


To: Village of Ridgewood Zoning Board of Adjustment
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From: John Barree, PP, AICP - john@mjplanningllp.com 

CC: Bruce Whitaker, Esq. Board Attorney
James McGrath, PE, Director of Public Works / Village Engineer
Jane Wondergem, Board Secretary

Date: March 9, 2026

Re: Westside Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood
6 South Monroe Street & South Hillside Place
Block 2403, Lot 17.01 & Block 2404, Lot 3
Planning Review - Amended Report

This memorandum constitutes a planning report for the referenced application. It updates the initial report dated March 4, 2026 to clarify some of the existing yard setback dimensions and provide several additional comments in **bold** below. As requested, I have reviewed the following materials in preparation of this report:

- Village of Ridgewood Zoning Application with attachments, dated July 21, 2025, revised November 25, 2025.
- ALTA Survey dated July 21, 2025
- Preliminary and Final Site Plan, consisting of 19 sheets, prepared by B.S Crowder, P.E. of Bohler Engineering, revised through September 19, 2025.
- Architecture Plan, consisting of 4 sheets, prepared by Mary FitzPatrick Scro of Z+ Architects, dated July 11, 2025.
- Completeness Review prepared by Kyle+McManus Associates, dated November 7, 2025.
- Response Memorandum from Ben Crowder, P.E., dated November 25, 2025.

Property Description

The subject property consists of Block 2404, Lot 3 and Block 2403, Lot 17.01, which are collectively developed with West Side Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood, its parking lot, a barn, and playground. Block 2404, Lot 3 (the Church) is on the north side of South Hillside Place and has frontage on three streets including West Ridgewood Avenue and South Monroe Street. Block 2403, Lot 17.01 is on the south side of South Hillside Place with frontage on South Monroe Street and its south side abutting Citizens Park.

The site has a length history of municipal approvals including those for the youth center, parking lot lighting and expansion, use of the second floor of the barn as a meeting hall, reconstructing the fire damaged church in 2003, and installing a wireless telecommunications facility.



Google Aerial Image of Church and Associated Facilities

Project Description

The applicant is seeking approval for a variety of site improvements, mostly located on Block 2403, Lot 17.01. The improvements include: modification / enlargement of the existing barn; a new rain garden with boulder walls; a community garden with planters, seating, and a shed; a sensory garden with walking path; a forecourt adjacent to the parking lot; a church forecourt and crosswalk on South Hillside Place; a remembrance pocket garden; a prayer pocket garden; a labyrinth and mediation court; parking lot improvements; playground improvements, sports court improvements and expansions, and new landscaping.

Zoning

The subject property is in the R-110 Zoning District. Houses of worship are a conditional use. The use is subject to the following conditions set forth at Section 190-123.B:

1. More than one institutional use on a lot. More than one institutional use shall be permitted on a lot or as part of the same development, such as but not limited to a house of worship and school as part of the same development.
2. Accessory uses. Uses that are customarily incidental and subordinate to the primary institutional use and part of the same development as the primary use shall be permitted.

3. Residences for institutional use staff. Residences for the staff of institutional uses, such as but not limited to parsonages, rectories, convents, manses and vicarages, used solely or primarily as housing shall be permitted on the same lot or on lots separate from the institutional use, subject to the following:
 - a. When such a residence is located on a separate lot from the institutional use, it shall not be considered a conditional use, but shall be subject to all of the provisions applicable to residences in the zone district within which it is located.
 - b. When such a residence is located on the same lot as the institutional use, and it is located within a separate building and its yard areas, its accessory uses and its accessory structures are generally distinct and separate from the institutional use, then it shall not be considered a conditional use, but shall be subject to all of the provisions applicable to residences in the zone district within which it is located, with that portion of the lot devoted to the residence considered its "lot" for purposes of complying with such requirements. Furthermore, the residential portion shall be excluded from the institutional use lot for the institutional use for purposes of complying with the requirements for the institutional use in this subsection.
 - c. When such a residence is located within the same building as the institutional use, or is located in a separate building but its yard areas, its accessory uses and its accessory structures are not distinct and separate from the institutional use, such residence shall be considered part of the institutional use and shall be subject to all of the requirements applicable to the institutional use.

