

**WETHERSFIELD ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS**  
**PUBLIC HEARING**  
**February 26, 2007**

The Wethersfield Zoning Board of Appeals held a public hearing on February 26, 2007 at 7:00 PM in the Police Department Community Room, 250 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, Connecticut.

**PRESENT:** Morris R. Borea, Chairman  
Thomas J. Vaughan, Jr., Vice Chairman  
Bruce T. Bockstael, Clerk  
George McKee  
Frank Dellaripa, Alternate  
Matt Cholewa, Alternate

**ABSENT:** Gina P. DeAngelo  
Mike Wrona, Alternate

**Also Present:** Brian O'Connor, Chief Building

Chairman Borea opened the meeting at 7:00PM. Before the meeting started, the public was welcomed to speak regarding anything except specific cases in the past or on the night's agenda. There was no one present who wished to speak.

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**APPLICATION NO. 5971-07 James D'Amato** seeking a variance to install an additional sign at 1715 Berlin Turnpike, west side, Regional Commercial Zone (§6.3).

James D'Amato, Paul Giangrave and Frank Giangrave, 1715 Berlin Turnpike, Wethersfield, CT owners of Gatorwash appeared before the Board requesting a variance to install an additional sign. He stated that they are requesting this additional sign because they are running into issues with the current sign that they have from a visibility perspective.

Mr. D'Amato stated that there are seven (7) key points as to why they are requesting the variance.

1. 5th. Avenue Motel
2. Hooters Building
3. Gatorwash Building is set back
4. Land Elevation
5. Bushes/trees on the median
6. Customer Complaints
7. Safety concerns

Mr. D'Amato stated that with regards to 5th Avenue Motel there are issues with the building actually blocking their property for the cars that are traveling 91 Southbound merging onto Routes 5 and 15 and also for vehicles traveling south on 5 and 15. He showed pictures to the Board which illustrate this.

Commissioner Cholewa questioned if it is because the motel is too close to the road. Mr. Giangrave stated that it is; he stated that if he were to build that building today it would be in violation of the set back restrictions that are in place today.

Mr. D'Amato stated that compounding this issue is the fact that the Gatorwash building is pushed back for safety reasons. He stated that when they built the building they sacrificed potential customers for safety. He stated that they

are about 25' back from the required setback. He stated that the reason they did this was so that they can make sure that the water is off of the cars when they are pulling onto the Berlin Turnpike. He stated that they do not want a safety hazard for the customer pulling onto the turnpike. He stated that in doing this it does make the visibility harder.

Mr. D'Amato stated that the 5th Avenue Motel has two structural signs. He stated that one sign in particular is a major concern to their business. He stated that this one sign further obstructs their building from cars on the Berlin Turnpike that are positioned at the traffic light. He showed pictures which illustrate this.

Mr. D'Amato stated that the Town of Wethersfield requested that Gatorwash install a fence separating Gatorwash and 5th Avenue Motel. He stated that this fence now further obstructs the view of their building. He showed pictures which illustrate this.

Mr. D'Amato stated that with regards to the Hooters Building their signs are a lot bigger. He stated that he realizes that these signs are grandfathered in; however, they are trying to get market share just like everyone else. He stated that they are in an environment between two huge signs, 5th Avenue and Hooters. He stated that when someone goes to the carwash it is usually an impulse decision, therefore it is very important to have the visibility. He stated that they are losing some of the market share because people just cannot see them. He stated that if you take the Hooter's sign it is significantly larger than the Gatorwash sign, probably about 4 times larger. Mr. Giangrave stated that basically what they are saying is; yes, these other signs are grandfathered in, however, we are at a big disadvantage because it is not like we are two or three businesses past these signs; we are in between them.

Mr. O'Connor stated that the point of contention with the 5th Avenue Motel sign is that it is really a billboard. Mr. D'Amato stated that they offered to pay to have the sign moved to another location, however, he refused. Mr. O'Connor stated to the Board that the 5th Avenue Motel will be before the Planning and Zoning Commission, if they wish to bring up the issue of his sign.

Mr. D'Amato explained about the set back and the land elevation; he stated that as he mentioned earlier they are set back for safety concerns and the elevation was lowered significantly due to the water on the property. He showed pictures which illustrate the difference in land elevation when compared to Hooters. He stated that the problem is that since they are a lot lower and they are set back and competing for market share between 5th Avenue and Hooter's with enormous signs, it is making it very difficult for their place to be seen.

Mr. D'Amato stated that their next point is the bushes and trees on the median. He stated that these bushes/trees are now blocking the building. He showed pictures which he explained were taken from the Dunkin Donuts parking lot, which is diagonally across from the Gatorwash. He stated that these pictures clearly show that the bushes and trees located in the median are blocking the view of the building from the side.

Mr. D'Amato stated that he will get to the last two points which are probably the most important, however, first he wanted to say that when they had up this sign for about a week (which he showed pictures of to the Board) he stated that their business was up by almost 40%; adding that this was just due to the fact that people could actually see them.

