

The Richland Township Zoning Hearing Board met March 5, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. to hear the Appeal or Application of the Applicant, East Hills D S A A Limited Partnership and Brew Team Group, LLC for property owned by East Hills D S A A Limited Partnership located at 1523 Scalp Avenue, Richland Township, Cambria County, Pennsylvania, which is zoned C-2 General Commercial District. The Applicants requested a variance from Richland Township Zoning Ordinance Sections 240-105, 240-107, 240-109 and 240-110 to reduce the required off-street parking spaces for Tax Parcel 50-255.-202.000, known as East Hills Plaza shopping center, by 13% or 58 parking spaces, for the construction of a 7 Brew drive thru coffee shop.

Present:

Bill Patrick

PJ McGowan

Dave Strushensky

Eber Verhovsek

Mark Kishlock

Eric D Hochfeld, Solicitor

Tiffany Shomo, Secretary

Absent:

Rodney Kniss

Mr. Patrick began the hearing at 6:30 pm with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Hochfeld began the hearing by listing exhibits. Board Exhibit #1 was the appeal application with attachments. Board Exhibit #2 was the Richland Township Zoning Ordinance, by reference, and Board Exhibit #3 was the posting of the municipal building, the property involved, advertising in the Tribune-Democrat and notification of this hearing to adjoining property owners via certified mail.

Court stenographer Lori Behe swore in the following:

1. Sally Feather
2. Matt Peters, Director of Operations (7Brew)

Mr. Peters explained that the applicant is seeking a parking variance associated with the proposed project, which would utilize 58 existing parking spaces within the shopping center. He emphasized that the proposed use has a relatively small physical footprint and acknowledged that the primary concern is the reduction in available parking. However, he noted that a substantial number of spaces would remain and stated that the applicant has already engaged in discussions with neighboring business owners regarding the impact. Mr. Peters added that the intent is to introduce a high-quality use that will positively contribute to the community.

Mr. Peters then presented the proposed traffic flow plan for vehicles entering and exiting the site. He described a clearly marked system with directional arrows guiding drivers, maintaining two

lanes of traffic throughout the site. Vehicles will travel along designated parking columns rather than cutting through individual parking spaces. He stated that the operational goal is to avoid any queuing within the parking lot columns, with an estimated service time of approximately two minutes and thirty seconds per order. All vehicles will remain within the defined double-lane configuration. While special promotional events, such as “swag days,” may temporarily increase traffic volume, the goal remains to contain all activity within the designated lanes.

Regarding operations, Mr. Peters outlined the proposed hours of operation as daily from 5:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., with extended hours until 11:00 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. He noted that business typically declines after 11:00 a.m., which coincides with increased activity at nearby food establishments such as Little Caesars and Firehouse Subs, suggesting complementary rather than competing peak periods. The facility will not offer dine-in service; however, a walk-up option will be available, primarily intended for emergency personnel or oversized vehicles, with approximately 50 percent of such customers anticipated to be in uniform (EMS, Fire Department, etc.).

Mr. Peters explained that there will be no mobile ordering, order-ahead system, or speaker box. Instead, once a vehicle enters the lot, an employee equipped with a tablet will approach within approximately one minute to take the order. Staffing levels will be adjusted based on demand to maintain efficiency. While exact daily traffic volumes are uncertain, he estimated a few hundred vehicles per day, with demand distributed throughout the day rather than concentrated in a single peak period.

He also addressed the proposed use of music on-site, indicating that speakers will be installed both inside and outside the building. The volume and music selection will be carefully regulated, with employees permitted to select music within established guidelines to create a controlled and welcoming atmosphere. Mr. Peters stated that sound levels will range between 50 and 60 decibels and are designed to remain contained within the property, such that the music would not be audible from nearby businesses like Burger King or Dairy Queen.

Ms. Sally Feather added that multiple locations were evaluated and that the selected site represents an underutilized portion of the parking lot, currently used primarily by park-and-ride employees. Mr. Peters expressed confidence that the project will not detract from the shopping center’s functionality but will instead enhance it. Ms. Feather further noted that based on her daily observations, that section of the parking lot is typically underused.

In discussing signage, Mr. Peters indicated that while specific details are not yet finalized, the site includes space on an existing retail center sign panel. The building itself will feature modest, neutral design elements intended to blend with the surrounding architecture, including a dimmable blue LED sign designed as a subtle accent rather than a prominent or intrusive feature.

