

Norwalk Planning & Zoning Commission

125 East Avenue
Norwalk, Connecticut



MEMORANDUM

January 14, 2022

TO: Planning & Zoning Commission - Louis Schulman, Chairman
FROM: Bryan Baker, Principal Planner
RE: [#2021-41 SP – City of Norwalk Board of Education – 12 Knowalot Lane – Construction of new Cranbury Elementary School](#)

APPLICANT/OWNERS NAME/ADDRESS: City of Norwalk

PROPERTY ADDRESS/DBL: 12 Knowalot Lane/5-32-13

ZONING: AAA Residence

LOT AREA: 1,377,554sf (31 acres)

EXISTING CONDITIONS: The existing Cranbury Elementary School occupies the site. The city is planning on keeping the existing school while the new school is being constructed and then demolishing the existing school once the new school has been completed. The site is very large but also contains a large amount of wetlands which restrict the developable area on the site.

PROPOSED CONDITIONS: The city is proposing to construct a new Cranbury Elementary School on the site, which would be approximately 62,000sf in size in a two-story building. New basketball courts and baseball and soccer fields are also proposed as part of the project, no lighting is proposed for the fields. A separate entrance is proposed for bus loading and drop-off as well as a separate loop for parent loading and drop-off. 122 parking spaces are contemplated based on the parking requirement of 1.5 spaces per worker employed at any one time. A [variance](#) was obtained for the rear yard setback by the Zoning Board of Appeals and therefore all applicable zoning regulations appear to be met and detailed below.

Per the standards for special permits, the Commission may attach reasonable conditions and safeguards as it deems necessary to protect the general health, safety, welfare and property values of the neighborhood, including but not limited to, requiring additional screening of lights and parking areas, limiting the hours of operation, requiring the redesign of buildings, and similar types of safeguards and conditions. A Special Permit may be granted after determination by the Commission that the proposed use or structure is in harmony with the general purpose and intent of these regulations and after consideration of the following conditions where applicable:

a) The density of use and bulk of buildings

a. Shown below is the zoning chart provided by the applicant on the engineering site plan:

