



TOWN OF COVENTRY, RI
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

STAFF REPORT

Project Name:	395 Knotty Oak Road Rehab + Extension
Plan Type:	Minor Land Development / Use Variance
Plan Review Phase:	Preliminary Plan stage
Owner/Applicant:	John W. Studley III
Address:	395 Knotty Oak Road
Plat / Lot / Zone:	AP 70 Lot 104 Zone R-20 Lot Size 0.74 acres
Existing Use:	Commercial
Proposed Use:	Commercial with addition
Description:	Applicant proposes to construct a 3,600 SF addition, of which 2,500 SF would be a replacement of a fire damaged section of the building and 1,100 SF of the building would be new construction of additional space. The existing use is a pre-existing non-conforming use, therefore the additional space would represent an expansion of the non-conforming use, and would require a Use Variance.

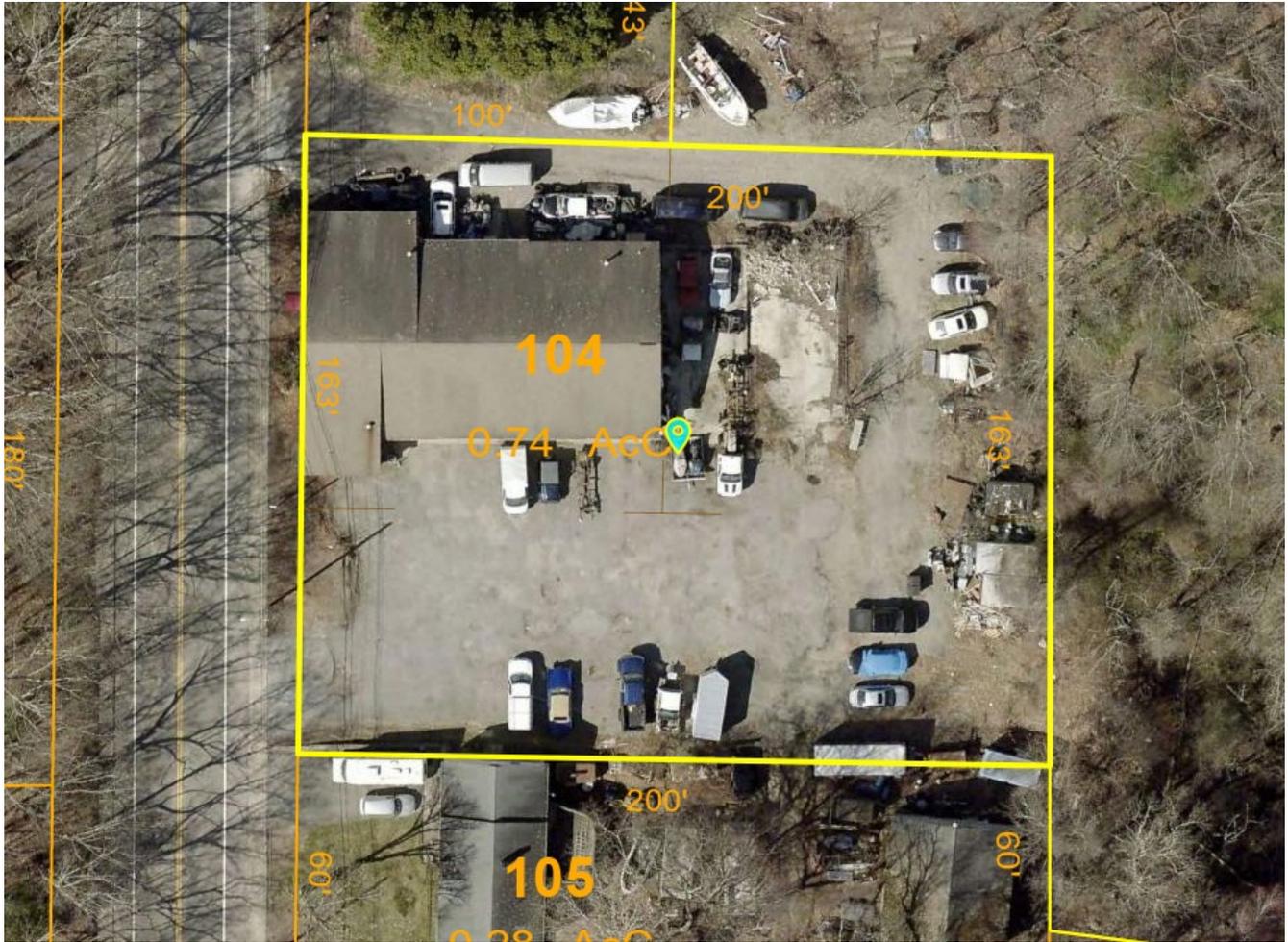
I. PROJECT INFORMATION

Overview

This matter comes before the Planning Commission as a Unified Development Review, Preliminary Plan stage application. The application was before the Technical Review Committee on February 17, 2026. The proposed project came before the Planning Commission as a Pre-Application stage project on December 17, 2025.

