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TO: Borough of Sayreville Planning Board

FROM: Michael P. Fowler, AICP/PP, Board Planner *MPF*

DATE: February 16, 2024

SUBJECT: Masjid Sadar – Community Center/House of Worship  
Preliminary and Final Site Plan  
Block 444.04, Lots 23, 24, 25 & 28  
Sayreville, New Jersey

We have reviewed the above referenced Preliminary and Final Site Plan prepared by AWZ Engineering Inc., dated February 4, 2022, and last revised October 25, 2023, consisting of twenty-three Site Plan sheets. We have also reviewed the Architectural Plans prepared by Vision Design & Development, dated January 25, 2023, and last revised October 3, 2023, consisting of eight Plan sheets.

Based on our review of the Application and Plans, we have the following comments as provided below:

**A. PROJECT**

1. The subject property is located at 216 Ernston Road in the R-7 Residential Zone and previously contained an Attorney's Office, with an Accessory Dwelling Unit, and two single-family dwellings. The property also contained off-street parking for the medical office on the opposite side of Ernston Road. The Application for Preliminary and Final Site Plan approval proposes the demolition of the existing structures and the construction of a three story 44,391 sq ft House of Worship, with a principal height of 40 ft. As described in the Board Engineer's report, the proposed use will contain ladies and gentlemen's prayer rooms, a gymnasium, ladies and gentlemen's exercise areas, classrooms, a multi-purpose hall, boys' and girls' activity halls, a kitchen, and a cafeteria. A below-grade parking area for sixty-four vehicles is also proposed beneath the proposed building. In addition, a forty-five space at grade parking lot and infrastructure improvements are also proposed. The plans also depict site improvements in support of the proposed use, such as landscaping, lighting, and stormwater facilities.
2. The history of the site is detailed in the Board Engineer's February 21, 2024, review of this Application. It acknowledges that in 2021, the Applicant changed the use of the subject property, resulting in violations being issued by the Borough and subsequent litigation.

## **B. EXISTING CONDITIONS**

1. The property fronts on the north side of Ernston Road between Highway 9 and Bordentown Avenue approximately 450 ft east of the Ernston Road/Bordentown Road intersection. The subject property is 2.49-acres. As mentioned above, the developed site contains two single-family dwellings and a former office building and associated parking. All of which are planned for removal.

The configuration of the site is rectangular with no apparent encumbrances such as easements, wetlands, or steep slopes. The site has a little over 300 ft of frontage on Ernston Road.

As previously mentioned, the Board Engineer's Memo of February 21, 2024, contains a detailed history of the site's prior approvals and subsequent actions as the result of an unauthorized Change of Use.

With respect to the surroundings, the Subject Property has several abutting land uses. To the north, east and west are Single-family dwellings, and to the south, across Ernston Road in Old Bridge Township are a Dentist's Office, a Funeral Home and Cemetery, and Single-family dwellings.

## **C. MASTER PLAN**

1. The Borough's 2013 Master Plan designates the Subject Property as Medium Density Residential, consistent with the Zoning.

## **D. ZONING**

1. The subject site is in the R-7 Single-family Residential Zone, in which a House of Worship is permitted Conditional Use.

As stated in the Borough's Land Development Ordinance, Houses of Worship shall be permitted as a Conditional Use in all zoning districts in compliance with the following:

- (a) Compliance with Zoning Schedule III at the end of this chapter.
- (b) Screening and landscaping shall be provided where necessary to minimize the development's impact on adjacent properties.

2. The Bulk Zoning Standards (Zoning Schedule III) for the R-7 Residential Zone as it relates to the requirements for a House of Worship are depicted on Sheet 1 of the Applicant's Plan set depicting existing and proposed conditions. As noted, no bulk variances are being created by the current Application.
3. The Board Engineer's Updated Technical Review attached to the February 21, 2024, report identifies many inconsistencies between the proposed site improvements and the Ordinance Design Standards to be addressed at the Hearing. Many of these inconsistencies, as described in the Review, will require waivers or variances from the Board.

4. We agree with the determination of the waivers and variances identified in Engineer's Report, as well as all the comments and recommendations and it is not necessary to state them over again in this report.

## **E. GENERAL COMMENTS**

### **Traffic**

1. The Applicant should explain how vehicular circulation on the site will function without conflicting movements as areas in the parking garage are dead ended with little ability to turn around.
2. The routes that trucks will follow to safely maneuver about the site should be presented to the Board.
3. Stop bars and stop signs should be added in the parking area where drive aisles intersect.
4. It is recommended that the Applicant approach the County to determine if a dedicated left turn lane can be accommodated within the Ernston Road right-of-way and whether additional right-of-way dedication would be necessary to accomplish it.
5. A redistribution of traffic at the entrance/exit drives should be considered. The two site driveways are approximately 100 ft apart. It appears that the current configuration would result in conflicting turning movements when vehicles are exiting the site's driveways. It is recommended that the Applicant consider limiting one driveway to entrance only and one to exit only or designing for right turn in and right turn out only maneuvers. A reconfiguration of the driveways would also assist Police Officers who may be employed to direct traffic during more heavily attended events at the Masjid Sadar.