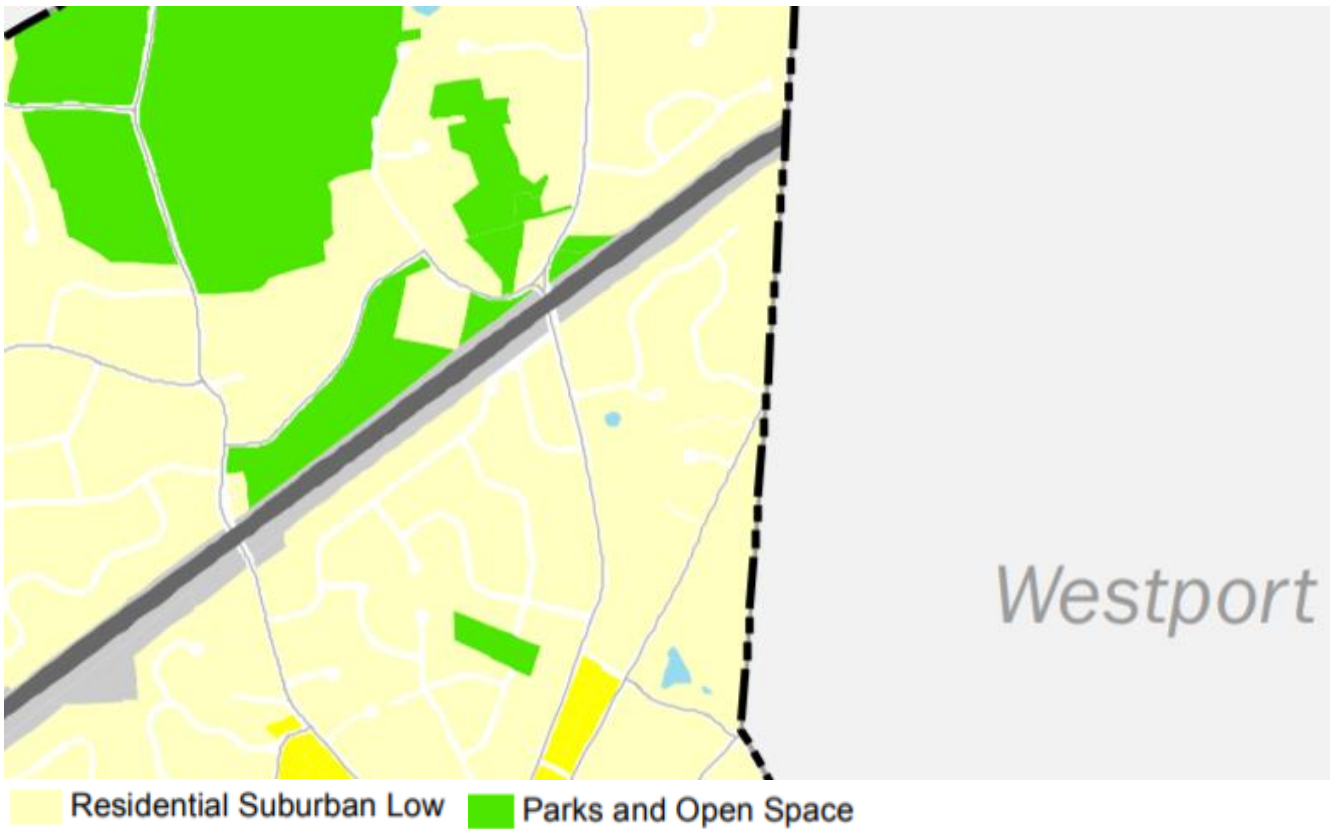
ZONING REQUIREMENTS:

APPLICANT/OWNER: CITY OF NORWALK
 LOCATION: 12 KNOWALOT LANE (MAP 5, LOT 13)

ZONE: RESIDENCE "AAA"	REQUIRED	EXISTING	PROVIDED	SECTION
MINIMUM LOT AREA	43,560 SF	±1,377,554.51 SF	±1,377,554.51 SF	118-310 (Bulk Reqr. Part 1)
MAXIMUM BLDG. AREA	25%	±3.76%	±3.2%	118-310 (Bulk Reqr. Part 1)
MAXIMUM BLD. HEIGHT	2.5 Stories & 35' (40' to Peak)	31' (26.5' TO MID)	31'	118-310 (Bulk Reqr. Part 1)
MINIMUM LOT WIDTH	150'	399.95'	399.95'	118-310 (Bulk Reqr. Part 1)
FRONT	40' x 2 = 80 FT	1100.30 FT.	1403.25 FT.	118-1450
SIDE	NEED NOT EXCEED 40 FT	180.55 FT. & 227.02 FT.	178.56 FT. & 229.24 FT	118-1450
AGG. SIDE	N/A	N/A	N/A	118-1450
REAR	30'+0.5'(BLDG WIDTH-40')= 223 FT	315 FT.	70.53 FT.	118-1450

