



TOWNSHIP OF MORRIS

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

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DANIEL 'BUZ' KENNEY
CHAIRPERSON

To: Morris Township Planning Board

From: Buz Kenney, Steve Tractenberg, Environmental Commission Members

Re: PB-11-20, Rabbinical College of America, Block 3004, Lot 21, 226 Sussex Avenue, OSGU zone

Date: August 28, 2020

At the August 13, 2020 Environmental Commission (EC) meeting, the application of the Rabbinical College of America was introduced and reviewed by the members. The EC has completed its review of the application, including inspection of the proposed project site, and notes the following:

Findings of Fact

- The application contemplates: (i) the construction of a new 3-story, 26,546 square foot building to contain classrooms, study halls and a gymnasium on an undeveloped portion of the existing Rabbinical College of America property; (ii) the reconstruction and widening of an existing access road; and (iii) the expansion of an existing parking lot
- The 2.68-acre area of disturbance is part of the 15.085 Rabbinical College of America campus, Lot 21, Block 3004, which is bordered to the north by Sussex Avenue and existing single-family residences along Deborah Drive to the south, Sunderland Drive to the west and Alexandria Road to the east.
- The overall project involves both previously undisturbed and disturbed land
- The overall project will result in removal of 71 existing trees, including 42 trees of 24" caliper and above
- Project plans call for 121 replacement trees, 324 shrubs and 238 grasses
- The project site does not include any sensitive areas
- A portion of the existing stormwater runoff from the project site flows overland to Sunderland Drive, while the majority of stormwater runoff from the project site flows overland to Sussex Avenue or is captured by existing inlets and is piped to the Sussex Avenue storm sewer
- A portion of the stormwater runoff that is piped to Sussex Avenue first flows into an existing infiltration depression approximately 4.7 feet deep
- Post-construction stormwater overland runoff to Sunderland Drive will be managed through a reduction in the drainage area
- Post-construction stormwater runoff which is piped to Sussex Avenue will be mitigated through construction of a grass-bottom detention basin
- A bioretention facility also will be constructed adjacent to the proposed structure to address stormwater runoff water quality
- The proposed stormwater management system has been designed for a 100-year storm in accordance with applicable regulation

Findings of Impact

- Post-construction impervious surface within the project site will increase by approximately 0.7 acre, building alone is 0.6 acre
- The project stormwater management plan will result in reduction in stormwater runoff from the level of stormwater runoff from the site as presently developed
- Although the Township of Morris tree ordinance gives the Planning Board the authority to require that the 71 existing trees to be removed be replaced with 284 trees, the project landscaping plan calls for only 121 replacement trees, with the balance of the new landscaping to consist of 324 shrubs and 238 grasses
- The 238 individual grass plantings called for in the project landscaping plan are specified to be fountain grass, a non-native invasive species spread by both birds and wind via seed
- The project landscaping plan calls for a variety of replacement trees and shrubs, some of which may be deemed invasive
- Warming associated with the climate crisis is expected to result in more frequent high-intensity rainfall events within New Jersey which may exceed the 100-year storm capacity of the project's stormwater management provisions
- Use of pervious materials (i.e. porous asphalt, pervious concrete) for project road and parking surfaces to be constructed would help to mitigate stormwater runoff
- The project building and related improvements should be designed and built to be as energy efficient as possible, including the installation of rooftop solar panels.

Recommendation

The principal environmental concern with the proposed project described in the application is the landscaping plan, which does not adhere to the replacement tree provisions of the Township tree ordinance and which involves at least one invasive species. The Planning Board should consider requiring additional replacement trees and that all such replacement trees and other plantings be of species native to the Township. The EC also is concerned with stormwater runoff associated with the increase in impervious surface. While the EC does not presume to have engineering expertise, it believes that designing to a 100-year storm standard in the face of expected climate change impacts may not be sufficient. Mitigation of stormwater runoff during project construction should be closely monitored. The Planning Board also should consider requiring the installation of at least one electric vehicle charging station as part of the enlargement of the existing parking lot.

In any new building project within the Township, energy efficiency should be a primary driver in the design, approval and construction process. The EC recommends that the new structure be designed and constructed to be as energy efficient as possible. The Planning Board should seek to ensure that the design meets or exceeds all existing green building standards and, to that end, the Planning Board should consider requiring the incorporation of rooftop solar panels into the final building design.

The Environmental Commission recommends approval of the Planning Board application on condition that this report be read and discussed at the Planning Board project hearing.

CC: Environmental Commission Members
James Slate, Township Engineer
Sonia Santiago, Planning Board Secretary
Arnold Chait, Applicant's Attorney