

June 30, 2025

TO: Planning Commission Members

FROM: Sarah Carley, Planner

SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY LAND DEVELOPMENT PLAN
1 Belmont Avenue, Bala Cynwyd, Ward 9, LD# 3925PP

PROPOSAL

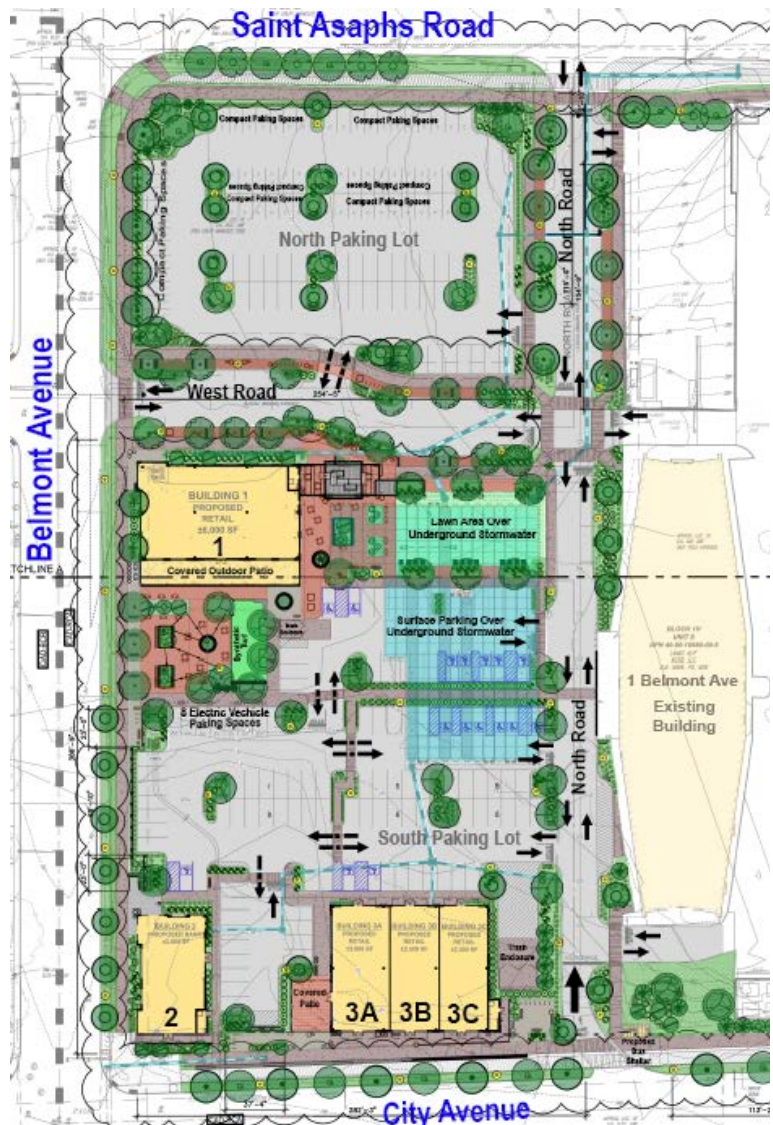
The applicant, George Broseman, Esq., on behalf of KGSB, LLC (Applicant) is seeking Preliminary Land Development Plan approval for improvements at 1 Belmont Avenue in Bala Cynwyd (Property) including:

- Three (3) commercial buildings (17,700 SF total gross floor area.)
- 14,724 SF of public gathering space.
- Two (2) new minor streets with on-street parking.
- 226 surface parking spaces.
- Onsite stormwater management system.

Waiver Request: The Applicant seeks relief from Code §135-3.2(A), requesting to waive the Tentative Sketch Plan review process for the project.

