

**CITY OF NORWICH ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS**  
**March 10, 2026**  
**7:00 PM**  
**Regular Meeting Minutes**  
**Hybrid Meeting**  
**ZOOM & Lower Level Conference Room**  
**23 Union Street, Norwich, CT**

The regular meeting of the City of Norwich Zoning Board of Appeals was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Roll call was taken.

PRESENT: Chairman Marc Benjamin  
David Martin  
Edward Aberbach  
Robert Phoenix  
Paul Butcher (ZOOM)

ABSENT: Dorothy Travers

OTHERS: Richard Shuck, Zoning Enforcement Officer.

Chairman Marc Benjamin called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Chairman Marc Benjamin stated that Edward Aberach was now a regular voting member and that Paul Butcher would be seated as an alternate voting member.

**A. COMMUNICATIONS:** None.

**B. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES:** Robert Phoenix made a motion to accept the November 25, 2025 special meeting minutes, as amended. David Martin seconded. Chairman Marc Benjamin, David Martin, Edward Aberbach and Robert Phoenix voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

**C. OLD BUSINESS:** None.

**D. NEW BUSINESS (Public Hearing):**

**1. V# V# 26-01: 80 Stonington Road** – Application for Use Variance.

Applicant seeks a variance from the Norwich Zoning Regulations to permit the outdoor placement and storage of detached semi-trailers (box trailers) as a principal use within the General Commercial (GC) Zoning District. Property of The Mashantucket Pequot Tribe, Application of Bob's Discount Furniture, LLC, Assessors Map 111, Block 001, Lot 066.

Chairman Marc Benjamin reported that he received a letter from Mayor Singh addressed to himself and Deanna Rhodes as city staff. Chairman Benjamin stated he also had individual business conversations with the Mayor and Chairman Frank Manfredi from the Commission on the City Plan regarding the project.

Richard Shuck presented Exhibit List 1 - 16 on screen for all to view. Robert Phoenix made a motion to accept the exhibit list as presented. David Martin seconded. All voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously. Richard Shuck stated the letters received from Mayor Singh and NCDC would be added into the record.

Robert Phoenix noted that he also had a conversation with Mayor Singh regarding this agenda item, as it had come up in a personal conversation not directly regarding the agenda item specifically.

Bob Martino, principal at the law offices of Updike, Kelly & Spellacy in Hartford, reported that the parcel in question was approximately 24 acres surrounded by woodland which was shown in Photo #1 that was provided with the application. Bob Martino distributed additional photo to all members for inclusion in the record. Bob Martino explained that the parcel had 15 acres of black top with security surveillance. Bob Martino stated the parcel was zoned general commercial. Bob Martino explained that the property was the former Foxwoods employee parking lot that was then used as an event space. Bob Martino expressed that the applicant spent a lot of time and money to clean up the property.

Robert Phoenix made a motion that the additional photos provided be entered into the record as Exhibits 15 - 33. Chairman Marc Benjamin seconded. All voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Bob Martino explained that the property is owned by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and was leased to Bob's Discount Furniture for the past year as a parking facility, pursuant to the temporary accommodation by the City of Norwich which expires March 31, 2026. Bob Martino stated the purpose of the parking lot was to support the Taftville Bob's Discount Furniture warehouse, where they had been a good community partner for over 30 years. Bob Martino explained that in that period they have expanded from servicing 18 stores from the Taftville warehouse to around 50. Bob Martino stated the applicant was seeking a use variance to permit the use of the property for outdoor placement and storage of the detached semi-trailers. Bob Martino stated the goal was to continue to make productive use of the existing vacant parking lot while minimizing the impact to the surrounding area. Bob Martino added that the Taftville location was compromised from a parking standpoint due to the age of the building and the proximity of the property to the Shetucket River. Bob Martino noted that within the zoning district there were other permitted transportation and logistics related uses such as bus and tax facilities, passenger stations, bus terminals, railroad stations, transportation centers and distribution centers, all of which they felt were more intensive than their proposed use of the property. Bob Martino stated there would be no regular customer traffic, freight handling or continuous operational activity. Bob Martino continued that there would be minimal noise impacts and minimal vehicle movement, which would be limited to daytime hours only. Bob Martino stated that the existing paved parking lot presents the most suitable use without additional construction or disruption of the property.