- b. As shown on the zoning chart and as listed in the zoning regulations, the maximum building area (or coverage) allowed in the AAA Residence Zone is 25% of the lot area, the proposed school will occupy 3.2% of the lot.
 - c. Regarding maximum building height, [Section 118-810 K.](#) permits buildings such as schools to be constructed with a maximum height of 50' in a residence zone. The proposed height of the school is 26.5' to the midpoint of the roof line, which is what we measure maximum height based on, and then 31' to the peak of the roof. Furthermore, under the [Schedule Limiting Height and Bulk of Buildings – Residential](#), the maximum number of stories for any structure in a AAA Residence Zone is 2.5, and the proposed school will be 2 stories.
 - d. Setbacks for structures such as schools in a residence zone have special standards which are listed under [Section 118-1450 D.](#) The front of the property according to the zoning regulations would be the eastern property line along Field Street, with a minimum setback of 80' which is met. The side yards for the property are the southern and northern property lines with a minimum setback of 40' which is met. The rear yard setback in this circumstance is more difficult to calculate but is done by taking the minimum required setback for the specific zone (30') and then adding 6 inches for each foot of building length more than 40' as measured parallel to that property boundary. As proposed, the minimum rear yard setback would then be 223' which is not met, however, the applicant received a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals, reducing the rear yard setback to 68.45' as shown on the proposed site plan.
 - e. Parking setbacks for special permit uses in a residence zone must be a minimum of 10' from side and rear property lines and the proposal complies with this requirement.
 - f. Therefore, it is Staff's opinion that as proposed, the new school complies with all density and bulk standards.
- b) "Stable traffic flow" shall mean that site-generated traffic shall not adversely affect pedestrian or vehicular safety, conflict with the pattern of highway circulation or increase traffic congestion to a level of service (LOS) considered unacceptable by the Commission. The Commission shall not approve developments which fail to maintain a stable traffic flow unless provision has been made for the improvement of inadequate conditions**
- a. The applicant has provided a [traffic report](#) which was prepared by Stantec Consulting Services Inc. As noted in the report the same amount of parking spaces that are currently provided (122) will remain, although in a new configuration. Changes in circulation are proposed which will separate parent drop off and visitor parking from bus drop off and staff parking. The study finds that the proposed parent drop off loop should prevent any queueing from stacking onto Knowalot Lane which would improve both pedestrian and vehicular safety in the immediate area. The study concludes that there will be little impact on level of service (LOS) because of the construction of the school, with no LOS dropping below Level C at any intersection at both morning and afternoon peak hours.

- c) **Availability of mass transit facilities and provision of sidewalks, with a minimum clearance of five (5) feet without obstructions**
 - a. As part of the construction of the new school, sidewalks are required to be a minimum of 5' wide. There are no mass transit options in the nearby vicinity.
- d) **Availability and compatibility of utilities**
 - a. The site will utilize a septic system, installing a new septic tank and pipes to connect to the existing leaching fields. The site will connect to the water main that is located on Grumman Avenue. The Norwalk Health Department and First District Water Department are reviewing the proposed utility plans for compliance with their respective regulations.
- e) **Adverse impacts from noise, odor, fumes, dust and artificial lighting**
 - a. The applicant has provided a landscaping and lighting plan showing the location of all proposed lighting on the property. The property is surrounded by Cranbury Park to the north, city owned property to the south, a significant setback from the properties on Field Street which would leave only the neighbors along the western property line as having any potential adverse impacts from noise, odor, fumes, dust and artificial lighting. The applicant has worked with the neighbors on Grumman Avenue to provide adequate screening which would prevent any impacts from lighting. It is not anticipated that there will be any adverse impacts from noise, odor, fumes or dust outside of actual construction of the project.
- f) **Signs of size and design that are in harmony with the neighborhood**
 - a. All signage must comply the sign regulations.
- g) **Adequacy of yards and open space, screening and buffering**
 - a. As mentioned earlier in the memo, all setbacks are met more than the minimum requirements except for the rear setback with the abutting neighbors on Grumman Avenue. As part of being granted a variance to reduce the rear yard setback, the city has worked with the neighbors to come to an agreement on installing adequate screening and buffering.
- h) **Impact on neighborhood properties, as compared to uses and structures permitted as a matter of right**
 - a. In the AAA Residence Zone, the as-of-right uses include single-family houses, parks and playgrounds, farms and neighborhood clubhouses. The maximum height for a single-family house in the AAA Residence Zone is 2.5 stories and 35' as measured to the midpoint of the roofline. This application is not proposing a change of use as there is already an elementary school on the property.
- i) **Existing land use in the area**
 - a. The property to the north is Cranbury Park, the property to the south is city owned land and the properties to the east and west are single-family homes.
- j) **Proximity of community facilities**
 - a. The school itself is a community facility as well as Cranbury Park located on the adjacent property.
- k) **Compliance with the Zoning Code and Plan of Conservation and Development**
 - a. Knowalot Lane is proposed as residential suburban low and parks and open space on the Future Land Use map that is included in the [Plan of Conservation and Development](#).



