

Memorandum

Date: April 19th, 2019

To: South Orange Planning Board

From: South Orange Design Review Board

Subject: Application #268- The Learning Center 109 & 115 South Orange Ave. West

Applicant: Ridgewood Commons Group, LLC

This memo is requested to advise the Planning Board regarding application #268 from Ridgewood Commons Group, LLC. Due to the high visibility of this building on South Orange Avenue, by the South Orange Middle School and by the River Greenway leading to the Parks and South Orange Pool, attention needs to be considered to multiple sides to enhance the village character and the public's pedestrian experience.

General Design Comments:

I. Ground Floor

With any application we always prefer the ground floor to be active space with window interest. Driveway entrances on the front façade make this challenging. We asked that the design of the façade be updated to help the building feel more active on the ground floor and a smaller driveway entrance. Larger windows on the ground floor and lighting are key ways to make the first floor more active. The revised drawings are much improved with larger windows and lights.

On the west elevation of the building, facing the Verizon building, a suggestion was made to extend the wall more to be a more typical downtown building.

II. Building Materials

Quality materials were particularly important given the prominent location and size of the proposed building. Our initial recommendation of improving the ground floor façade by adjusting the heights and proportions of materials has been incorporated. Our initial preference was a stone base to the entire building with a brick top as seen in Figure 2 below. The applicant came back with the rendering with a combination of stone, HardiPlank and brick. We very much appreciate the efforts of selecting a material like Hardipank for its durability and longevity. Due to the proximity of this building to some of South Orange's impressive historic buildings, keeping the materials to just stone and brick would be the simplest way to ensure the street side façade look its best and compliments the buildings to its left. Since the Verizon building facing the west elevation has only stone on the front façade side that seems to offer a pleasing solution for this building as well. See Figure 3 below.

Generous-sized windows are an important element to any design. Enlarging the windows was a request that was updated on the revised drawings and is a significant improvement. Changing the windows and fencing from white to black also improved the design.

III. Signage

It was a very positive improvement to see the signage on the first floor in the updated drawings. While we understand the need to use corporate branded colors, we don't recommend the sign be in glowing plastic multicolored letters. The ideal signage style would be made of an upgraded material that does not appear to be plastic. Our preference would be the version without the elephant logo like we have seen in another location. External illumination with goosenecks is preferred. The lettering could be mounted on a plaque. The plaque would ideally be the same tone as the stone trim. These updates would help improve readability.

IV. Lighting

The addition of sconces on the building is always recommended to compliment the building and encourage an inviting and safe pedestrian environment. We are very pleased to see sconces on the front of the building on the ground and second floor façade. Reviewing the updated drawings, four larger scaled sconces on the ground floor would be enough. See figure 3. We would also recommend about four sconces along the side of the building facing the parking lot. We recommend quality fixtures and lighting with a warm temperature to be the most inviting. A wonderful lighting accent would be to have the trees up-lit with a low warm light on the parking lot side and the one front tree on the west façade facing South Orange Avenue. This will enhance the building's side and frame it at night.

V. Landscaping

To help break up the extensive side and back façades, and to soften the visual impact of the building, we recommend adding trees or greenery to wrap around the site perimeter. See renderings below with trees added for reference. Different locations around the building may be better suited to different scale and types of tree or evergreens due to building architecture or sun. This can be determined at a later date.

In conclusion, we very much appreciate the applicant attending our Design Review Board meeting and their efforts to update drawings to respond to our recommendations. Their full color renderings were incredibly helpful in this review process. We feel reviewing color samples of the building materials and lighting fixtures should be done at a later date and onsite to ensure the best color selection.

Figure 1: Original facade

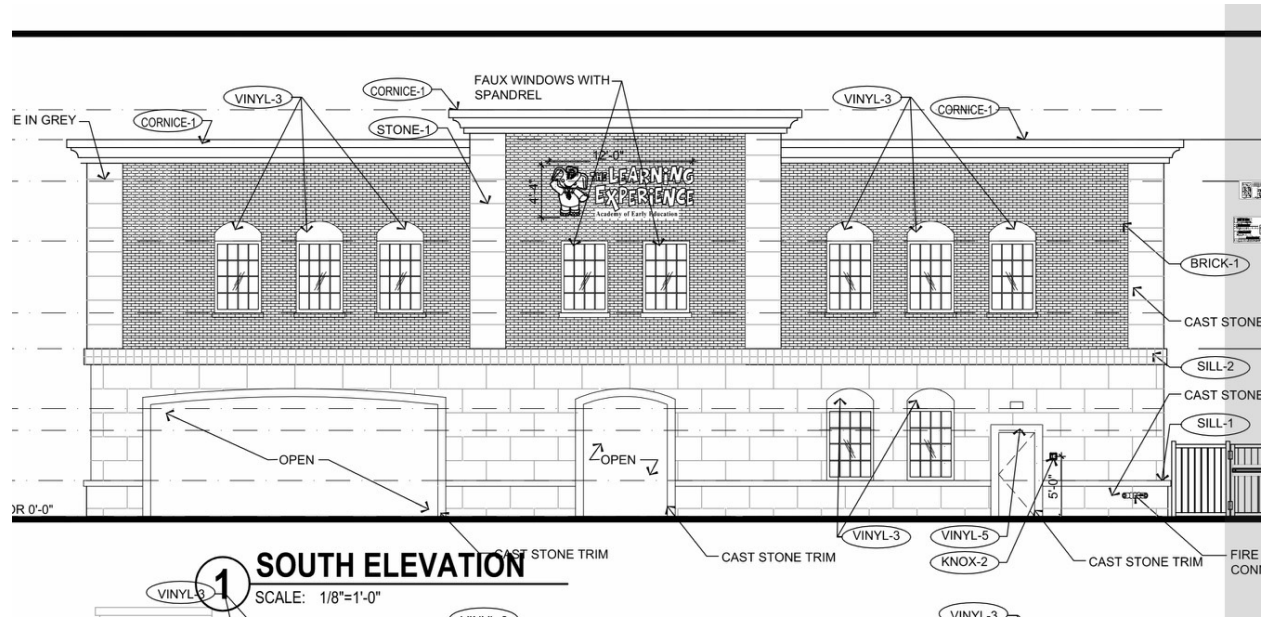


Figure 2: Design Review Board's rendering to highlight recommendations



Figure 3: Suggested signage with gooseneck lights added to applicants updated rendering. To clarify materials recommendation, this image shows stonework extending up to the second floor on the front façade to mimic the Verizon building to the left. Brick would then be on the sides and back.



Figure 4: Brick was added to applicants updated rendering on the side to clarify recommendation. Four sconces would also be an enhancement on the parking lot side between trees. Trees added to visualize placement. Up lighting of trees would be ideal on this side along with the one tree facing the avenue on the left of the building.



Figure 5: Small-scale trees are added to the back of applicant's updated rendering to help visualize landscape. The appropriate planting for scale, sun and maintenance can be determined at a later date.