Submission: Materials submitted include:

- Preliminary Land Development plans prepared by Bohler Engineering consisting of 35 sheets originally dated 11/01/24 and last revised 06/20/25.
- Landscape and Lighting plans prepared by Stuart and Associates, LLC consisting of 11 sheets originally dated 01/17/25 and last revised 06/20/25.
- Architectural drawings prepared by RHJ Associates, PC consisting of six (6) sheets dated 06/19/25.
- Parking Assessment Study and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Strategies prepared by Traffic Planning & Design, Inc. last revised 05/15/25.



KEY PLAN REVISIONS SINCE LAST REVIEW

The Planning Commission reviewed a tentative sketch plan for the project on 11/04/24 and the Applicant subsequently requested to waive the Tentative Sketch Plan.

Significant changes from the Tentative Sketch include:

- Revised architectural design including the addition of a tower feature on Building 2 at the corner of City Avenue and Belmont Avenue.
- A pergola structure connected to Building 3 along West Road.
- West Road realigned to comply with a PennDOT requirement to intersect Belmont across from the 121 E City Avenue driveway.
- Adjustments to accommodate potential future PennDOT intersection improvements at Belmont Avenue and St. Asaphs Road.
- Pedestrianway along Belmont Avenue and connecting to the City Avenue District trail network.
- Greening and lighting improvements to the north lot surface parking area.
- Consolidated storm water management system situated beneath Public Gathering Space and parking lot.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

The Property is a 6.8-acre double corner parcel on Belmont Avenue between City Avenue and St. Asaphs Road. To the east, the property abuts 225 E. City Avenue.

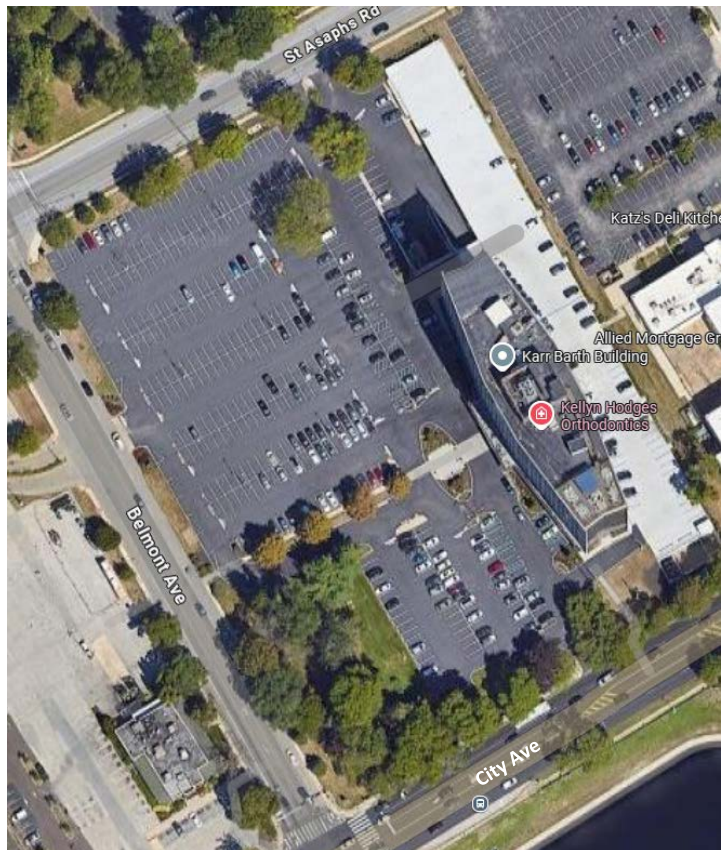
The property is currently improved with a 12-story commercial office building with an attached partially underground parking structure, large surface parking areas and driveways connecting to adjacent streets. At the corner of City Avenue and Belmont Avenue, the Property features a grassy area with mature trees. The existing building with attached parking will remain.

The construction of a mixed-use development on the adjacent property at 121 E. City Avenue (across Belmont Avenue) is currently underway and includes 15,547 SF retail commercial use and 220 residential units. A master plan for the large site to the north, across St Asaphs Road (231-251 St Asaphs Road), was approved in 2022 and Phase 1 of the Bala Plaza development is currently under land development review.