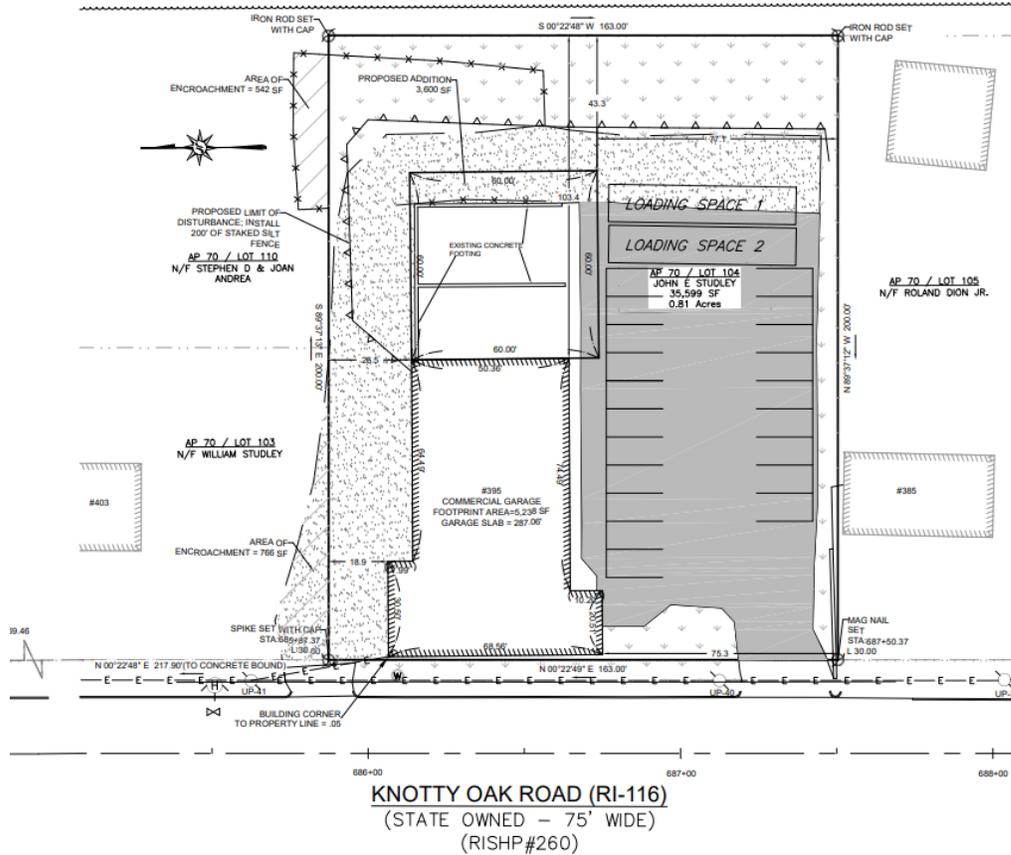
Existing Conditions

The project is proposed on a 0.74-acre parcel on the eastern side of Knotty Oak Rd., between Spring Valley Lane and Gervais Street. The subject parcel abuts residential uses on all sides. The existing garage was built in 1920. The rear third of the building burnt down between 2014 and 2018. There appear to be no wetlands on the property and the property is located in Zone X (“Area of Minimal Flood Hazard”) of the FEMA flood zone.



Proposed Conditions

The applicant has proposed to build a 3,600 square foot addition to the rear (east) of the existing structure. 2,500 square feet of the new construction would be a rebuild of the portion of the building that burned down. An additional 1,100 square feet of the proposed addition would extend south and east from the portion of the proposed building that would be a rebuild, shown below. Additionally, the applicant has made a commitment to clean-up the site as it relates to abandoned cars and various junk currently kept on the property.



Zoning

The subject parcel is zoned R-20 and currently enjoys pre-existing non-conforming status for the commercial use in a residential zone. The building sits within the front setback, almost on the property line. The proposed expansion would be located in the back of the building, therefore no dimensional variances are required. However, the expansion of the structure beyond the area that was destroyed by fire triggers a Use Variance as it would constitute the expansion of a pre-existing non-conforming use.

