

July 22, 2016

**TO:** Building & Planning Committee Members

**FROM:** Christopher Leswing, PP, AICP, Assistant Director, Planning

**SUBJECT:** AMENDMENT PLAN – 600 Righters Ferry Road, The Royal Athena, Bala Cynwyd, LD# 3683A, Ward 9. *Christopher Leswing*

### **Proposal**

The applicant, Kevin Kyle, of Righters Ferry Associates, LP (RFA), is seeking **Amendment Plan** approval to reconfigure the approved public gathering space and plaza areas and the removal of nine (9) parking spaces.

The proposal is illustrated on the accompanying set of plans that includes two (2) sheets, prepared by Orsatti & Stuart Associates, Inc. dated July 6, 2016, last revised July 18, 2016.

### **Background**

On May 15, 2013, the Lower Merion Township Board of Commissioners approved a Preliminary Plan showing the transfer of 5,248 square feet from 600 Righters Ferry Road to 615 Righters Ferry Road and the construction of two elevated apartment houses containing 593 units, 898 total parking spaces including 338 in a parking garage and 8 trailhead parking spaces, a recreational trail and a 9,665 square foot public gathering space. The project includes the use of the Pencoyd Bridge for vehicular traffic by residents and emergency vehicles and pedestrian traffic by residents and the general public.

The requested amendments are the due to physical changes to the required public gathering space and private recreational plaza areas in connection with providing electricity to the site from PECO's high tension powerlines which required the installation of a number of transformers. Due to the fact there is floodplain on the property, the transformers were required to be elevated above the floodplain level.

**The size, appearance and location of the transformers not only changed the configuration but also completely changed the character of the approved public gathering space. Therefore, the applicant is required to amend the plan to include a design of the public gathering space which accommodates the physical improvements.**

### **M-District Public Gathering Space & Plaza Areas**

For this development the applicant utilized a density increase provision in the M-District to achieve the proposed unit count. The density increase requires a mixed use element or in lieu of the required commercial space a minimum of 7,500 square feet of public gathering space must be provided. The applicant opted to not provide commercial space and instead provided a 9,665 square foot public gathering space adjacent to the eastern property boundary.

The design and open space standards for apartment houses include a requirement for open air plaza areas for use by residents of the development equal to 3% of the total lot area.

## Approvals

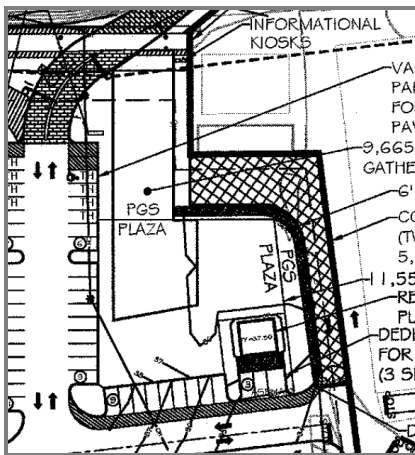
The application requires the following approvals:

- Amendment Plan approval

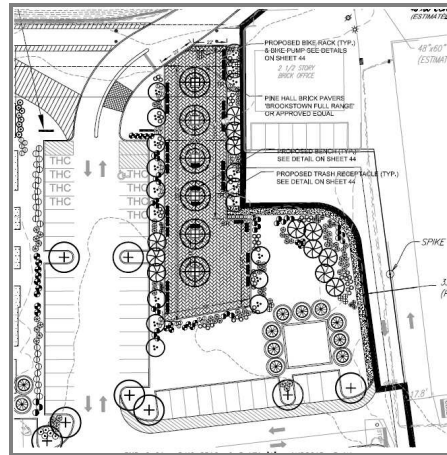
Plaza Area			
	Required (sq. ft.)	Approved (sq. ft.)	Proposed (sq. ft.)
Plaza A	3% of Lot Area (597,380 sq. ft. x .03)	11,556	9,177
Plaza B		6,815	6,818
Plaza C		-	2,700
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,921*</b>	<b>18,371</b>	<b>18,695</b>

Public Gathering Space		
Required (sq. ft.)	Approved (sq. ft.)	Proposed (sq. ft.)
7,500	9,665	10,030

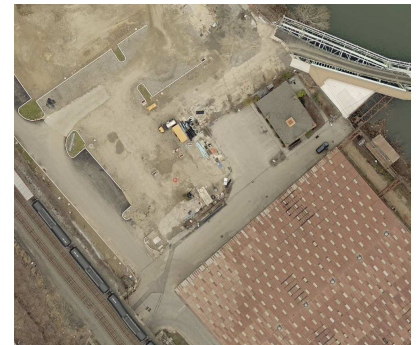
Impervious Surface			
Permitted (% & sq. ft.)	Existing	Approved (sq. ft.)	Proposed (sq. ft.)
60%	80.9%	59.2%	10,030



