

REPORT TO THE BOARD OF MAYOR & ALDERMEN

DATE: December 8, 2025

FROM: Jaime W. Groce, Town Planner

SUBJECT: Waiver from Design Guidelines for Cornerstone Investments, 209 Washington Street, Case #51291

INTRODUCTION:

Arthur Chapman (Cornerstone Settlements), represented by Michael Walker (WalkerArch LLC), is requesting a waiver from the Design Guidelines to allow a reduction of the minimum buffer widths for a nonresidential property location at the southwest corner of Washington Street and Mt. Pleasant Road (see Exhibit 1). The subject property is zoned GC General Commercial with GC to the west and the south (see Exhibit 2).

BACKGROUND:

The existing 1,057-square foot structure at 209 Washington Street was originally constructed in 1953 as a single-family detached dwelling. The property is not within the Town's Local Historic Overlay. The applicant purchased the property in 2017 and began the process of converting the dwelling to an office. The GC Zoning District (see Exhibit 2) allows office uses "by right".

In July of 2018, the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) denied a variance for this adaptive reuse project to allow a crushed gravel parking lot. The Design Review Commission (DRC) considered the waiver request in July 2018 and found grounds exist for granting the waiver. The DRC recommended conditions to limit the extent of the waiver requests and ensure the site would be enhanced to the maximum extent practicable. The Board of Mayor and Aldermen (BMA), which has the final determination for granting waivers from the Guidelines, has not yet considered the waiver request.

A formal Site Plan Modification request was initially received in November 2019 for the property and is near entering into a "short form" Development Agreement for the related site work. Minor interior changes are needed to complete the conversion in use. Building permits for the interior work will not be issued until the requested waivers have been approved by the BMA and a Development Agreement is executed.

DISCUSSION:

1. Adaptively reusing a small residential lot into an office use has created several nonconformities as it relates to Front Yard Open Spaces/Buffers required by the Guidelines.

- The Design Guidelines require a minimum Front Yard Open Space/Buffer along Washington Street of 10 feet and Mt. Pleasant Road of 20 feet.
 - The Guidelines say, the front yard open space shall be measured from the front property line and shall not include any portion of the public right-of-way unless expressly authorized by the BMA.
 - The existing principal structure (to remain) is within both Front Yard Open Spaces/Buffers, which are measured from the property/right-of-way line. The existing buffer along Washington Street is currently only 6.5 feet +/- and the one

along Mt. Pleasant Road is only 13.57 feet (see Exhibits 3 & 4). Additions are not planned to the building within these buffers.

- Additional lawn area in the public rights-of-way of both roads will make the open spaces/buffers appear wider than they actually are. The lawn area along Washington Street appears to measure 11 feet and the one along Mt. Pleasant Road measures 25 feet (see Exhibits 3 & 4).
- The 2018 plan for the site (Exhibit 3) showed the new parking lot encroaching into the 20-foot buffer along Mt. Pleasant Road closer than the existing building is placed.
 - The parking lot would leave a buffer width of only 10 feet +/- along Mt. Pleasant Road for approximately 18 percent of the buffer width (excluding the driveway).
 - The DRC did not object to the proposed parking lot design encroaching into the buffer given the principal structure is also within the buffer, provided the required landscaping in the buffer is installed.
- The Guidelines say, where two nonresidential uses/districts are contiguous, an average buffer width of at least 10 feet shall be provided with the minimum width of the buffer being no less than 5 feet at its most narrow point.
 - The width of the buffer on the west property line varies but falls below 5 feet for around 21 percent of the property line (see Exhibits 3 & 4). The DRC found this design to be appropriate, provided the required landscaping in the buffer is installed.
 - The width of the buffer on the south property line varies but falls below 5 feet for around 28 percent of the property line due to the location of the existing nonconforming storage building (to remain) (see Exhibits 3 & 4). The DRC found this design to be appropriate, provided the required landscaping in the buffer is installed.
- The 2025 version of the plan (Exhibit 4) shows proposed landscaping within the required buffers, which will mitigate any off-site impacts from the conversion of the site to office uses and bring to property into compliance with commercial landscaping requirements. The 2025 version of the plan addresses the conditions of approval recommended by the DRC.

2. Similar buffer yard waivers were granted for the Washington Square development on the north side of Washington Street allowing front yard and perimeter buffer widths of less than 10 feet.

3. Mt. Pleasant Road is currently in an unimproved rural condition. Road improvements (i.e. curbs, gutters, drainage, and sidewalks) along Mt. Pleasant Road were not required for this project due to its limited scope. These improvements would have been required if a substantial addition was made to the building or the lot was completely redeveloped.

4. On-site detention was not required due to the limited scope of the project and proximity to a regional drainage system. The Town recently completed a project to improve the capacity of the drainage system in Mt. Pleasant Road.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff Recommends approval of the requested buffer encroachments. Allowing the limited encroachments into the buffer yards is consistent with §151.133(A) of the Zoning Ordinance says a legal nonconforming structure shall be allowed to expand operations which involve an actual continuance and expansion of the activities provided there is a reasonable amount of space for such expansion on the property so as to avoid nuisances to adjoining landowners.

ATTACHMENTS:

[Exhibit 1 - Location Map & Contacts.pdf](#)

[Exhibit 2 - Existing Zoning.pdf](#)

[Exhibit 3 - 2018 Existing Conditions & Site Plan.pdf](#)

[Exhibit 4 - 2025 Landscaping Plan.pdf](#)

PROPOSED MOTION:

To approve the requested reductions in the minimum buffer widths for 209 Washington Street, subject to the following conditions recommended by the DRC:

1. All other perimeter buffer requirements shall be met along the west and south property lines.
2. All required foundation, parking lot, trash enclosure screening, appurtenance screening, and street tree requirements shall be met for the site.
3. A Site Plan Modification application shall be submitted to the Development Department for review and approval prior to the occupancy of the building.

Board Action: Motion By _____ Seconded By _____

Vote Total	Hall	Jordan	Robbins	Marshall	Stamps	Fraser
Yes						
No						
Abstain						