



TOWN OF COVENTRY, RI
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

STAFF REPORT

Project Name:	Janelle Art Studio
Plan Type:	Minor Land Development with Associated Dimensional Variances
Plan Review Phase:	Preliminary Plan Stage
Owner/Applicant:	Michael Janelle
Address:	420 Washington St.
Plat / Lot / Zone:	AP 56 Lot 77 Zone VMC Lot Size 6,221 Sq. Ft.
Existing Use:	Vacant Lot
Proposed Use:	Personal Art Studio
Description:	The applicant proposes to construct a small art studio on a currently vacant 6,221 SF lot. The applicant is seeking zoning variances from the minimum required landscape buffer, minimum number of required loading spaces for a commercial building, the minimum distance between a curb cut and intersection, the minimum distance between the subject curb cut and the closest abutting curb cut, and relief from providing the engineering report to accompany the above curb cut request.

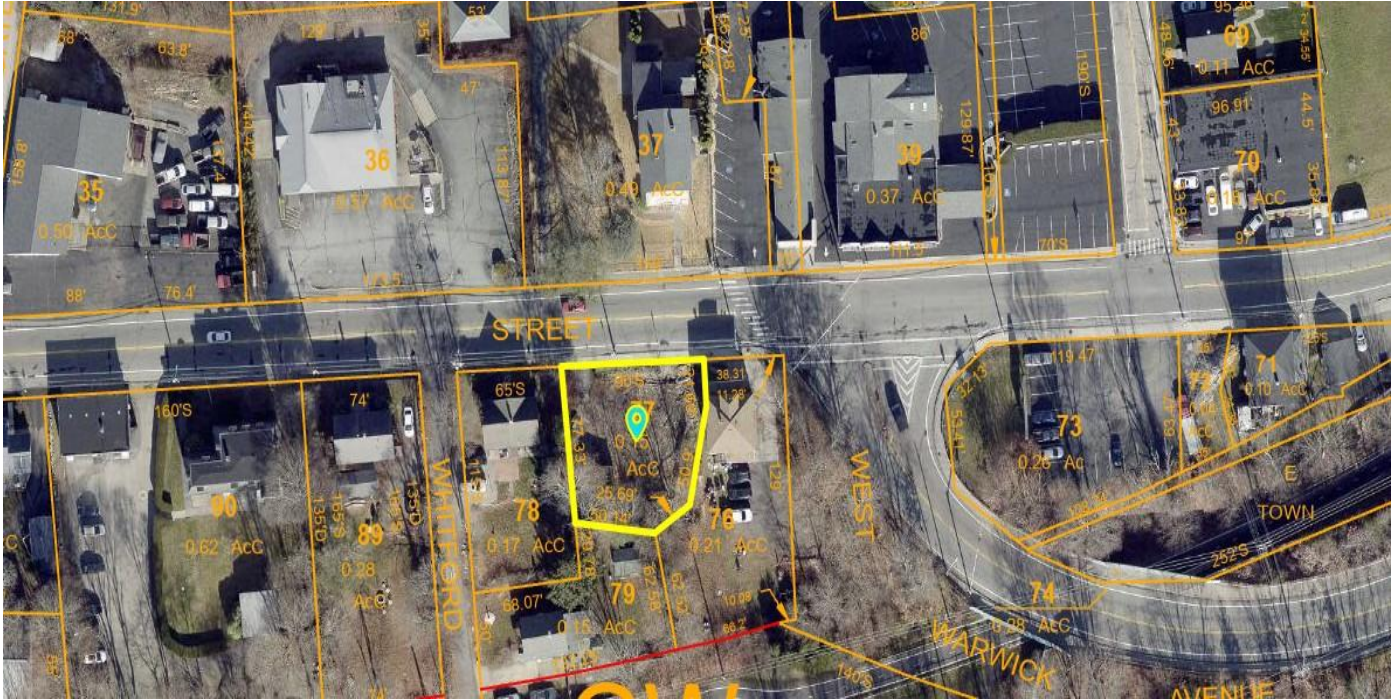
I. PROJECT INFORMATION

Overview

This matter comes before the Planning Commission as a Unified Development Review Application for a Minor Land Development with associated Dimensional Variances in accordance with Article V, § D.3. of the Coventry Subdivision & Land Development Regulations. The application came before the Technical Review Committee on May 18, 2026.