The applicant has requested a reduction for the number of required parking spaces from 30 to 20. § 255-1220A. states, in part, that “The Town Engineer or Planning Commission when applicable may lower the minimum parking spaces if he/she/they feel it is warranted.” While the Town Engineer has not yet responded to the request at the time of the writing of this report, the Engineer will provide his opinion prior to the Planning Commission meeting. Planning Staff have no concerns with the request.

Interdepartmental Review and Comments

Please see the attached report from the Technical Review Committee (dated February 17, 2026) for interdepartmental comments on this application.

Waivers

No waivers have been requested.

II. USE VARIANCE

Findings of Fact

Staff have conducted a review of the Use Variance component of this application for conformance with required standards set forth in RIGL Section 45-24-41. Staff's findings are as follows:

RIGL § 45-24-41. General provisions – Variances. (d)(1) states, "That the hardship from which the applicant seeks relief is due to the unique characteristics of the subject land or structure and not to the general characteristics of the surrounding area; and is not due to a physical or economic disability of the applicant, excepting those physical disabilities addressed in § 45-24-30(a)(16)"

1. The Applicant states "The repair of the structure affords the applicant to reconstruct the existing damage and fashion the addition to systemetricly balance the structure."
2. Planning Staff opine that the proposed expanded use has existed in this location since before zoning was enacted by the Town.

RIGL § 45-24-41. General provisions – Variances. (d)(2) states, "That the hardship is not the result of any prior action of the applicant"

3. According to the Applicant's submission, "The applicant purchased the lot and building as is with all damages occurring beforehand."
4. Planning Staff opine that the applicant purchased the parcel in 2025, while the fire occurred approximately 10 years ago.

RIGL § 45-24-41. General provisions – Variances. (d)(3) states, "That the granting of the requested variance will not alter the general character of the surrounding area or impair the intent or purpose of the zoning ordinance or the comprehensive plan upon which the ordinance is based"

5. The Applicant's submission states "The use and structure have existed for at least 40 years on that location, being there has had no impact on the public health, safety or general welfare. The essential character of the neighborhood has not been affected."
6. Planning Staff opine that the proposed addition will be located in the rear of the building limiting the visual impact on the surrounding area.

RIGL § 45-24-41. General provisions – Variances. (e)(1) states, “In granting a use variance, the subject land or structure cannot yield any beneficial use if it is required to conform to the provisions of the zoning ordinance. Nonconforming use of neighboring land or structures in the same district and permitted use of lands or structures in an adjacent district shall not be considered in granting a use variance.”

7. Application states “The applicant has the right to reconstruct that area of the building destroyed by fire without seeking a use variance. The area to be expanded is supplemental to the existing structure.”
8. Planning Staff opine that the applicant is primarily seeking to increase the size of the structure destroyed by fire by less than 50%.

Recommendation

Without the benefit of hearing any public comments at the meeting, staff currently have no concerns with the proposed expansion of this pre-existing nonconforming use due to the unique nature of this particular property and the mitigation planned by the Applicant. Any positive consideration of this application should adopt the documented findings of fact and **approve** the Use Variance application with a condition that the applicant receive approval of its Final Plan – Minor Land Development application.

III. MINOR LAND DEVELOPMENT

Findings of Fact

Staff has conducted an orderly, thorough, and expeditious technical review of this Preliminary Plan application for conformance with required standards set forth in RIGL Section 45-23-60, as well as in the Town of Coventry’s Subdivision and Land Development Regulations, and finds as follows:

RIGL § 45-23-60. Procedure – Required findings. (a)(1) states, “The proposed development is consistent with the comprehensive community plan and/or has satisfactorily addressed the issues where there may be inconsistencies.”

1. The Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use designation for the subject parcel is Commercial. The contractor garage use proposed for this parcel is consistent with the Commercial designation.

RIGL § 45-23-60. Procedure – Required findings. (a)(2) states, “The proposed development is in compliance with the standards and provisions of the municipality’s zoning ordinance.”

2. The current use for the subject parcel is a pre-existing non-conforming use within the R-20 zone.
3. Final Plan approval is conditioned upon obtaining relief in the form of a Use Variance.
4. The proposal will not alter the general character of the surrounding area or impair the intent or

purpose of the Coventry Zoning Code as consistent with the findings for the Use Variance component of this project.

