

**City of Northfield Planning Board**  
**1600 Shore Road**  
**Northfield, New Jersey 08225**  
**Telephone (609) 641-2832, ext. 127**  
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September 7, 2023

Notice of this meeting had been given in accordance with Chapter 231 Public Law 1975, otherwise known as the Open Public Meetings Act. Notice of this meeting had been given to The Press of Atlantic City on August 26, 2023 posted on the bulletin board in City Hall, filed with the City Clerk, and posted on the city website, stating the date, time and place of the meeting and the agenda to the extent known. Digital copies of the application documents, exhibits, and the Planning Board Engineer's report have been uploaded onto the city website as well if applicable.

The **REGULAR** meeting of the Northfield Planning Board was held on Thursday, September 7, 2023. ***In following with the decisions of Mayor Chau and City Council, the Planning Board will be eliminating the mandatory observation of Covid-19 related social distancing measures at their public meetings. In addition, the Planning Board will continue to air the regular meetings on Zoom video conferencing for convenience of those who do not wish to appear in public.***

Formal action may be taken at this meeting.

City of Northfield Planning Board is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

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The meeting was opened by Chairman Richard Levitt at 7:00 p.m. with the reading of the Sunshine Law and the roll call. The following were present or absent as noted.

Peter Brophy

Matthew Carney

Mayor Erland Chau

Councilman Eric Leeds-absent

Dr. Richard Levitt

Henry Notaro

Dan Reardon

Ron Roegiers

Derek Rowe

Clem Scharff  
Jim Shippen  
Paul Utts-absent  
Joel M. Fleishman, Esq.-Planning Board Solicitor  
Matthew Doran, PE, PP-Planning Board Engineer

The meeting began with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Mr. Brophy.

There was an application on the agenda from First Baptist Church of Northfield, Block 33, Lot 63, known as 1964 Zion Road, for a "D" use variance, "C" variances, and a major site plan in the R-1 zone. The attorney for the applicant was Thomas H. Darcy, Esquire of Galloway. Pastor Jeremy Rice and Robert A. Bruce, the engineer who prepared the plans, were also present to testify. Dr. Levitt swore them in. Mr. Darcy stated the project is for a 24 ft. by 70 ft. addition to include bathrooms, an office, classrooms, and an all-purpose room which will increase the functionality of the church and the convenience of the congregation.

Mr. Darcy described the approvals and variances. The church is requesting Major Site Plan approval and a (d) (3) variance due to this being a place of worship in the R-1 zone. They do not require a (d) (1) variance which is a more stringent variance. The (d) 3 is more of a relaxed standard. Places of worship are conditional uses and they do not meet the acreage which requires 5 acres and their property is 3.3 acres. They intend to prove that the property can accommodate the church and the addition. They will prove that approval of the variances will not negatively impact the zone plan and character of the neighborhood. A place of worship is an inherently positive use.

Mr. Bruce provided the zoning analysis and displayed the site plan which was labeled Exhibit A-1 by Mr. Fleishman who also confirmed the professionals as experts. He stated that total coverage is 14% and the site can handle that. The church is a principal structure and the parsonage is the accessory structure. The parsonage has a pre-existing side yard setback of 14.7 ft. where 30 ft. is required. The height of the parsonage is 18 ft. where 12 ft. is the maximum allowed for an accessory building. The sign has three existing issues. The size is permitted to be 10 sf and 40 sf is existing. The height is permitted to be 6 ft. and 7 ft. is existing. The setback is required to be 15 ft. and 5 ft. is existing. The sign has been there for a long time. Mr. Bruce said the variances do not affect the improvements and he noted that there is only one exit from the property and there is nothing affecting the county sight triangle. Pastor Rice added that the sign has been there since the 1970's and he said he can move it if the Board wants that and the size has remained the same.

Mr. Bruce described the site conditions and he prepared the site plan. The property has 585 ft. along Zion Road and 300 ft. on the left and right sides and along the back of the property. The site has a lot of open space with an existing church and parsonage. Parking is on the right and there is a gravel road to exit back on Zion Road. There is an existing dumpster and the pastor said it is now enclosed. The church has 85 seats and they need 34 parking spaces. The site contains 15 spaces and additional crushed stone spaces will be added for a total of 34 spaces which will conform. There will be one-way traffic. Mr. Bruce said the best way to measure the parking is based on the number of seats. The other functions of the church do not occur at the same time and there is a lot of space that is not used during a service. Dr.