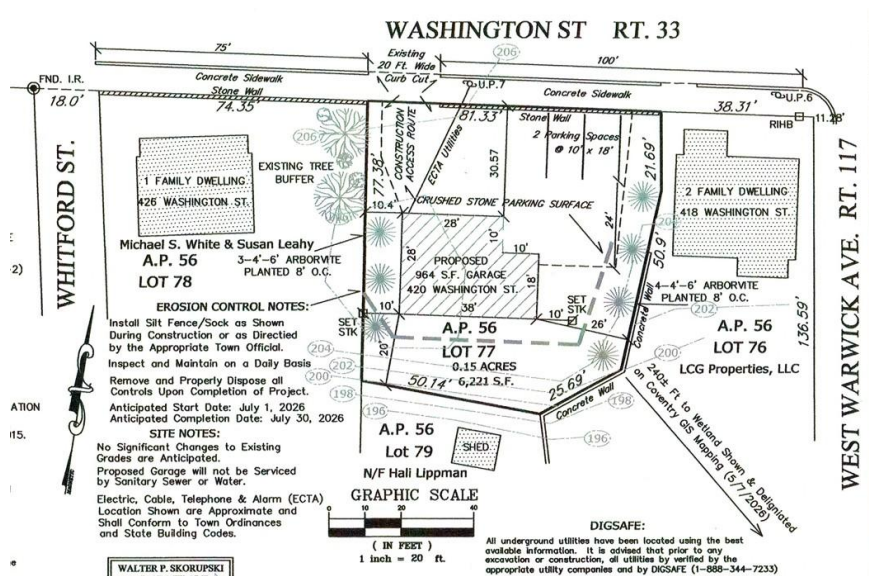
Background and Existing Conditions

This item will be reviewed at the Preliminary Plan stage for a proposed Minor Land Development of a 6,221 SF parcel at 420 Washington Street. The subject parcel is currently vacant, and directly abuts multiple residential properties. This parcel is located in the VMC (Village Main Street Commercial) Zone, which consists of a mix of residential and commercial uses, including a funeral home, car repair shops, and other stores within the direct vicinity of the parcel.



Proposed Conditions

The applicant is proposing to construct a 964 SF personal art studio on the vacant parcel. With this, the applicant is proposing plantings on either side of the building, as well as a crushed stone driveway/parking surface. *This proposed structure will only serve as a personal art studio/workshop to the applicant, and will not be open to the public.*



Zoning

The subject parcel is zoned VMC (Village Main Street Commercial), and the proposed use of the art studio is allowed by-right in the VMC zone. The applicant is seeking variances from the minimum required landscape buffer, minimum number of required loading spaces for a commercial building, the minimum distance between a curb cut and intersection and the closest abutting curb cut, and relief from providing the engineering report to accompany the above curb cut request.

Interdepartmental Review and Comments

Please see the attached report from the Technical Review Committee (dated May 18, 2026) for interdepartmental comments on this application.

II. DIMENSIONAL VARIANCES

Findings of Fact

Staff have conducted a review of the **Dimensional Variance** components 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)"

- Applicant provided the following answers: The land is too small for the required buffer zone and loading space, plus the curb cut is preexisting.
- Staff added the following considerations: This parcel is quite small, and could not reasonably accommodate any kind of commercial development (even small scale like in this case) without relief being granted. Without relief, this lot is essentially unbuildable for this allowed use due to the size of this substandard lot of record.

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

- Applicant provided the following answers: The lot is preexisting and the applicant has made no attempts to subdivide.
- Staff added the following considerations: The hardship is not due to any prior action of the applicant because they did not create the unique shape and size of the subject parcel.

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"

- Applicant provided the following answers: The variances are necessary for the art studio, which is an allowed use in the VMC zone.
- Staff added the following considerations: Though the subject parcel directly abuts two residential properties with historic characteristics, the surrounding neighborhood contains a diverse mix of land uses. Nearby properties include multiple auto repair businesses, a funeral home located directly across the street, and various other commercial shops and stores throughout the area. As such, the proposed art studio would be consistent with the existing character and mixed-use nature of the neighborhood. Regarding the existing curb cut for which relief is sought, the applicant has indicated that the space will function solely as a personal art studio and will not be open to the public. Additionally, no commercial deliveries are anticipated at the property. As such, the applicant has stated that traffic impacts associated with the use would be negligible, with access to the site limited primarily to the applicant himself. When compared to other uses permitted in the area, it is reasonable to conclude that the proposed art studio would generate little to no measurable impact on traffic volumes.

*§45-24-41(e)(2): "In granting a **dimensional** variance, that the hardship suffered by the owner of the subject property if the dimensional variance is not granted amounts to more than a mere inconvenience, meaning that relief sought is minimal to a reasonable enjoyment of the permitted use to which the property is proposed to be devoted. The fact that a use may be more profitable or that a structure may be more valuable after the relief is granted is not grounds for relief."*

- Applicant provided the following answers: If the variances are not granted, the property would be unbuildable for my art studio (allowed use).
- Staff added the following considerations: As noted above, without the requested relief, there would be no viable opportunity for commercial development on the parcel, despite several commercial uses being otherwise permitted within the VMC zone. Absent such relief, the property would effectively remain vacant and unusable for any practical purpose by the applicant.

