

## Surgery center OK'd after compromise

### Applicant reduces size of Edison facility in response to citizens' concerns

**BY KATHY CHANG**

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After a year of lengthy hearings, a controversial plan to build a medical facility on James Street in Edison was approved last week, but only after the developer offered to reduce the size of the building.

The Zoning Board of Adjustment voted unanimously July 19 to approve the application from Rukh Edison Plaza/James St. Medical of Piscataway, subject to a review by the zoning department and township planner Henry Bignell. The board granted a use variance for the medical office building, which is not a permitted use in the residential zone.

Board Chairman Randolph Holmes III said he was appreciative and pleased to see the applicant and residents work together after an extensive period of time.

Board member Mary Petti motioned to approve the application, and Rosemary Feteric seconded it.

"This is a great example of neighbors and businesses coming together, a meeting of the minds," Petti said. "I commend both parties. This does not happen very often."

The applicant's attorney, Peter Lanfrit of the Lanfrit & Tulio law firm, Somerset, prefaced his comments at the meeting by saying they were "approaching our first anniversary" of when hearings began.

He said the applicant was in discussions over the past several weeks with representatives of Citizens Against James Street Medical Development and the group's attorney, Stuart Lieberman of Lieberman & Blecher, Princeton.

"Even as late as 7:45 p.m. tonight, we have been in negotiations," Lanfrit told the board.

The applicant, he said, was reducing the size of the medical office building from 10,000 square feet to 8,400 square feet.

“This is where we started out originally,” Lanfrit said.

In 2004, the Edison Township Council had reversed the zoning board’s earlier decision to approve the 8,400-square-foot medical building.

The newly proposed 8,400-square-foot, two-and-a-half-story building will serve as a surgery center, as originally proposed. Lanfrit said the basement would be used for storage of mechanical equipment.

The medical center, to be built at the intersection of James Street and Mundy Avenue, will be closed on Sundays. There will be no overnight patient stays at the facility, the applicant said previously. The number of parking spaces will be reduced from 73 to 50, the attorney said.

“The parking should be more than adequate, but we will have the [area for] 23 parking spaces banked on the property if necessary,” he said.

Todd Bletcher of Bignell Planning Consultants, representing the township, said that with the reduction of the building to 8,400 square feet, 56 parking spaces would be required, slightly more than is being provided.

Lanfrit said the parking spaces would be in the front of the building, facing James Street, and along the left side, rather than the proposed parking on all three sides of the building.

“We will put landscaping where the additional [23] parking spaces would have been,” he said. “If we need those spaces, we will have to take the landscaping out.”

Other modifications being made after the recent negotiations include the coloring of the building, which is being changed from red brick to earth-tone colors with stucco. The material of the roof is also being changed from metal to shingles. “This building will not stick out in the neighborhood,” Lanfrit said. Also, the only exterior light will be above the emergency door in the back of the building.

Lanfrit also addressed the issue of flood control, which has been a prominent concern among area residents. He said that although the square footage of the building is being reduced, the size of the proposed retention basins would remain unchanged.

“We hope this will relieve the concerns of the residents regarding the flooding,” he said.

Lanfrit said he and his client hope that all the modifications will be adequate for all those involved.

“This is everything we have agreed to and we hope the neighbors are happy with it,” he said.

Citizens Against James Street Medical Development, along with the Edison Wetlands Association, have come to the meetings to air concerns about the site being used for a large medical facility. Residents said they were worried about their property values, and said they did not want James Street, which consists mostly of residential units, to become like Oak Tree Road, where many businesses and specialty boutiques have opened over the years.

Many also raised concerns about the environmentally sensitive wetlands that provide flood control for the community.

Jane Tousman, a former councilwoman and an activist in the township, told the board she was still against the application.

“I hope these [modifications] work,” she said. “I still do not want to see the area changed.”