Commissioner Cholewa questioned when the sign was up. Mr. Giangrave stated that they had this sign up for a few days until they were told that they had to take it down. Mr. Giangrave stated that it was up about a month or a month and a half ago. Mr. O'Connor stated that it was probably up in the beginning of January.

Mr. D'Amato stated that their two biggest concerns or greatest fear is the customer complaints. He stated that in a lot of cases it is becoming an issue of safety. He stated that they have had multiple customers complaining that they have missed entering the carwash simply because they did not see the business until they were past it. He stated that there were many times that a customer actually drove past the carwash driveway and stopped right on Berlin Turnpike and came in the exit because they missed the entrance. He stated that there was even an instance where a customer went past the carwash, entered the Hooters parking lot, turned around and went north in the southbound lane of the Berlin Turnpike to get back to the carwash.

Commissioner McKee questioned if there have been any accidents. Mr. Giangrave stated that as of this point there have not been any accidents. Mr. O'Connor stated that he is not aware of any problems.

Mr. D'Amato stated that throughout this development of building this project they have worked very well with the Town of Wethersfield and have been very compliant. He stated that he asks that the Board understand that a lot of these issues are really effecting their business and in order for us to truly be successful and do the business that we need to do we need to have more visibility. We are just in an area where we are not seen the way we should be. He stated that basically what they are doing at this point is kindly asking the Board to accommodate what we are looking for.

Vice Chairman Vaughan, Jr. questioned where they want to put the sign. Mr. Giangrave stated that he has the plan; he showed to the Board where the main structural sign is and where they are proposing to put up the additional sign.

Commissioner Cholewa stated that he is unclear as to what is being asked. Mr. D'Amato stated that they are requesting an extension of their existing sign.

Commissioner Bockstael questioned if it is a permanent sign, temporary sign, how big is the sign, etc. Mr. D'Amato stated that it is a permanent sign that is 4' x 6'.

Chairman Borea questioned that according to the plan it looks like the sign is almost right on the street. Mr. Giangrave stated that he just drew something up quickly. He stated that they have the surveyor stakes. Chairman Borea questioned how the sign was put up before. Mr. Giangrave stated that it was put up with steel posts. Chairman Borea asked Mr. O'Connor if he had seen the sign when it was put up and questioned if it was too close to the highway. Mr. O'Connor stated that he did see the sign up and it was placed fine; however, they need to come here for the variance because it is considered a banner.

Commissioner Bockstael questioned how the sign would be put up. Mr. D'Amato stated that they would like to put the sign up in a nice frame on the existing sign and make this an additional permanent sign.

Vice Chairman Vaughan, Jr. stated that they were before this Board last year with a lot of the same arguments and they were already granted a bigger sign. Mr. D'Amato stated that this was correct, however, they did not anticipate this being such a hard location to see. He stated that if the 5th Avenue sign were not located where it is it would make their property more visible.

Commissioner Dellaripa questioned when their busiest time of the year is. Mr. D'Amato stated that they really only have 3 or 4 months that are not as busy, but the rest of the months are a very busy time.

Commissioner McKee questioned if they are looking for this sign year round. Mr. D'Amato stated that they are.

Chairman Borea questioned if this were a temporary sign would there be any other options. Mr. O'Connor stated that there would not, adding that they are looking for something more permanent, with additional signage on the detached sign.

Commissioner Cholewa questioned how much of their problem is from the 5th Avenue Motel sign. Mr. D'Amato stated that is part of their problem but not all of it. He stated that a bigger sign would give potential customers coming off I91 more time to react.

Commissioner McKee questioned if they have tried any other types of marketing. Mr. D'Amato stated that they have, but a lot of their business is impulse and to get that business they really need more visibility.

There were no further questions or comments from the Board.

There was no one in the audience who wished to speak in favor of or in opposition to this application.

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WETHERSFIELD ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS  
CHAIRMAN BOREA

Commissioner Bockstael, Clerk

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**ABSENT:** Gina P. DeAngelo  
Mike Wrona, Alternate

**Also Present:** Brian O'Connor, Chief Building

**DECISIONS FROM PUBLIC HEARING**

Voting Members: Chairman Borea, Vice Chairman Vaughan, Jr., Commissioner Bockstael, Commissioner McKee, and Commissioner Dellaripa.

**APPLICATION NO. 5971-07 James D'Amato** seeking a variance to install an additional sign at 1715 Berlin Turnpike, west side, Regional Commercial Zone (§6.3).

Upon motion made by Commissioner Bockstael, seconded by Vice Chairman Vaughan, Jr. and a poll of the Board it was voted by a vote of 4-1 with Commissioner McKee opposed that the above application **BE APPROVED** with the following stipulations:

1. 4' x 6' sign in an A frame attached to the base of the existing sign.
2. Sign cannot be placed off the property
3. For a period of two (2) years

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**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Upon motion made by Commissioner McKee seconded by Commissioner Dellaripa and a poll of the Board it was unanimously voted that [the minutes of January 22, 2007](#) **BE APPROVED**.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 PM.

WETHERSFIELD ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS  
CHAIRMAN BOREA

Commissioner Bockstael, Clerk