Dimensional Variance Recommendation

Staff finds this proposal consistent with the standards for required Dimensional Variance findings of fact set forth in RIGL Section 45-24-41. Staff therefore recommends that the Planning Commission adopt the documented findings of fact and **approve** the Dimensional Variance application with a condition per below.

1. The applicant shall receive approval of the associated 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 proposed art studio is a permitted use within the VMC (Village Main Street Commercial) zone. Staff finds that the proposed use is consistent with the general character of the surrounding area, as several nearby businesses (auto repair shop, stores, funeral home, etc.) exhibit similar commercial uses and characteristics.

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. This Preliminary Plan Minor Land Development approval is conditioned upon obtaining Dimensional Variances, and must maintain compliance with such decisions.
3. Aside from the noted Dimensional Variances, the Minor Land Development will comply with all other provisions of the Zoning Ordinance.

*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)*

4. 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)(4) states, “The subdivision, as proposed, will not result in the creation of individual lots with any physical constraints to development that building on those lots according to pertinent regulations and building standards would be impracticable. (See definition of Buildable lot). Lots with physical constraints to development may be created only if identified as permanent open space or permanently reserved for a public purpose on the approved, recorded plans.”

5. There is no subdivision being proposed, thus will not result in the creation of individual lots with any physical constraints

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 (Washington Street).
7. The proposed art studio will be accessed via the parcel'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 **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 Dimensional Variance Application as presented and approved.
2. The applicant shall submit a proposed Record Plan with the Final Plan application.



TOWN OF COVENTRY
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TECHNICAL REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT

DATE: May 18, 2026
PROJECT NAME: "Janelle Art Studio"
PROPERTIES: AP 56 Lot 77
ADDRESS: 420 Washington Street
ZONE: VMC (Village Main Street Commercial)
OWNER/APPLICANT: Michael Janelle

This matter came before the Coventry Technical Review Committee at its May 18, 2026 meeting as a Unified Development Review Application for a minor land development with associated Dimensional Variances in accordance with Article V, § D.3. of the Coventry Subdivision & Land Development Regulations.

An application and plan were submitted for review on April 30, 2026. The applicant proposes to construct a small art studio on a currently vacant 6,221 SF lot. The applicant is seeking zoning variances from the minimum required landscape buffer, minimum number of required loading spaces for a commercial building, the minimum distance between a curb cut and intersection, and relief from providing the engineering report to accompany the above curb cut request.

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

Janelle Art Studio - REVISED 5-8 Existing Conditions.pdf
Janelle Art Studio - REVISED 5-8 Proposed Conditions.pdf
Janelle Art Studio - Renderings.pdf
Janelle Art Studio Notice.pdf
Janelle Art Studio - Project Narrative.pdf
Janelle Art Studio - Variance Forms.pdf

PRINCIPAL PLANNER DESIGNEE

- Applicant is seeking a dimensional variance for the 50' minimum required landscape buffer. Applicant is proposing plantings on either side of the building to mitigate neighborhood impacts and demonstrate the semblance of a buffer.
- Applicant is seeking a dimensional variance for the minimum number of required loading spaces (1) for this commercial structure. Applicant has clearly noted that there will be no industrial

deliveries to this property, and that his structure is not large enough to accommodate a loading space.

- Applicant is seeking a dimensional variance for the minimum distance between a curb cut and intersection, and relief from providing the engineering report to accompany the above curb cut request. Code requires commercial properties be 150' from the closest intersection, where this property is 75 feet from the closest intersection (Washington St. & Whitford St. intersection).
- Applicant is seeking a dimensional variance for the minimum distance between the subject parcel's curb cut and the closest abutting curb cut. Code requires commercial properties be 150' from the closest curb cut, where this property is 85 feet from the closest curb cut.
- All state and outside local permits shall be provided at final plan stage.
- This development is occurring in a Village Main Street Commercial zone, which allows for a mix of residential and commercial uses. While the property directly abuts two residential properties, there are several commercial uses in the direct vicinity, including a funeral home and multiple car dealerships across Washington Street.
- Staff note that the parking requirements for this commercial structure are satisfied by the two (2) parking spaces noted on the plan.
- Applicant has noted that he will be the sole inhabitant of the space. This art studio will *not* be open to the public, and will serve as a "hobby shop" art studio for the applicant. With this, the applicant has noted a low volume of traffic, likely not generating an increase.

TOWN ENGINEER

- A) No comment.

PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

1. The application is void of water and sewer connections to the building
2. The building does not meet the minimum size lot if the applicant intends to convert the proposed Art Studio to a dwelling unit.

FIRE REPRESENTATIVE

- No comment.

POLICE CHIEF

- No comment.

PLANNING COMMISSION CHAIR

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