PREVIOUS APPROVALS

The Applicant received previous land development approval (LD #3889) in 2022 for a larger-scale project on the Property to construct two (2) residential/ commercial mixed-use structures on the existing surface parking area of the site including:

- An 18,881 SF 7-story building with 165 units and 2,674 SF commercial use.
- A 35,647 SF 5-story building with 107 units and 25,844 SF commercial
- A 595-space parking structure.
- A public gathering space, internal roadways and streetscape amenities.



The current proposed project differs significantly from the previously approved project which included multi-story mixed-use structures and a grocery store at the City Avenue corner. While the buildings on the proposed plan are a much smaller scale than previously approved, the public improvements including a public gathering space, pedestrianways, new minor streets, street trees, and sidewalks are the same.

REVIEW PROCESS & MEETING SCHEDULE:

The purpose of a Preliminary Land Development Plan is to determine the final locations and dimensions of buildings, driveways, streets, sidewalks, public gathering spaces, parking lots, landscape and street trees, and stormwater infrastructure. The plan must comply with the Township's Comprehensive Plan, Zoning and Subdivision Land Development Ordinance, and Official Map.

Tentative Dates for Preliminary Plan Review

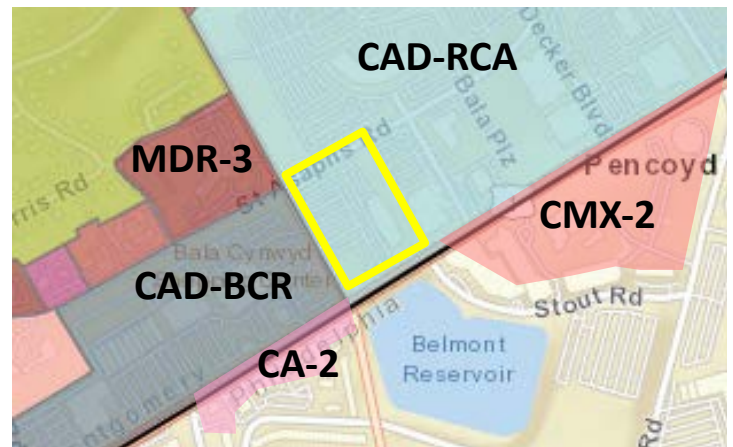
→	06/30/25	Planning Commission
	07/09/25	Building & Planning Committee
	07/16/25	Board of Commissioners

The Township's Land Development approval process is illustrated in the [Subdivision & Land Development Flowchart](#). This application review is currently in *Stage 4: Public Meetings*.

ZONING

The Property is located in the [City Avenue District-Regional Center Area \(CAD-RCA\)](#) zoning district and is an existing non-conforming lot due to a greater than 600' lot width.

Adjacent property zoning includes CAD-RCA, CAD-BCR, and MDR3 on the Lower Merion Township side of City Avenue, and CMX-2 and CA-2 commercial/commercial mixed-use on the Philadelphia side.



Dimensional Standards - CAD-RCA §155-6.6

Lot Occupation	Required	Existing	Proposed
Lot width	600 feet maximum	CITY AVE: 467.3' BELMONT: 642.2' (ENC*) ST. ASAPHS ROAD: 467.0'	CITY AVE: 467.3' BELMONT: 389.7' ST. ASAPHS ROAD: 269.5'
Impervious surface	70% maximum	76.6% (ENC)	69.5% With Reserve Structure 69.7%
Primary frontage	60%	N/A	CITY AVE: 60% BELMONT: 60% WEST: 60.5%
Frontage Yard Type	See §155-3.5	N/A	Urban Yard - Permitted
<i>*Existing Non-Conforming (ENC)</i>			
Building			
Build-to-Line	City Ave: 25' min, 40' max All Others: 20' min, 30' max	N/A	Building 3 (City): 31.7' Building 2 (City): 37.4' Building 2 (Belmont): 23.1' Building 1 (Belmont): 24.8' Building 1 (West): 29'

Floor area ratio (FAR)	0.7 (1.75 max with density bonus)	0.72	0.78 (using public gathering space* 0.15 density bonus)
Height	2 stories or 28' min	N/A	28'
* A public gathering space at this location is required as shown on the City Avenue District Official Map.			

