

**MINUTES OF THE BOROUGH OF NORTH CALDWELL PLANNING BOARD
CONFERENCE MEETING HELD FEBRUARY 6, 2023**

Chairman Brower called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. The following members were present:

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Chairman Brower, Mr. Campbell, Mayor Raymond, Councilman Rees, Mr. Fishbone, Mr. O'Sullivan, Ms. Nathans, Mr. Roth

ABSENT: Dr. Spinelli

Others present: Mr. Dusinberre, Esq., Board Attorney, Paul Ferriero, PE, Board Engineer

ADEQUATE NOTICE of this meeting of the Borough of North Caldwell Planning Board was given as follows: Notice was sent to The Progress and Notice was filed with the office of the Borough Clerk.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

None

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Chairman Brower noted that the Board is still tasked with preparing a summary of recommendations to present to the Mayor and Council regarding items recently discussed as it relates to subdivisions resulting in irregularly shaped lots. This discussion will be scheduled at a future meeting.

RESOLUTIONS & MEMORIALIZATIONS

None.

APPLICATIONS & INFORMAL HEARING

Chairman Brower invited the North Caldwell Board of Education (NCBOE) to the dais to make a presentation to the Board regarding proposed additions and interior renovations to Gould Elementary School and Grandview Elementary School. Chairman Brower reminded the Board that the presentation is informal in manner and the hearing is a courtesy review.

Those in attendance who were representing the NCBOE were Superintendent Dr. Freda, Administrator Mr. Halik, BOE Attorney Dennis McKeever, Board President Mindy Oppen and NCBOE Architect Allen Barnett.

NCBOE Dennis McKeever introduced himself and deferred the presentation to Mr. Barnett. Mr. Barnett introduced himself and started his presentation with the proposed plans for Gould Elementary School. The plan includes two exterior additions, an outdoor courtyard, a new parking area for approximately 30 cars. Mr. Barnett went through the details of the new multi-use gym, speech room, cafeteria expansion and the addition which connects the 2 buildings.

Member Rees asked why parking is set so far back away from the building and gym area. Mr. Barnett mentioned that the topographic constraints and ingress/egress issues led to the current design. Mr. Barnett was asked to speak about any possible issues which might result from a dual ingress/egress circulation being converted to a singular driveway. Mr. Barnett mentioned that the topography leads to a natural desire for emergency access directly from Gould Avenue or Mountain Avenue and rear-of-building access would be least desirous during emergency response.

Member Rees asked why the gym only had two exits. Mr. Barnett said he could add a third exit.

Chairman Brower asked if the smaller parking lot would remain. Mr. Barnett noted the smaller lot would remain as a maintenance lot for NCBOE maintenance workers.

Chairman Brower asked if the NCBOE could approach PSE&G regarding emergency access across their right-of-way from the new parking lot. It was suggested that this might help alleviate circulation concerns on an emergency basis. Mr. Barnett mentioned he would follow-up with PSE&G.

Member Campbell asked if the turning radius into the parking lot created unnecessary restrictions. He asked if it could be studied to assure ambulance access and access from other first-responder vehicles.

Mr. Barnett acknowledged a number of communications from the police and fire departments through the evolution of the project. He read the most recent comments provided by the Fire Chief and Police Chief and provided answers for each of them.

Member Fishbone asked about the middle courtyard area behind the school. Mr. Barnett noted that it is intended to primarily remain a play area.

Member Nathans asked if the soccer field would be lost as a result of the new parking lot. Mr. Barnett said he would reconsider parking and play area layout in final design in order to least impact existing uses of the play area.

Mr. Ferriero noted that this project appears that it would qualify as a major development and stormwater designs should be considered earlier than later.

Member Nathans asked how this design would change the drop-off and pick-up routine. Board President Opper explained the current routine and potential routine if new addition is in place. Mr. Barnett also expanded on his considerations for site circulation for vehicles and pedestrians in support of Board President Opper.

Mr. Dusinger asked if an additional guardrail or a taller guardrail should be considered along Mountain Avenue to provide greater pedestrian safety for potentially higher pedestrian volumes. Mr. Barnett noted he would look into this in further detail.

Mr. Dusinger asked if the gym would be separately secured and Mr. Barnett explained that the design calls for separate locks for the gym which accomplishes the necessary security for the rest of the building.

Mr. Dusinger asked for further explanation on pedestrian access to and from the gym area and Mr. Barnett explained the design but indicated he could add additional sidewalks. Mr. Dusinger asked if 30 parking spaces would be adequate and suggested that PSEG be approached for overflow parking by utilizing the PSE&G right-of-way.

Mr. Roth asked if consideration was given to the outer limits of the site when planning the site layout. Mr. Barnett noted that it could be considered in final designs. Mr. Roth noted that perhaps the grass field could be relocated or the play space be modified to maximize the usefulness of the existing space.

Mr. Brower asked the NCBOE to present their plans for Grandview Elementary School. Mr. Barnett provided a detailed explanation of the proposed additions which include a new gymnasium, two new support classrooms adjacent to the gym and four new kindergarten classes. Mr. Barnett reviewed the plans in greater detail and asked the Board for questions.

Mr. Brower asked if any thought was put into making this a 2-floor school. Mr. Brower noted that consideration was given but stairway requirements, utility requirements and elevator requirements start to eat away at the buildable footprint making it less realistic and less fiscally responsible.

Mr. Rees asked about cost comparison for a brand new school at another location. Mr. Barnett did not have a direct answer but estimated \$500-\$600 per square foot for a new school construction. NCBOE President Oppen provided the Planning Board with context on project needs and reiterated the need to move forward with the project if no other property currently exists.

Chairman Brower emphasized that he fully supports the need for the community today. He also encouraged all decision makers to provide a balanced consideration on the plans that are good for the immediate future and long-term future. Chairman Brower suggested that the NCBOE give Mayor Raymond time to review the matter and consider all alternatives including, but not limited to: renovations of existing building vs. new building on the same site vs. new building on alternative sites.

Member Campbell asked if the plans contemplate future development. Mr. Barnett noted that the plans are based upon "unhoused students" and that is a consideration given in State Aid. Mr. Barnett further explained that the district and State will also look forward to 5-years of projections for classroom. NCBOE Superintendent Dr. Freda noted that the current schools are designed for 585 students but approximately 700 students are currently enrolled. New schools will be built to house the 700 students plus additional anticipated students for up to 5 years.

Mr. Barnett explained the state aid funding formula in greater detail and explained that the state aid is greatly diminished in projects other than renovations. As such, the local tax burden for new construction falls more squarely on the shoulders of the local tax payers.

Mr. Dusinger asked if the playground area at Grandview was too close to the neighbors. Mr. Barnett explained that this area is already used as a play area.

Mr. Fishbone asked if the Gould School was a tighter school with greater enrollment concerns. This was confirmed by the NCBOE.

Councilman Rees asked for further discussion on why Grandview was not extended as a 2nd floor addition. Mr. Barnett identified a number of considerations which led the BOE to rule out the 2nd floor addition.

Chairman Brower thanked the BOE for their presentation.

NEW BUSINESS

None

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Chairman Brower opened the meeting to the public and nobody was present. Chairman Brower then closed the meeting to the public.

ADJOURMENT

Chairman Brower requested a motion to adjourn at approximately 9:07 pm. A motion was made by Member Fishbone and seconded by Member Campbell. All members voted in the affirmative.

Kevin O'Sullivan
Planning Board Secretary