Bulk Standards (Conditional Use Requirements 4 – 15)

Standard	Required	Existing	Proposed
Min. Lot Area	43,560 SF Net (may include non-contiguous lots within 200 feet)	244,549 SF	No Change
Min. Lot Width	150' (Principal Building / Use) 120' (Accessory Parking Corner Lot)	253.7' (Lot 3) 271.5' (Lot 17.01)	No Change
Min. Lot Depth	200'	244.8' (Lot 3) 397.7' (Lot 17.01)	No Change
Max. FAR	15%	19.1% (ENC)	19.4% (V)
Max. Coverage by Above Grade Structures	20%	10.9%	12.4%
Max. Improvement Coverage	65%	52.8%	54.2%
Max. Building Height	45'	+/- 50' (ENC)	No Change
Min. Yard Setbacks – Lot 3	Front - 45' S. Hillside Place Front - 40' West Ridgewood Ave Front - 40' S. Monroe St. Side – n/a Rear – 50'	25' (ENC) 50.3' 51.4' n/a 28.5' (ENC)	No Change
Min. Yard Setbacks Lot 17.01	Front – 45' to S. Hillside Place Front – 40' to S. Monroe St. Side – 50' Rear - 50'	460' (Lot 17.01) ? 46.8' (Lot 17.01) (ENC) 44.2' (Lot 17.01) (ENC)	456.4' ? 46.7' (V) No Change

Min. Yard Setbacks (Parking and Driveways)	Front – 40’ to S. Monroe St. Front – 45’ to S. Hillside Pl. Side – 30’ (buffer requirement) Rear – 30’ (buffer requirement)	0.1’ (ENC) ? 9.6’ (ENC) 136.7’	No Change ? No Change 148’
Min. Yard Setbacks (Outdoor Use Area)	Front – 40’ to S. Monroe S. Front - 45’ to Hillside Place Side – 30’ (buffer requirement) Rear – 30’ (buffer requirement)	495.3’ ? 111.1’ 7.9’ (ENC)	493.4’ ? 127.2’ 8.5’ (V)
Buffer Requirements – adjacent residential properties	10’ + 1’ / 5,000 SF of developable area greater than 50,000 SF; max. 30’ = 30’	7.9’ (ENC)	8.5 (V)

Variations

1. D(3) Conditional Use Variance – As noted in the table above, there are several existing and proposed conditions that do not comply with the conditional use standards in Section 190-123.B. Relief is required pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40:55D-70.d(3).
2. D(4) Floor Area Ratio Variance – The current conditions exceed the permitted FAR and the proposed conditions increase the FAR from 19.1% to 19.4% where 15% is the maximum permitted.
3. Excessive Combined Wall / Fence Height – The proposed wall and fence along the east side of the sports court exceed the maximum permitted combined height of 6 feet at approximately 6.5 feet.

Planning Comments

Variations

1. The applicant requires d(3) conditional use variance and d(4) floor area ratio relief to permit the proposed site modifications. To grant this relief, the applicant must satisfy the positive and negative criteria as established by the Municipal Land Use Law and relevant case law.
 - a. Positive Criteria: The *Coventry Square v. Westwood Zoning Board of Adjustment* decision establishes that the burden of proof for conditional use variances should focus on whether the site can accommodate the use despite the deviations from the conditional use standards. The *Randolph Town Center v. Tp. of Randolph* decision sets basically the same burden of proof for an FAR variance.
 - b. Negative Criteria: For all variances, the applicant must demonstrate that the relief will not result in substantial detriment to the public good or substantially impair the master plan or zoning ordinance.
2. The applicant requires a bulk “c” variance. Relief can be granted by the board based on either the c(1) hardship standard or the c(2) balancing of benefits vs. detriments standard. Testimony in support of the relief shall be provided.