PARKING

Reserve Request: The Applicant made a conditional use request that was reviewed by the Planning Commission on 11/04/24 and heard by the Township Hearing Officer on 11/11/24. The Applicant requested conditional use approval for reserve parking, pursuant to Code §155-8.3, to hold 60 parking spaces in reserve while undertaking the proposed land development project. If ever needed, a 36,000 SF lined parking structure with 237 parking spaces total will be constructed on the site of the currently proposed surface parking area between West Road and St Asaphs Road. The Township Hearing Officer recommended approval of the conditional use request to hold 65 spaces in reserve.

Vehicle Parking	# Spaces
Existing Office	344
Required for Proposed	339
TOTAL REQUIRED	683
Total Proposed	584
Conditional Use Recommended to Hold in Reserve	65
Additional Reserve to be Requested	34

Since the date of the Conditional Use Hearing, staff has asked the applicant to increase greening in the north lot and PennDOT has provided comments regarding potential future intersection improvements. Subsequently, the applicant will request to hold an additional 34 vehicle parking spaces in reserve. The Board of Commissioners will consider this request in July.

Electric Vehicle: While the proposed land development is subject to the electric vehicle requirements of §135-4.9(R), electric vehicle spaces are required to be installed only if the development requires more than 25 additional parking spaces. With 778 existing spaces and only 683 required spaces, the proposed development results in a net loss of parking. Regardless, the Applicant intends to install seven (7) electric vehicle spaces in addition to the six (6) spaces in the existing structured parking.



Bicycle Parking: The Applicant intends to host a bike share station on the Property to provide an active transportation option for employees, shoppers and nearby residents to navigate the City Avenue District and the Township's trail network. With support from Montgomery County, the Township is working with Indego Bike Share and coordinating with the City Avenue District and three sites, including 1 Belmont, to add publicly available bike share stations in or near City Avenue District. The 1 Belmont station will have 15 spaces and provide both conventional and electric bicycles.

PATHS AND PUBLIC GATHERING SPACE

The Property occupies a pivotal location on the Township's City Avenue District Official Map, situated almost in the center of the City Avenue zoning district and bounded by the Belmont Avenue primary axial north from City Avenue. The official map codifies the Township's commitment to install pedestrianways and multipurpose paths as development occurs in City Avenue and to transition of the area from being automobile-oriented to pedestrian-oriented.

The CAD Official Map requires a public gathering space on the Property and public multipurpose paths along City Avenue and St. Asaphs Road. While a multipurpose path is not required on the east side of Belmont Avenue, to enhance

connectivity and encourage pedestrian and active transportation access to the site, the Applicant proposes to install a 10'-wide path, exceeding the walkway width required.

The proposed public gathering space will be situated in the center of the Property at the intersection of the new West Road and North Road and will consist of two contiguous areas wrapping around Building 1 and fronting Belmont Avenue and West Road. The public gathering space will feature lawn and hardscape areas, moveable and bench seating, landscaping in large raised planters and shade trees.

