours of operation. Commissioner Eisenman also asked about the drive-thru canopy remaining and whether refuse can coming in and out of Main instead of West Second. Engineer stated that could be researched but added that Applicant is lessee of building and there could be unknown structural issues with the canopy removal. An alternative maybe to roll out refuse container to Main Avenue Area. Chairman Zecchino shared that the canopy removal would be helpful to move traffic off of West Second.

Vice-Chair Molner expressed concern about on-street parking by patrons due to the lack of parking on site. Chairman Zecchino shared this concern and wanted to minimize impact on neighboring properties. Board members expressed concern about low parking numbers.

Applicant eventually confirmed that the Canopy can be taken down and circulation can be changed to allow egress only from West Second Street and exit only onto Main Street.

Board member questions whether Main Street be only access site. Applicant express concerns about getting County of Passaic approval. Vice-Chair shared that West Second Street parking is still a problem as the site is under parked.

Violet Serekian, West Second Street, asked about the parking numbers and restaurant operations.

Coral Silfa, West Second Street, asked about truck traffic parking on site and trash controls.

Applicant asked to continue the hearing until **January 7, 2026** to address the concerns of the board and residents.

4. **Rainbow Montessori School**, 21 Varettoni Place, Bl. 4.03, Lot: 14.01, Zone R-B2

Counsel, **Dominic Iannarella, Esq.**, appeared and presented the application.

Applicant representative explained that the current school operations leases the other building on lot. The operation has been very successful and now needs more space. Current building is on the lot and has recently become available. They would like to convert the space for school usage. This will not result in more employees or students but simply to provide some space need relief.

Applicant's architect, **Tomasz Bona**, was called forward, sworn in and qualified as an expert in the field of architecture. Architect explained the conversion of the current space. There is no exterior expansion but a new entrance will be constructed. This will be ADA compliant. Interior spaces will be modified for school needs.

Applicant's planner, **Peter Steck**, was called forward, sworn in and qualified as an expert in the field of planning. Planner presented exhibit A-1 to the Board. Planner spoke about the two uses on one lot variance. This is an expansion of previously approved secondary use. School is an inherently beneficial use and gets preferential treatment. The impact on the area is minimal at best and only physical modifications are for code compliance. School is already in use and this does create any negative repercussions in the area. Planner also concurred with the Board Planner comments.

No interest parties appeared on this matter.

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

Commissioners Robol, Eisenman, Braid, Eramo, Foukas, Vice-Chair Molner and Chair Zecchino voted in favor. Motion passed 7-0 and the application was approved.

NEW BUSINESS

Board then discussed the adoption of 2026 Meeting Schedule. Commissioner Eisenman brought up concerns about conflicts with religious holidays and council meetings. Both aspects will be dealt with accordingly. Vice-Chair Molner moved to approve. Commissioner Robol seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted in favor.

ADOPTION OF MEMORIALIZING RESOLUTIONS/MINUTES

1. Resolution memorializing the approval of the application by Isaac & Shira Brooke, 18 Lehigh Avenue, Bl. 70.03, Lots: 36, Zone RA3, for new two-story single-family dwelling which required bulk variance relief of combined yard setback of 15.25', rear yard setback at 25.24', and lot coverage at 33.7%.

Commissioner Braid made a motion to memorialize the Resolution. Commissioner Robol seconded the motion; voting in favor are Commissioners Robol, Braid, Eramo, and Foukas. Motion passed 4-0.

3. Resolution memorializing the approval of the application by Joseph & Malka Neumann, 190 Cresthill Avenue, Bl. 57.08, Lots: 25, Zone RA3 new two-story addition which required bulk variance relief of front yard setback at 20', side yard setback at 5', combined side yard setback at 11.2', lot coverage at 32.7%, and driveway in front of house not serving a garage.

Commissioner Braid made a motion to memorialize the Resolution. Commissioner Eramo seconded the motion; voting in favor are Commissioners Robol, Braid, Eramo, and Foukas. Motion passed 4-0.

4. Minutes of the November 5, 2025 Regular Meeting.

Commissioner Robol made a motion to memorialize the Resolution. Commissioner Eisenman seconded the motion; voting in favor are Commissioners Robol, Eisenman, Braid, Eramo, Foukas, and Vice-Chair Molner Chair Zecchino voted in favor. Motion passed 7-0.

There being no further business before the Board, Commissioner Foukas moved to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Braid, with the unanimous approval of all Board members present, the meeting was adjourned at 8:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

JOSEPH M. WENZEL, ESQ.,
COUNSEL SECRETARY