*RIGL § 45-23-60. Procedure – Required findings. (a)(3) states, “There will be no significant negative environmental impacts from the proposed development as shown on the **final** plan, with all required conditions for approval.” (emphasis added)*

5. This finding pertains specifically to the final plan; however, no significant environmental impacts are anticipated based on the Preliminary Plan level of detail required at this stage.

RIGL § 45-23-60. Procedure – Required findings. (a)(5) states, “All proposed land developments and all subdivision lots have adequate and permanent physical access to a public street. Lot frontage on a public street without physical access shall not be considered in compliance with this requirement.”

6. The subject parcel currently enjoys adequate permanent physical access to a public right-of-way (Knotty Oak Road).
7. The proposed addition will be accessed via the facility’s existing driveway, which provides for safe and adequate circulation for vehicular traffic as well as for emergency vehicles.

Recommendation

Staff finds this proposal consistent with the standards for required findings of fact set forth in RIGL Section 45-23-60 as well as with the Town of Coventry’s Subdivision and Land Development Regulations. Staff therefore recommends that the Planning Commission adopt the documented findings of fact and waivers, and **approve** the Preliminary Plan application, subject to the conditions denoted below.

Conditions of Approval

1. Preliminary Plan approval is conditioned upon strict adherence to the associated Use Variance Application as presented and approved.
2. The applicant shall submit a proposed Record Plan with the Final Plan application.
3. Applicant shall generally clean up the site and address any encroachment on adjacent properties.
4. Applicant shall design any lighting to reduce the effect on adjacent properties with appropriate mitigation or screening.



TOWN OF COVENTRY
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TECHNICAL REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT

DATE: February 17, 2026
PROJECT NAME: "395 Knotty Oak Road Rehab + Extension"
PROPERTIES: AP 70, Lot 104
ADDRESS: 395 Knotty Oak Road
ZONE: R-20 (Residential)
OWNER/APPLICANT: John W. Studley III

This matter came before the Coventry Technical Review Committee at its February 17, 2026 meeting as a Preliminary Plan for a Minor Land Development project in accordance with Article V, D.3. of the Coventry Subdivision & Land Development Regulations.

An application and plan were initially submitted for review on February 2, 2026. The applicant proposes to construct a 3,600 SF addition, of which 2,500 SF would be a replacement of a fire damaged section of the building and 1,100 SF of the building would be new construction of additional space. The existing use is a pre-existing non-conforming use, therefore the additional space of 1,100 SF would represent an expansion of the non-conforming use, and would require a Use Variance. This project will be reviewed under Unified Development Review in which both the Minor Land Development and the Use Variance will be decided by the Planning Commission.

The members of the Technical Review Committee reviewed the following documents related to this application when preparing the comments below:

395 Knotty Oak Rehab & Extension - Preliminary Plan Set.pdf
395 Knotty Oak Rehab & Extension - Project Narrative.pdf
395 Knotty Oak Rehab & Extension - Use Variance Form.pdf

TOWN ENGINEER

- A. A town Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Permit will be required from the Town Engineering Office prior to any ground disturbing activities.
- B. It is unclear if the proposed addition will have plumbing or restroom facilities. Please clarify.
- C. Thirty (30) parking spaces are required per Section 1220 of the Zoning Ordinance. Twenty-six (26) spaces were provided. I have reviewed the information received by Louis Baldi on 2/13/26 and take no issue with the requested four (4) parking space reduction.
- D. Two (2) off-street loading spaces are required per Section 1210 of the Zoning Ordinance.
- E. Upon project completion, a Certificate of Conformance (COC) from the Engineer of Record (EOR) shall be required. The COC shall certify that the constructed project meets all required

standards, regulations and specifications in the permitting and construction documents. A certificate of occupancy will not be issued until COC is received and accepted by the town.

PRINCIPAL PLANNER

- This Minor Land Development application is being handled through Unified Development Review due to the need for a Use Variance.
- The Applicant is seeking a Use Variance for an expansion of a pre-existing non-conforming use.
- Staff note that there will be no increase in impervious cover due to the entire parcel being paved.
- Planning staff are seeking confirmation of the height of the addition.
- More information is requested on the required and proposed parking on the site.
- Information is needed on the proposed lighting locations, if changing, and the effect on the neighboring properties.
- Required loading spaces shall be shown on the plans.

PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR DESIGNEE

- DPW Designee did not review this project.

FIRE REPRESENTATIVE

- No comments at this time.

POLICE CHIEF

- No comments at this time.

PLANNING COMMISSION CHAIR

The Planning Commission Chair recused as this item will be heard before the Planning Commission.