Pedestrianways §155 Table 6.6.1	Required	Proposed
City Avenue	24' wide total 6' landscaped verge at curb 8' public multipurpose path 2' verge 8' public walkway	24' wide total 6' landscaped verge at curb 8' public multipurpose path 2' verge 8' public walkway
Belmont Avenue (City to West)	14' total 6' landscaped verge at curb 8' public walkway	17.5' total 7.5' landscaped verge at curb 10' public walkway
Belmont Avenue (West to St. Asaphs)		21' total 11' landscaped verge at curb* 10' public walkway
St. Asaphs Road	23' total 5' landscaped verge at curb 8' public multipurpose path 2' verge 8' public walkway	30' total 12' landscaped verge at curb* 8' public multipurpose path 2' verge 8' public walkway
<i>*Verge widths allow for potential future PennDOT intersection improvements.</i>		

Public Gathering Space (PGS) §155 Table 6.6.5	Required	Proposed
Size	5% lot size minimum Net Lot = 294,481 SF	14,724 SF

BELMONT AVENUE / ST. ASAPHS ROAD INTERSECTION

PennDOT is exploring intersection improvements at the intersection of Belmont Avenue and St. Asaphs Road. The Township is working with PennDOT to integrate intersection improvements into the Township's land use and circulation plans for the City Avenue District. As part of the approvals for previously approved plans (LD# 3889), the Applicant has modified its plans for the Property to accommodate the potential PennDOT project.

TOWNSHIP AND REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLIANCE

The proposed project is located in the City Avenue Regional Center as defined by the [Land Use Element](#) of the 2016 *Lower Merion Township Comprehensive Plan*. The goal of the Regional Center is "to transform the predominant auto-oriented, office-based environment into a more functionally diverse live/work/shop environment." The proposed project will result in an overall more productive land use than the Property's existing use as surface parking. The addition of two minor streets will create smaller blocks and the implementation of streetscape improvements will result in a pedestrian-friendly environment in alignment with the intent of the CAD-RCA legislative code.

The City Avenue District area of Lower Merion Township is identified as a Regional Mixed Use Center in the Future Land Use Plan of the Montgomery County Comprehensive Plan, [Montco 2040: A Shared Vision](#). Regional Mixed Use Centers are intensely developed suburban cores with significant retail, office, and residential land uses, ideally with a clearly

defined public gathering space, internal road system, and over time, the possibility to “evolve with higher buildings, diverse uses and structured parking.”

ADDITIONAL REVIEWS

- **Township Engineer Review (attached):** The Township Engineer’s 06/27/25 review has been incorporated into the recommended conditions of approval.
- **Montgomery County Planning Commission (attached):** The County’s 06/27/25 comments encourage the applicant to explore additional architectural design elements to emphasize the human-scale of the development and to ensure the architectural and streetscape design work together to create a cohesive development in keeping with the goals of the City Avenue zoning district.
- **Civic Association:** The Applicant presented the proposed project to representatives of the Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd civic association on October 28, 2024.

APPLICABLE STUDIES AND REPORTS

- *Potential Economic Impact of Redevelopment*, Economics Research Associates, 2007
- City Avenue Transportation Services Area Studies:
 - *Land Use Assumptions Report*, KSK Architects Planners Historians, Inc., 2010
 - *Roadway Sufficiency Analysis & Transportation Capital Improvement Plan*, McMahon Transportation Engineers & Planners, 2011
- *City Avenue District Official Map*, 2012
- *City Avenue Connectivity Plan*, Whitman, Requardt & Associates, LLP, 2014
- *City Avenue Landscape Master Plan*, SALT Design Studio, 2023
- *Commercial Retail Analysis*, MSC, 2023.

RELIEF REQUEST

The applicant has met the substantive design, landscape and stormwater requirements of the subdivision and land development ordinance. The applicant seeks relief from Code [§135-3.2\(A\)](#) to waive the Tentative Sketch review process and states that the purpose of the tentative sketch plan requirement has been satisfied for these reasons:

- The applicant has received considerable feedback from the Township including extensive comments from the Land Development Committee and multiple meetings with Township staff.
- The Tentative Sketch Plan and Conditional Use Application were reviewed by the Planning Commission at a public meeting on 11/04/24 and the Planning Commission recommended approval with recommended conditions.
- The applicant met with representatives of the Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd who expressed no opposition to the project.
- The project underwent additional review through the Conditional Use process.