Bob Martino stated there were significant wetlands and other limitations to the parcel. Bob Martino stated that the proposed use requires no construction or site reconfiguration. Bob Martino stated the site was currently under-utilised and there were significant utility and infrastructure challenges for large-scale development of the parcel. Bob Martino stated there were no alternative development plans at that time for the parcel and the proposed use was the most practical and beneficial use of the site given current conditions. Bob Martino stated the property had a natural woodland buffer from the neighbors and the parking would be focused on the rear of the lot away from the road. Bob Martino stated the applicant felt the variance was a proper and necessary request due to the reasonable low impact use. Bob Martino noted that the trailers were actively staged and left the property every 7 to 10 days. Bob Martino noted that Bob's Discount Furniture was responsible for maintaining the property. Bob Martino explained that the applicant felt the proposed use was consistent with the intent of the zoning regulations and was compatible with the neighborhood. Bob Martino explained that the parking facility was instrumental to their goal of continuing to service the community and create jobs locally due to the challenges for expansion at the Taftville facility. Bob Phoenix asked for an explanation of how the lack of a variance would present a hardship to the user of the property. Bob Martino explained that the hardship was the parcel itself as there were not a lot of great uses for the property as it exists today. Bob Martino stated Bob's Discount Furniture was prepared to enter another 10-year lease at their warehouse in Taftville and could not do so without the use of the Stonington Road property. Robert Phoenix clarified that denial of the variance would jeopardize the renewal of the lease of the Taftville facility. Bob Martino responded that was correct as it was critical for Bob's Discount Furniture to have a tractor trailer distribution network and that the Taftville warehouse on its own did not function without some type of supplemental parking. Bob Phoenix noted that one objection from the Commission on the City Plan was concern the trailers could deteriorate over time if left static, but it seemed as though it was presented that the trailers would be in constant use. Bob Martino responded that was accurate as there was no storage of old trailers to occur and they would be constantly turnover over. Robert Phoenix asked if there was a supervisor in charge of tracking the status of the trailers. Peter Sarantino, Senior Vice-President of Supply Chain for Bob's Discount Furniture, stated that there was a fleet safety and maintenance compliance department that oversaw their fleet nationwide, as well as a representative to oversee the trailers locally. Chairman Marc Benjamin asked for an explanation on the process of moving the trailers. Peter Sarantino responded that product was received through the Taftville distribution center and from there moved into storage or holding units which were then transferred to the holding yard, which would be the Mashantucket yard. Peter Sarantino explained that the units sit in the yard for approximately 7 to 10 days and would stay there until they are pulled back to the Taftville distribution center and external yard. Peter Sarantino stated this was the setup of their business country wide and they were now modeling the Taftville building to meet the needs of the community, their customers, and the guidelines of their distribution centers across the

country. Edward Aberbach asked if there were any options to expand the Taftville facility on its 35 acre property. Peter Sarantino responded that based on his knowledge the age and expense associated with expanding the Taftville building was not an achievable goal. Peter Sarantino discussed the layout of the existing Taftville building. Peter Sarantino explained that due the structure of the building and the location of the river alongside the property there was no space to expand the building and in that sense it would make more fiscal sense to move the business.

Robert Phoenix asked staff if approval of the proposed variance would eliminate the restricted covenants that were part of the previously approved variances. Richard Shuck stated he presented that question to the land use attorney and did not receive a specific response other than the restrictions in the other variance, whether specific or not, those restrictions would still apply until a new application is submitted. Richard Shuck explained that from the record it appeared in the past that a variance was approved for the property for the construction of a transportation center with the condition it be for employee parking only. Richard Shuck stated that was a condition of the approval to construct the very thing that the applicant was requesting a variance to use. Richard Shuck reiterated that he did not get a clear answer if the new variance would trump or create a conflict with the previous one. Discussion ensued regarding the previously approved variance for the site in juxtaposition to the one being requested.

