

## Government

# Franklin Township: Planning Board Approves Hamilton Street Zoning Change and Harbor Group Construction



Hamilton Street  
Malik Lyons

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SOMERSET, NJ - Two property changes were presented to the Franklin Township Planning Board on March 16, one pertaining to the Hamilton Street Business Zone and the other to The Harbor Group on Belmont Drive.

First, the Board considered an ordinance to change the zoning district designation of certain properties from Hamilton Street Business to R-7 Residential; the ordinance was referred to the Planning Board under the Municipal Land Use Law to determine if it is inconsistent with the master plan.

Even though the Hamilton Street Business Zone is intended to occur along Hamilton Street with the zone itself extending one block deep, or about 200 feet, one area in question extends more than 800 feet from Hamilton Street into the surrounding residential neighborhood.

“The proposal is to re-zone that undeveloped portion from HBD to R-7 and have the zoning boundary follow the overall pattern,” said Board Member and Planning Director/Senior Zoning Officer Mark Healey. He shared his opinion that “it is not inconsistent with the overall zone plan for Hamilton Street because this makes the zoning more consistent with the entirety of the rest of the zone.”

The Planning Board did not have any other recommendations.

Second, the Board approved an application from The Harbor Group concerning 110-120 and 130 Belmont Drive (Harbor Group owns 110-120).

The complex currently has three buildings and shared parking lots, but the proposal would give more of the property to 110-120, allowing for demolition of the two buildings and construction of a 150,000-square-foot warehouse (no tenant yet). The existing office building at 130 remains as is.

The property’s subdivision line would change from primarily east/west to north/south, running alongside the warehouse, and there would be 170 dedicated parking spaces for 130 Belmont and 117 spaces for the warehouse (a traffic expert said those numbers are sufficient).

Along with these modifications, the application includes a new sidewalk along Belmont Drive; landscaping on the property; a retaining wall between the office building and warehouse (the property drops 14 feet from the northwest corner to the southeast corner); 25-foot LED fixtures to light both parking lots (20 poles) plus lights on the warehouse and the sidewalk; and a new network of pipes and inlets to collect stormwater.

Largely because of fewer parking spaces, the site offers a reduction in overall impervious coverage.

“That is a huge positive for this site, providing a reduction without sacrificing the safety or operation of the facility,” said Brett Skapinetz, Director at Dynamic Engineering Consultants, who testified about the project as an engineer and a planner. Also in the safety category, the driveway would be widened to allow for safer truck movements and turns. Charging stations for electric vehicles would be provided, along with bike racks.

In terms of physical attributes, the warehouse would be built from precast concrete and have 30 docks (one for every 5,000 square feet of space), and its roof would be solar capable. While The Harbor Group’s intention is to have one tenant, the building could accommodate two smaller tenants.

The Planning Board’s next meeting is scheduled for April 20, when it will hear discussions about Franklin Storage’s application to construct a three-story, self-

storage facility.

Greg Waxberg, a writer and magazine editor for The Pingry School, is also an award-winning freelance writer.

A video of the full meeting can be seen below:

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