Standards for consideration of a waiver of requirements are stated in [§135-1.6](#):

§135-1.6 Waiver of Requirements.

Where, owing to special conditions, a literal enforcement of any of the requirements of this chapter would be unreasonable, would cause undue hardship or where an alternative standard can be demonstrated to provide equal or better results, the Board of Commissioners may make such reasonable exception thereto as will not be contrary to the public interest and that the purpose and intent of this chapter is observed. All requests for modifications shall be provided in writing and be part of the application for subdivision and/or land development. In the request for a modification, the applicant shall:

- A. State the ground and facts of unreasonableness or hardship on which the request is based or demonstrate that an alternative standard can provide equal or better results.
- B. List the provision(s) of the chapter involved.
- C. State the minimum modification necessary.

CONSIDERATIONS

1. Architectural Design

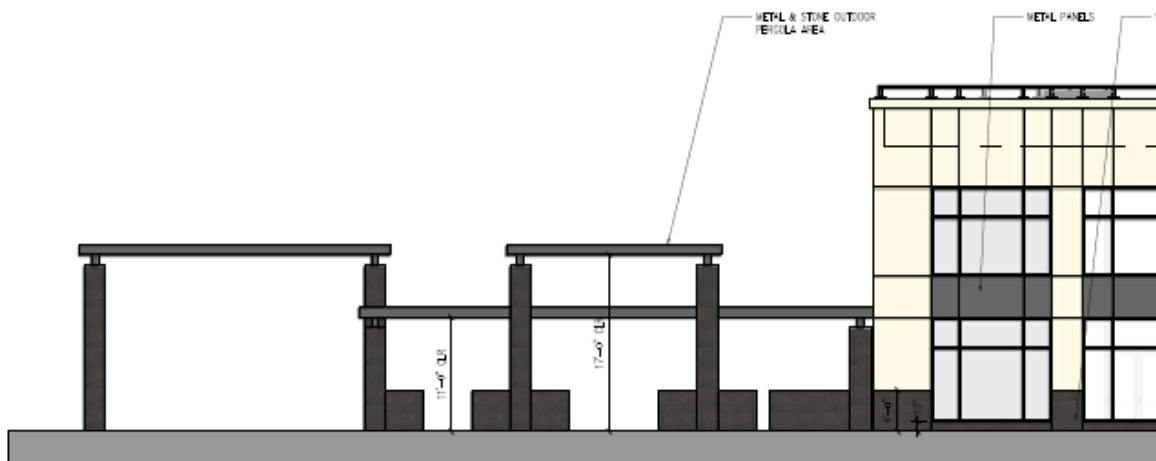
The Property's location at the intersection of City Avenue and Belmont Avenue makes it a key gateway site within City Avenue District with the potential to significantly impact the overall character of development on the City Avenue corridor. CAD-RCA zoning encourages higher density mixed- and multiple-use pedestrian-oriented development and recognizes the importance of City Avenue as a gateway community to the Township. It is essential that the design of the structures on the site, particularly at the City/Belmont corner, create an attractive and vibrant gateway to the Township and City Avenue District.

The architectural design elements included on the applicant's most recent submission aim at creating a gateway design at the City/Belmont corner. Opportunities may exist to further enhance the gateway and to create a more impactful pedestrian-oriented design that is integrated with landscaping and streetscape features through the use of material selection, façade articulation, wrapped awnings, and signage placement.

Within the context of the proposed development's location immediately adjacent to the 12-story existing office structure and on the busy City Avenue corridor, it is important that the architectural and site design provides a cohesive pedestrian-scaled environment in order to successfully achieve the intent of the zoning. The use of pergola extensions as a design feature on each of the proposed structures would be an effective design gesture to further enhance a human-scaled and welcoming environment and create a more cohesive site.



The design of Building 2, as shown by elevation facing City Avenue, includes a tower feature to accentuate the site's importance as a gateway site.