Levitt asked how they will designate parking spaces on stone. They said they would use wheel stops. Mr. Brophy asked if they are parking spaces, aren't they required to be paved. Mr. Scharff said they can ask for a waiver. Mr. Bruce said the cartway will be an 18 ft. traffic aisle. Mr. Bruce spoke about buffering and said the neighbor has an existing tree line and the rear of the site is woods. Dr. Levitt said the site is very densely wooded. The waste/recycling area will be enclosed on three sides by a 5 ft. landscape buffer. Mr. Bruce discussed curbs and sidewalks. Zion Road is a county road and there are no curbs and sidewalks along Zion Road and they are asking for a waiver. They will be providing a 10 ft. concrete apron.

Mr. Darcy noted that the church is not increasing the size of the congregation. Dr. Levitt said sidewalks would require county approval. He asked the applicant to maintain a 4 ft. grass area for pedestrians. Pastor Rice said they would keep the area well cut for pedestrians. Mr. Bruce said they are proposing one area of landscaping in the form of a raingarden. Due to the increase in impervious coverage, they will be adding an area of flowers and small shrubs. The rain garden will have an 8-inch depression which will help with drainage. Mr. Bruce said they will have one freestanding pole light on the northernly side in the asphalt area and two building mounted lights on the south side of the addition. They are asking for a waiver for a loading zone which they do not need as they have no large deliveries. It is a requirement for buildings over 5000 sf so a waiver is requested. They are requesting a waiver for the 14 crushed stone parking spaces. They are required to have asphalt or concrete curbed parking spaces. There is no drainage issue on the site and they are requesting a waiver. They also need a waiver for the 16-ft. wide driveway on the northernly side for exiting the site. The south side has the required 18-ft. driveway. Mr. Darcy said they would like to keep the existing sign, but the pastor will move it to 15 ft. to conform. Mr. Bruce said there will be traffic control signs on site. He also said there will be no digital signage. They are also requesting a waiver of street trees as they want to keep the front of the site open. Mr. Bruce said they will comply and contact Cape Atlantic Soil, Atlantic County Planning, and the Northfield City Departments as listed in Mr. Doran's report and post the required Performance Bonds and Inspection Escrow.

Harry Harper, a licensed architect from Absecon has been in practice for almost 40 years. His firm has worked with a fair number of churches and Northfield Baptist is trying to keep its congregation and offer new things with the new offices, all purpose room, and classrooms. They will add a gable across the rear and remove the sloped area which will improve drainage on the roof. They will also be able to put mechanicals in the attic space and the addition will comply with the stringent NJ energy package. The population of the church is not expected to increase. This addition to the church will complete the church and the mission. Mr. Fleishman labeled the architectural rendering as Exhibit A-2. Mr. Harper said the addition is 24 ft. x 70 ft. and will encompass 1680 sf.

Mr. Harper discussed positive criteria. He said the site is suitable despite the deviations. The church is used two to three times a week. The stone parking lot and the site will be well maintained. The addition is behind the existing church and will not be noticeable. This is an improvement that is necessary and will pay for itself with the benefits that will be incurred. There is no detriment to the Master Plan.

Mr. Carney asked about the occupant load. Mr. Harper said normally it will be about 85 people and is busier on Easter and Christmas. Mayor Chau asked if they were considering solar panels. Mr. Harper said not at this time. They have no retention pond and want to keep the open field for drainage. They don't want to see solar panels on their roof. Mr. Carney said he would like to see a paved parking area. Dr. Levitt had no problem with the stone parking as it provides the best pervious drainage and helps with runoff. Mr. Scharff felt that if the sign is not in the sight triangle, he didn't see any reason to move it. Mr. Brophy asked where they conduct other church activities at this time. The pastor said they have used Meadowview and other centers, but Covid slowed that. They mainly use the church. Mr. Doran asked if the trash enclosure was built to code. The pastor said it was. He added that they have fifty plus people in the congregation right now and want to maintain the people they have. This addition would be a blessing to the parishioners. Mr. Brophy asked how long he has been with the church. Pastor Rice said he was the assistant pastor from 2003-2006 and when the pastor who trained him passed away in 2006, he took over as pastor.