Peter Sarantino stated that without approval of the variance Bob's Discount Furniture could not scale their business and continue to support Connecticut or the greater New England area. Peter Sarantino explained that the Taftville location was the largest distribution center in their network and service approximately 12,000 customers at any given time. Peter Sarantino discussed the various weather related issues they have experienced at the Taftville location. Peter Sarantino appealed to the board to help the applicant achieve their goal of continuing supporting Norwich. Paul Butcher asked if there would be 24-hour security at the property. Peter Sarantino responded that a gate was installed to secure the lot as well as 24-hour motion triggered video security which was monitored remotely. Chairman Marc Benjamin asked what number of trailers were being considered and where they would be located on the lot. Peter Sarantino responded 500 trailers would be located towards the rear of the property, and noted there were 300 trailers there currently. Peter Sarantino reported that the hours of operation would be Monday through Friday approximately 7:00AM to 7:00PM with occasional work on Saturday. Peter Sarantino stated there would not be a convoy of fleets moving trailers and that on average there would be 5 to 7 trucks per day going in and out of the property. Chairman Benjamin asked if the applicant was against adding additional shrubbery for screening, to which Peter Sarantino responded they were not. Chairman Benjamin asked if anything would be visible from the roadway, to which Peter Sarantino responded there would not be.

Ben Flight of 110 Palmer Street had questions of how the property would be maintained and noted there were a lot of animals in the area. Ben Flight

stated he could see the trailers from his home but that it did not bother him. Ben Flight stated he lived at the property for 9 years and heard maybe two or three trucks a day, which did not bother his family either. Ben Flight stated he was not opposed to the trailers being on the lot but wanted to ensure the quality of living would be the same. Ben Flight noted he did not notice lights or any disturbances at night.

Jackie Law of 6 Dorian Drive explained she recently purchased her home directly opposite the lot in question. Jackie Law stated she had similar concerns about the project changing the quality of the area and its wildlife impact. Jackie Law expressed that she was not opposed to the project and while she noticed trailers moving around the property in the dark she was at ease hearing the report given.

Chuck Mandell of 0 Palmer Street stated his property was exactly to the north of the lot. Chuck Mandell expressed that he was unsure of the proposed location of the trailers and noted that the two site plans submitted were over 26 years old, with surveys that did not seem to be signed or certified. Chuck Mandell explained that he was not against Bob's Discount Furniture expanding their operations but felt there was a lot of discussion regarding financial matters in relation to the Taftville site, not Foxwoods. Chuck Mandell referenced Zoning Regulations 2.4.2.2 and felt there were 32 listed uses of the property that were possible without granting a variance. Chuck Mandell questioned if any of those uses were ever explored or marketed. Chuck Mandell noted that the CCP gave an unfavorable recommendation of the application regardless of the deterioration of the trailers. Chuck Mandell expressed that he did not feel the applicant had demonstrated a hardship as explained in Zoning Regulations 7.10.1. Chuck Mandell explained that he had plans for multi-family development on his property and some of the units would end up abutting the location of the trailers. Chuck Mandell noted there were no plantings in the area to obscure the view between the properties and he was unsure if there had been a previous condition of the zoning approval. Chuck Mandell stated that trailers were not permitted in the multi-family district. Richard Shuck noted that the city zoning regulations were updated as of February 15, 2026 but he did not believe the updates affected any of the comments made. Discussion ensued regarding the proposed location of the trailers. Chuck Mandell expressed that he was not in opposition of the project but felt there was not enough buffer protection between the properties. Chuck Mandell stated he would feel better if the location of the trailers could be moved further south away from where future homes would be located. Chuck Mandell stated he would like a new landscape parcel between the northern buffer of the property.

Bob Martino explained that there were no trailers in the closest abutting portion to the neighboring land and there was an existing tree line at the north end buffer. David Martin asked what the distance was between the edge of the lot and the tree line. Discussion ensued and it was determined based on maps that the distance was approximately 20 feet.

Bob Martino noted the parcel itself presented many hardships in regards to the significant amount of wetlands on the property and the utilities that would need to be brought in for the property to be used for another purpose. Bob Martino added that he did not see the property being used for another use in the near future due to legal hardships.

David Martin asked staff if per the updated zoning regulations what was permitted for parking in the zone in question. Richard Shuck explained that a transportation center was a permitted use in the zone which was what was previously approved with a variance for the Foxwoods employee lot, but noted that was an operational use. Richard Shuck further explained that a truck terminal or storage yard were not permitted in the zone, which is what the requested variance would allow. Discussion ensued regarding the setbacks to the properties in the area in regards to potential developments.

Tim Rigney of 92 Palmer Street asked for confirmation that there were currently 300 trailers on the property and the variance was requesting 500 be located there, which Chairman Marc Benjamin provided. Tim Rigney stated the lot seemed full currently with 300 trailers and that Bob's Discount Furniture had been a great neighbor. Tim Rigney expressed he did not see an issue with a few tractor trailers moving things around daily.