Mr. Peters stated that the busiest time of day is expected to be in the morning, with secondary increases occurring after school hours. He noted that traffic patterns vary by location, with typical

volumes of 8 to 10 vehicles in the morning peak and smaller increases to approximately 6 to 8 vehicles during afternoon periods. He reiterated that the business model emphasizes direct customer interaction, and while there is currently no mobile app or pre-order capability, future options such as QR code ordering may be considered to improve efficiency.

He further explained that on the exit side, the two-lane configuration continues, with drinks hand-delivered to customers. Pavement striping will clearly delineate pedestrian areas for employee safety. Orders are staggered to ensure that vehicles do not exit simultaneously, even with dual lanes in operation.

When discussing competition, Mr. Peters noted that the business model differs from traditional competitors, as it does not include food service, dine-in options, or catering. He identified concepts such as Dutch Bros and Starbucks as somewhat comparable but emphasized that the focus is exclusively on beverages. He stated that the goal is to create new customers through a personalized, human-centered experience rather than divert business from existing establishments. He also confirmed that the franchise is committed to remaining beverage-only, consistent with the company's brand standards established by its CEO.

Mr. McGowan raised concerns regarding the overall parking supply, noting that the plaza currently requires 445 spaces but only provides approximately 387. Removing an additional 58 spaces would further increase the deficiency. He also expressed concern about traffic flow and the potential impact on the already busy Eisenhower intersection, one of the most heavily traveled in Cambria County. Mr. Peters responded that the company places significant emphasis on traffic management and employee training, with more than 70 employees trained in best practices to ensure efficient operations. He stated that, based on their experience, they would not pursue the project if prior data indicated significant operational issues.

Additional questions were raised regarding site design and infrastructure. In response to Mr. Patrick's inquiry about stormwater management, Ms. Feather stated that two to three new catch basins will be installed to address drainage and site slope, noting that this issue has been carefully evaluated. Mr. Peters added that their engineering team has proactively addressed Highway Occupancy Permit (HOP) requirements and related considerations with PennDOT.

Mr. Hochfeld inquired about property ownership and leasing arrangements, to which Ms. Feather responded that the property will remain under the ownership of East Hills Partners, with prior subdivision approval granted by Richland Township. She indicated that the site is currently close to meeting required parking standards, estimating approximately 440 existing spaces.

In response to questions about employee parking, Mr. Peters stated that only three to four employees are typically on-site at any given time, with staggered scheduling to minimize parking demand. Regarding snow removal, Ms. Feather indicated that excess snow will likely be relocated to an area in front of Ollie's Bargain Outlet.

Further discussion addressed parking compliance and existing vacancies within the plaza. Ms. Feather noted that although the Wine and Spirits location is currently vacant, it is still included in the parking calculations as retail space, reflecting a fully occupied scenario. She confirmed that there are no formal shared parking agreements with adjacent properties, although an access agreement exists with neighboring parcels, including Windber Medical and Rite Aid.

Mr. McGowan also referenced specific parking counts within portions of the plaza, noting 139 spaces between certain entrance points. Clarification was sought regarding tenant layout, with Ms. Feather identifying Cartridges Galore as one of the central tenants. She provided the Board with an updated map labeled “Applicant Exhibit 1 – Proposed 7 Brew Concept Plan,” while Board members noted that the 777 Game Room appears to function as a central reference point within the plaza layout.

There were no further board questions.

There were no responses from audience.

Mr. Peters offered closing remarks, emphasizing broader consumer trends, particularly the continued shift toward “to-go” services extending into 2025 and beyond. He reiterated the project’s alignment with this trend, including the walk-up component, and expressed his belief that the proposed use is well-suited to complement the existing retail environment. He noted that the concept is intended to integrate seamlessly into the shopping center, describing it as “fitting a puzzle piece,” rather than introducing a more intensive use such as a full-service restaurant with indoor seating and additional demands. Mr. Peters concluded that the proposal is consistent with the character and function of the surrounding tenants.

Mr. McGowan made a motion to deny the applicant’s request of a variance to reduce the required parking spaces for the East Hills Plaza as requested. Seconded by Mr. Verhovsek. All in favor.

Mr. Verhovsek made a motion to adjourn the hearing at 7:49 pm. Seconded Mr. Strushensky.

Respectfully submitted,

*T. Shomo*

Tiffany Shomo  
Secretary