Use and Operations

3. The applicant should provide testimony about the scope of the proposed new facilities and uses. Does the applicant expect the level of activity at the property to change as a result of the improvements?
4. The applicant should provide testimony about the use of the renovated barn and associated deck area. The testimony should describe how the barn and deck will be used, the typical hours during which they will be used, and the frequency of events. Will the barn be available for special event rentals (weddings, etc.)?
5. The proposed sports court appears to be striped for a variety of potential activities. The applicant should provide testimony about the proposed sports that will be available and the general hours of outdoor activity.

Plan and Zoning Table Details

6. The plans do not include the setback from the edge of the deck to the southern property line. This dimension should be confirmed. Additional relief may be required.
7. The applicant should confirm the areas counted as “above grade structures” to confirm compliance with the Village Code definition.
8. **The plans shall be updated to reflect a required 45’ setback to South Hillside Place. The right-of-way width is 40’ so per Village Code, the setback requirement is increased by 5’.**
9. **The plans appear to be replacing the steps on Lot 3 in the same general location. The applicant shall confirm whether the setback from South Hillside Place to the new steps is changing.**

Parking and Circulation

10. The applicant is proposing to resurface / restripe the existing parking lot on Lot 17.01. Design exceptions are required from the following standards:
 - a. Section 190-90.B – Parking stalls are required to be 9’ x 20’ or 9’ x 18’ with a 2’ curb overhang. Several rows of parking stalls are slightly deficient in width at 8.9’ and one row of spaces in the southwest corner near lot 20 is 17.8’ deep. Where there are 18’ spaces, the applicant should confirm whether a curb overhang is provided.
 - b. Section 190-90.C – Drive aisle widths are required to be 24 feet for 90 degree parking. The drive aisle widths include 22.9’, 23.4’, and 23.8’. In addition, the drive aisle at the three spaces near the barn is not dimensioned. It appears to be approximately 19’, which is substantially undersized. As part of the justification for the design exception, the applicant should provide a turning template demonstrating that those spaces can all be safely maneuvered into and out of when the others are occupied.
11. **The applicant shall confirm whether the setback for the parking area along South Hillside Place is changing. The proposed reconstruction appears to be generally in the same location, but it is not dimensioned on the plans.**

12. The plans do not propose bicycle racks. The barn is described as a “youth barn” so depending on the nature of the use, it may be useful to provide locations near the barn, and perhaps elsewhere on the property for bicycle racks.

Fences and Buffers

13. The combined height of the proposed wall and fence along the east side of the basketball court is just over 6.5’ at its tallest point. A maximum fence height / combined fence and retaining wall height of 6’ is permitted per section 190-124.F. Bulk variance relief is required for the proposed fence.
14. Is a fence proposed along the west side of the basketball court near Lot 23? The land slopes up toward the neighboring lot, but a fence may be useful to corral errant balls.
15. The conditional use standards require buffers of 30 feet in depth. There are several existing non-conforming areas adjacent to the neighboring residential properties. The applicant should provide testimony about the quality of the existing vegetation in the buffer area and condition of any fencing. Any areas with dead or damaged landscaping and any sections of damaged fencing should be replaced / repaired as part of this application.
- 16. The applicant should provide testimony about the nature of the proposed labyrinth and water feature. Is the labyrinth going to be vegetative material? Will it have some other structure? Is the water feature elevated above grade? Depending on its material and their height, the labyrinth and/or water feature may be accessory structures in the front yard of Lot 3, which would require variance relief.**

Lighting

17. The applicant should provide testimony about the hours of operation for the parking lot and other site lighting on Lot 17.01. It is recommended that the illumination levels be reduced as much as possible outside of operating hours.
18. The illumination plan does not show any significant off-site light spillage and complies in that respect with the Village Code. The applicant should provide testimony about whether the light sources for any of the fixtures will be visible to neighboring properties, creating glare. To the extent that it may be necessary, shielding should be added to the fixtures to prevent detrimental glare.

Utilities

19. The plans do not dimension the setback from the ground-mounted transformer to the rear lot line of Lot 16. Landscape screening is proposed between the transformer and the neighbor, which is an appropriate design, but compliance with the 10’ setback requirement should be confirmed.
20. The plans do not show a dumpster or other means of refuse /recycling collection near the barn and other improvements on Lot 17.01.