Dr. Levitt reminded the Board that for this application the Board is operating as the Zoning Board. Mr. Fleishman agreed and said the elected officials cannot participate and only 7 voters will be called. Mr. Fleishman suggested allowing the pastor to move the sign since he is willing and it will improve the sight triangle and give better clearance. Pastor Rice gave more testimony as to parking. At services, everyone will not be in the same place at the same time and the people are families traveling together. There are adults, teens, and children. Some will be in the nursery, others will be in the junior church room, and some will be at the service in the church. Dr. Levitt added that there is a huge grass area that provides plenty of overflow parking areas. Mr. Fleishman asked if there were any parking problems during the holidays. The pastor said not at all. Most of the cars arrive with three to seven people in them. On each side there are fields and there are plenty of drainage areas. There is a lot of natural drainage and they have never had a problem.

Mr. Doran said his report had an error. There is not 14% coverage. It is actually 4.09% coverage. He said they addressed every point in his report. Mr. Fleishman and Mr. Doran discussed the waivers and they came up with five waivers. The design waivers are for the crushed stone parking and the waiver for curbed parking areas. The other waivers are for curbs and sidewalks along the front of the property, driveway widths of 20 ft. and 16. Ft., and a waiver for the loading dock. It was decided to allow the street tress to be optional for them. Mr. Fleishman said a landscape plan will have to be submitted and Mr. Doran said they have already done so. Mr. Fleishman continued by describing the "c" variance relief. They need variances for a side setback to an accessory structure where 30 ft. is required and 14.7 ft. is existing, accessory building height (the parsonage) where 12 ft. is permitted and 18 ft. is existing, and for the sign size (10 sf is permitted and 40 sf is existing) and sign height (6 ft. is permitted and 7 ft. is existing). The sign setback will not be necessary since the pastor has testified that he will move the sign to conform to the 15 ft. requirement.

Dr. Levitt opened the public session and there was no one who wished to speak. The public session was closed. Mr. Scharff reported that there was no one present on Zoom. Mr. Fleishman instructed that the jurisdiction stays with the Zoning Board and the elected officials cannot vote since the right to appeal to City Council is involved.

The first vote was for a d(3) variance for deviation of a conditional use where a 5 acre minimum lot size is required and the applicant has 3.3 acres. Mr. Scharff made the motion and Mr. Brophy seconded. The roll call vote was as follows:

Mr. Carney-yes  
Nr. Notaro-yes  
Mr. Roegiers-yes  
Mr. Rowe-yes  
Mr. Scharff-yes  
Mr. Shippen-yes  
Chairman Levitt-yes  
The motion carries.

The second vote was to add two other aspects to the d(3) variance and not to approve them as "c" variances since they are conditional use standards. These aspects involve the sign size and height (size- 10 sf maximum permitted and 40 sf is existing and height-6 ft. permitted and 7 ft. existing) and the side yard setback of the parsonage which is an accessory structure (30 ft. is permitted and 14.7 ft. is existing). Mr. Scharff made the motion and Mr. Brophy seconded. The roll call vote was as follows:

Mr. Carney-yes  
Nr. Notaro-yes  
Mr. Roegiers-yes  
Mr. Rowe-yes  
Mr. Scharff-yes  
Mr. Shippen-yes  
Chairman Levitt-yes  
The motion carried.

The third vote was for a major site plan, variances, and waivers as previously described. Additionally, the Board added an additional waiver of any additional landscaping and 4 conditions. Matt Doran's report will be attached to the resolution, they will keep a 4 ft. area along Zion Road unobstructed, the sign will be moved back to a 15 ft. setback, and all testimony will also be incorporated into the resolution. Mr. Scharff made the motion and Mr. Brophy seconded. The roll call vote was as follows:

Mr. Carney-yes  
Nr. Notaro-yes  
Mr. Roegiers-yes  
Mr. Rowe-yes  
Mr. Scharff-yes  
Mr. Shippen-yes  
Chairman Levitt-yes  
The motion carries.

Dr. Levitt asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the August 3, 2023 meeting. Mr. Scharff made the motion and Mr. Shippen seconded. The approval by voice vote was all in favor with no changes.

Dr. asked Mr. Doran for the Master Plan status and Mr. Doran said he is waiting on the Economic Development Committee information which he should have in a few weeks. He has progressed as far as he can at this point.

There was no public business to consider.

Mr. Shippen made the motion to close the meeting and Mr. Reardon seconded. Dr. Levitt closed the meeting at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Robin Atlas*

Robin Atlas, Secretary to the Board