The Applicant's Traffic Engineer should provide testimony regarding these recommendations, as well as comment 4. above.

6. The two isolated, off-street parking spaces located adjacent to the easterly exit drive should be redesigned to be perpendicular to Ernston Road and the landscape island should be relocated to the east side of those two spaces. This would reduce conflicting vehicular movements on site.
7. The Plans should be updated to depict the locations of the driveways and structures on the south side of Ernston Road within 200 ft of the subject site. A map showing this information should also be presented at the Hearing.
8. The trash enclosure should be moved approximately 3 ft to the east to allow for a softening of the turning radius into the basement parking garage.

9. It appears that there is a substantial drop from the adjacent grade to the bottom of the parking garage entrance. It is recommended that safety fencing be installed for added protection.
10. The provision and location of EV charging stations consistent with State requirements should be addressed by the Applicant.

### **Landscaping**

1. The landscape design shall comply with the requirements of the Borough Ordinance at 26-96.7. The Applicant should address compliance with the Ordinance as cited in the Board Engineer's report.
2. Street trees shall be required for all development applications. Trees shall be approximately fifty (50') feet apart and located between the setback line and the street right-of-way line if possible and not closer than twenty-five (25') feet from any existing or proposed streetlight or street intersection.
3. As noted in Section D above, a Condition of the Conditional Use for a House of Worship, is that screening and landscaping shall be provided where necessary to minimize the development's impact on adjacent properties. While the Applicant has provided screening and landscaping between the proposed building and site improvements and the adjacent residential properties, it is recommended that the screening be enhanced with a combination of berms (6 ft high) and the planting of a double row of evergreen trees, that conforms to the Borough's Buffer requirements.
  - a. As noted in the Board Engineer's Updated Technical Review, "Since there will be excess soil material on the site from the excavation of the proposed basement area, the possible use of this material to create landscaped berms in the buffer areas should be further reviewed."
4. The Applicant should address any irrigation proposed to maintain the proposed landscape/buffer plantings.
5. The landscaped plantings proposed along the Ernston Road right-of way, some of which are within the sight triangle easements as noted by the Board Engineer, should be relocated adjacent to the parking lot. The plantings should include enough evergreen plantings to screen the parking area from Ernston Road and the residences to the east and west. The remainder of the lawn area along the front of the site should be utilized to provide sections of low-lying ornamental/annual plantings that will not impact sight distance.

## **Building and Lighting**

1. As stated in the Borough's Land Development Ordinance in Section 26-82.5 Height Exceptions.
  - a. "Appurtenances Attached to Principal Structures. Church spires, belfries, domes or antennas attached to buildings, penthouses (not for human occupancy), chimneys, ventilators, skylights, water tanks, bulkheads and necessary mechanical appurtenances usually carried above roof level shall not be considered when determining the height of the building, and are not subject to height limitations, except that such features shall not exceed twenty (20%) percent of total roof area and shall not exceed a height such as is necessary to accomplish the purpose for which it is intended to serve."

The Applicant's Architect should provide testimony relative to the height of the Principal Building and the attached appurtenances (Dome and Minaret). In particular, the testimony should include compliance with the Ordinance, as it relates to the Dome and Minaret. Does the Dome or Minaret allow for occupancy and does the proposed height exceed that which is necessary to accomplish the purpose for which it is intended to serve?

2. All freestanding and wall mounted lighting in proximity to the residential areas should contain house-side shields. In addition, lighting shall be reduced after operating hours by at least fifty (50%) percent throughout the site. Motion-sensor security lighting or other lighting needed for safety purposes shall be permitted to exceed this threshold.
3. All roof mounted mechanicals should be screened from view by the public.
4. Relative to sustainability and green building, the installation of roof-mounted solar panels is encouraged, but not required. The Applicant should address any plans for solar panels or any other green energy improvements both active and passive.

## **Miscellaneous**

1. The existing refuse area should be designed in accordance with the Borough's requirements to accept trash and recyclables.
2. If approved, the Site Plan should be reviewed and approved by the Borough's Bureau of Fire Prevention and Division of Traffic Safety.
3. As noted in the Board Engineer's review, approval of this project is subject to all applicable outside agency approvals.
4. The Applicant is likely exempt from any affordable housing fees and/or other obligations per the Borough's Affordable Housing Ordinance. However, it will be required to follow the established procedures to declare the exemption.

5. The Applicant should address whether any devices will be on the exterior of the building that may emit sounds of any kind.
6. The Applicant should provide adequate testimony to justify any variance or waiver relief. The testimony should include any hardship created by features of the site, better planning alternatives being proposed and the benefits thereof, advancing purposes of the MLUL, any detrimental impacts on neighboring properties, and impacts on the Borough's Master Plan/Zone Plan.

We are available to answer any questions regarding this planning report.

Very Truly Yours,

*Michael P. Fowler*

Michael P. Fowler, AICP/PP  
Board Planner