

**ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT
BOROUGH OF ESSEX FELLS
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF MAY 28, 2026**

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. The Open Public Meetings Act announcement was read as required by law. Those present were: Chairman Michael Candido, Vice-Chairman Michael Spellman, Secretary Thomas O'Beirne, Oscar Bate, Bernard D'Avella, William Kovacs and Chris Shearin (7:10 p.m.). In addition, Michael D. Sullivan, Esq., Board Attorney, was present.

On motion made by Board Member Shearin, seconded by Vice-Chairman Spellman, the minutes of the meeting of April 23, 2026 were adopted unanimously by all those eligible to vote.

The next matter to come before the Board was the application of Vincent Sodano, 14 Hillbury Road, Block 2.01, Lot 5 for a floor area ratio variance. Vincent Sodano was present along with Julie Anne Cecere, 175 Fairfield Avenue, Unit 4C, West Caldwell, New Jersey a licensed architect and professional engineer in the State of New Jersey who was unanimously accepted as an expert. Ms. Cecere noted the applicant is seeking a floor area ratio variance to permit 19.9% where 17.4% is existing and a maximum of 17% is allowed. She said the plan was designed cognizant of the existing nonconforming floor area ratio and was minimally invasive and the applicant understands that floor area ratio variances are not granted lightly. The applicant's proposal will fit within the character of the existing neighborhood and is proportionate to the existing home.

Ms. Cecere advised that the applicant's plan will rectify two undesirable conditions with the existing home including a first-floor bathroom door that opens into the kitchen and a second-floor master bathroom which contains two toilets and a visible shower in between. Ms. Cecere referred to Sheet A-3 of the plan set dated March 19, 2026 which consisted of 12 photographs of the subject property as well as other nearby properties on Hillbury Road. The applicant's plan would raise the garage roof line six feet with dormers facing the front which is consistent with other area homes. The garage addition is complementary to the main portion of the home and replaces an unattractive roof line within an aesthetically pleasing addition. The one-story addition to the rear will not be visible from the street.

The increases to the first and second floor are 229 and 288 square feet respectively and the total increase in floor area including the dormer and roof extension is 558 square feet. In response to a question from a Board Member, Ms. Cecere indicated the garage roof is slate and following construction of the addition, the garage roof will be slate. It was not clear whether or not any of the existing slate could be reused. Ms. Cecere acknowledged receipt of a memorandum from Petry Engineering, LLC dated April 21, 2026 and stipulated the applicant would comply with comments 5.1 through 5.6 contained therein.

The matter was opened to the public and no one wished to be heard.

Board Member Kovacs noted the existing house is not small and the proposed increase is not insignificant, however, the massing from the street is not really impacted and he was in favor of the application. Board Member D'Avella noted the home is attractive and the applicant's proposal would make it more attractive. Adding to the back of the house would not impact anyone and the view from the street is the same. Board Member Bate stated he was in favor of the application. Board Member Shearin stated he was also in favor the application and complimented Ms. Cecere on her presentation. Secretary O'Beirne noted a significant number of homes in the area have dormers in the front as proposed and he was in favor of the application. Vice-Chairman Spellman indicated he was in favor of the application and complimented the design by Ms. Cecere. Chairman Candido stated the changes to the garage would have a positive impact on the streetscape and the changes to the rear would not be visible from the street. He believed the benefits substantially outweighed any detriments and he was in favor of the application.

On motion made by Board Member D'Avella, seconded by Board Member Shearin to approve applicant's request for a floor area ratio variance of 19.9% where a maximum of 17% is allowed subject to the following conditions: (1) compliance with comments 5.1 through 5.6 contained in the review memorandum of Petry Engineering, LLC dated April 21, 2026, (2) the applicant shall be bound by all representations made on his behalf in testimony presented to the Board, and (3) the applicant shall be responsible for the payment of all escrow charges incurred in connection with review of this matter was approved by a vote of 7 – 0 (Chairman Candido, Vice-Chairman Spellman, Secretary O'Beirne and Board Members Shearin, Bate, D'Avella and Kovacs voting in the affirmative).

There being no further business to come before the Board on a motion made by Board Member D'Avella, seconded by Board Member Shearin, the meeting was duly adjourned at 7:40 p.m. by unanimous vote.



A. MICHAEL CANDIDO, Chairman
Zoning Board of Adjustment
June 25, 2026