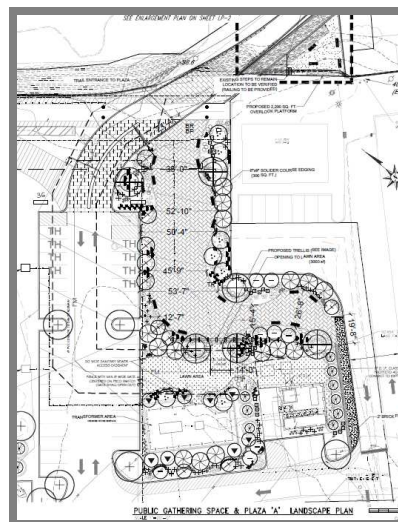
Previously Approved Area



Previously Approved Design



Proposed Area



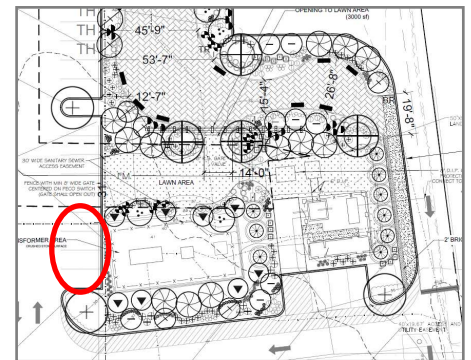
Proposed Design

## Issues

### 1. Public Gathering Space

The size and quality of the public gathering spaces have been impacted by the installation of the PECO transformers. Staff has worked with the applicant to redesign the public space to minimize the visual effect that both the elevated transformers and the pump house have on the space, with the goal of creating an attractive space for residents and users of the trail to gather and engage in recreational activities. The public gathering space has been extended to include an area that is cantilevered over the river and which connects to the Pencoyd bridge. Staff observed that the applicant recently installed a significant amount of chain-link fencing in this area and notes that a condition of approval required the removal of all chain-link fencing from the site. Therefore, staff recommends that the chain-link fencing in this area be removed as well.

In an effort to reduce the visual impact of the utilities on the space and create a direct pedestrian connection to and through the space, the applicant has reoriented the space from a linear to a more curvilinear design. The applicant has also included screening elements around the transformers such as a fencing and a trellis. Staff recommends four parking spaces located along the internal access driveway be removed to allow for additional landscape screening along the western side of the transformers.

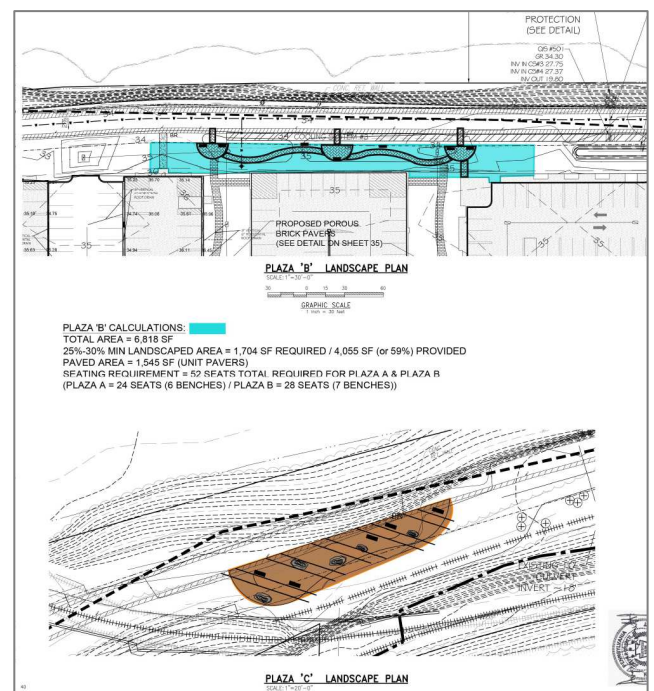


An important element of the location of the public gathering space is that it connects significant elements on the site including the public pedestrian access to the bridge and the public trail. The redesign provides an improved bike and pedestrian connection from the Pencoyd Bridge to Righters Ferry Road and an existing gate leading to West Laurel Hill Cemetery, which connects to the Cynwyd Heritage Trail. Staff would like to ensure that the pedestrian connections to this space are provided. Staff has included a condition requiring the applicant to continue to work with staff to provide the appropriate connections, including linking the space with Righters Ferry Road and making the space ADA accessible by adding a ramp from the public trail.

### 2. Plaza Areas

The approved plan showed two Plaza areas (Plaza A & Plaza B) and the proposed plan creates a third plaza area. Plaza A is located adjacent to the public gathering spaces, Plaza B is located adjacent to the trail and new Plaza C is located along the western portion of the property adjacent to the tow path bridge.

Plaza C is located in an underutilized portion of the site and incorporates railroad ties, a nod to the property's historical railroad connection which also meets a condition of approval requiring the



applicant to incorporate industrial material from the site.

### **3. Parking**

The applicant is proposing the removal of nine parking spaces adjacent to the pump house located along the access drive to screen the transformers from the entrance to the site. Staff notes that the spaces are not required for Phase 1 of the development, however they are required for the full build out of Phase II. The applicant may seek to hold these spaces in reserve at the time that Phase II is constructed. The applicant may also seek conditional use approval in the future to hold the additional four parking spaces requested to be removed in Issue no. 1.