- b. Furthermore, the POCD specifically includes goals and policies to support the improvement of Norwalk public schools.

Goals	Policies
<p>The Norwalk Public School system is the most successful city school system in Connecticut, with students exceeding state average achievement and high-need students having the smallest achievement gap.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to support the NPS Strategic Plan to improve system performance.
<p>The Modern Schools for a Growing City plan provides new and renovated schools to alleviate overcrowding and better serve students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the facilities improvement plan for the school system.

- l) Conservation of wetlands, watercourses and other ecologically viable lands**
- a. An inland wetlands permit was issued by the Norwalk Inland Wetland Agency under permit [#S21-575](#).
- m) No zoning violation exists on the property**
- a. No zoning violations exist on the property.

STAFF COMMENTS: The biggest concerns associated with the construction of the new school would likely be the impact that the new structure has on neighboring properties which includes the traffic impacts. As detailed by the applicant and in this memo, the applicant has worked with the neighbors on Grumman Avenue to ensure that adequate landscaping and screening is provided. In the applicant's traffic report, it is detailed that there will be little to no negative impact on traffic volumes. Staff does recommend that the applicant detail what sustainable measures have been included as part of the design of the school including but not limited to rooftop solar, permeable pavement, green building design and other energy saving techniques. It is Staff's recommendation that the application for the special permit to construct a new Cranbury Elementary School be approved.

Draft Resolution to Approve

**Whereas the Norwalk Inland Wetlands Agency issued permit #S21-575 on September 15, 2021; and*

**Whereas the Norwalk Zoning Board of Appeals issued variance #21-0819-03 with conditions on November 18, 2021 reducing the required rear yard setback from 223' to 68.45'*

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Norwalk Planning & Zoning Commission that application #2021-41 SP – City of Norwalk Board of Education – 12 Knowalot Lane – Construction of new Cranbury Elementary School be **APPROVED** subject to the following conditions:

1. That the building and site will be developed in accordance with the following plans:
 - a. Per all Site Plans and Architectural Drawings included in Volumes 1-3 entitled "Cranbury Elementary School" prepared by Antinozzi Associates, Stantec Consulting Services Inc. and Langan dated 11/18/2021; and
2. That any changes to the approved site plans must be approved by the Commission prior to implementation; and
3. That all accessory structures and signage shall comply with applicable setbacks as required in the Norwalk Building Zone Regulations; and
4. That all erosion and sediment controls be installed and maintained prior to the start of any construction or site work and that additional controls be installed at the direction of the Commission's Staff, as needed; and
5. That a Connecticut licensed engineer shall certify that all the required improvements, including any required off-site improvements, were installed to City standards prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Zoning Compliance; and
6. That a special permit certificate and mylar map of the approved site plan be filed on the Norwalk Land Records prior to the issuance of a zoning permit; and
7. That all conditions as required by the Norwalk Zoning Board of Appeals variance #21-0819-03 shall apply to this approval; and
8. That all conditions as required by the Norwalk Inland Wetlands Agency permit #S21-575 shall apply to this approval; and
9. That all conditions as required by the Norwalk Health Department shall apply to this approval; and
10. That all conditions as required by Norwalk DPW shall apply to this approval; and
11. That all conditions as required by Norwalk WPCA shall apply to this approval; and
12. That all CEAC signoffs are submitted prior to the issuance of a zoning permit; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this application complies will all applicable sections of the Norwalk Building Zone Regulations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the effective date of this action shall be January 28, 2022.