Robert Phoenix made a motion to close the public hearing at 8:14PM. David Martin seconded. All in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **E. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE DECISIONS:**

- 1. V# 26-01: 80 Stonington Road** – Application for Use Variance. Applicant seeks a variance from the Norwich Zoning Regulations to permit the outdoor placement and storage of detached semi-trailers (box trailers) as a principal use within the General Commercial (GC) Zoning District. Property of The Mashantucket Pequot Tribe, Application of Bob's Discount Furniture, LLC, Assessors Map 111, Block 001, Lot 066.

Robert Phoenix motion to approve the application. Paul Butcher seconded.

Robert Phoenix stated he made his motion based on the fact that denial of the application would create an operational insecurity and put the operation of the business in jeopardy in the City of Norwich. Robert Phoenix stated while this sounded like an economic hardship he did not believe it was and felt it was an operational hardship. Edward Aberbach stated he thought it would be appropriate to include verbiage in the approval about including additional screening for the neighboring properties. Paul Butcher stated he was in favor of the application with the same caveat as mentioned by Edward Aberbach. Paul Butcher stated that the property in its current state had been under used for years and the current owners have stated they had no intentions of developing the property due to the costs involved. David Martin stated that the hardship was the shape of the property lot in addition to the location of wetlands in the center of the property which limited its use and therefore if the board did not grant the variance that in

itself was a hardship. David Martin stated the proposed use of the property was somewhat consistent with the existing variance that was granted as a transportation center, with the caveat that there would be less traffic than if the lot served as a parking lot for commuter vehicles with associated buses for public transportation. David Martin expressed that he did not feel the arborvitae screening request by other members would flourish there, not that he was opposed to the idea. Chairman Benjamin provided his personal knowledge of the history of the property and reiterated that it had been under utilized. Chairman Marc Benjamin expressed his appreciation of the clarification of the lot as a transportation center versus a parking lot and felt the application was a reasonable use for the property. Chairman Benjamin stated he was also in favor of the application but would like to see stipulations included in any approval in regards to screening. Robert Phoenix reiterated that the lot would be a dynamic changing configuration and did not need to be considered as anything other than an active parking lot. Bob Phoenix stated that as part of any approval he would like additional screening from previous approval to be included. Richard Shuck read the definition of a truck terminal into the record from the City of Norwich Zoning Regulations. Discussion ensued.

Robert Phoenix made an amended motion to approve to APPROVE V#26-01 subject to the the following conditions:

1. The application provide vegetative screening on the locations noted on the markup sketch labeled Exhibit #20 of the application.
2. The period of operations will be limited to Monday through Saturday from 7:00AM to 7:00PM.
3. There will be no more than 500 units stored in the lot.
4. The areas of prohibited parking will be acknowledged as noted on the markup sketch labeled Exhibit #20 of the application.

Hardship: Denial of the application would limit and deny the best use of the property as it is currently developed in the condition it is in.

Edward Aberbach seconded. Chairman Benjamin noted it was a difficult site and he did not feel it was unreasonable to park trailers on the lot versus transportation buses or cars. Chairman Benjamin expressed that the testimony presented that evening supported his feeling that approval of the variance was the correct decision. Chairman Benjamin noted that the applicant was not the property owner so he felt the board was not removing the right of the property owner to develop the lot in a different way within the zone, whereas the variance was an addition to that right. All voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Ed noted units should be box trailers. Marc Benjamin difficult site I do think this reasonable to develop.. I don't find it unreasonable to park trailers there versus transportation buses or cars. I did come into this meeting mixed and spoke to chair of the opposing city board and after testimony tonight feel as though we are making the right decision. Also applicant is not the owner and if a better proposal comes forward we did not take away the right of the property owner to do something else within the zone.

Variance to add to that right. All voted in favor. Passed unanimously.

**F. STAFF UPDATES:**

1. Adopted new regulations effective February 15th 2026.

**G. ADJOURNMENT:** Robert Phoenix made a motion to adjourn at 9:15PM. David Martin seconded. Chairman Marc Benjamin, David Martin, Edward Aberbach, Paul Butcher and Robert Phoenix voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,  
Katherine Rose  
Recording Secretary

DRAFT