The design of Building 1 as shown here along the West Road facade effectively uses a pergola extension to create a pedestrian-scale environment.



The previously approved land development for the Property demonstrates a thoughtful pedestrian-oriented design including an at-grade primary facade entrance, pedestrian-scale signage and unique awning and window frame color.

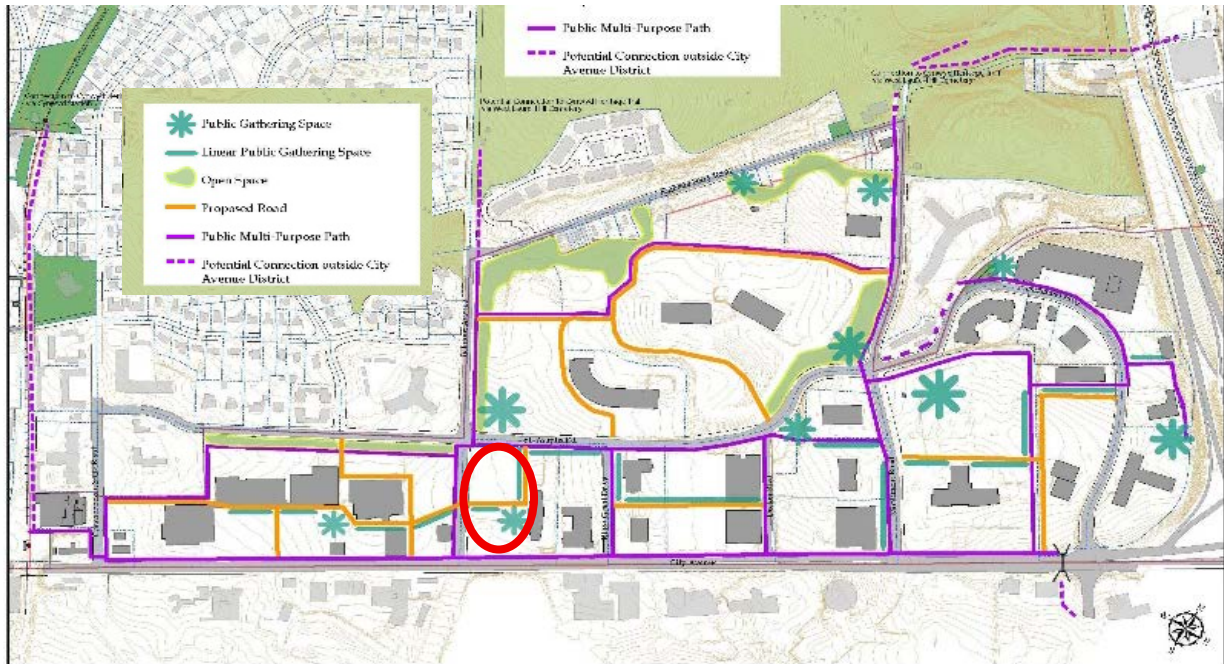
The following recommended conditions of approval (RCA) address this consideration:

- RCA 5. The applicant shall continue to work with staff on the overall architectural design of the structures, particularly Building 2, to ensure that the design adequately recognizes the site's importance as a Township and City Avenue gateway and to better align with the intent of the architectural design standards stated in §155-6.6(l)(5) and §155-3.9.
- RCA 6. Exterior wall materials shall be as per §155-3.9. Where stone is utilized on the walls facing public streets, the applicant shall consider materials that have a similar appearance to the type of stone in the existing wall to be removed along City Avenue. To enhance the pedestrian scale of the structures, stone or similar material shall be installed to a height of at least 12 feet on portions of walls facing public streets that are adjacent to pedestrianways. Final materials selection shall be approved by the Township.
- RCA 7. The applicant shall consider increasing the pedestrian scale of the overall plan through the use of pergola extensions along street frontages from each of the three structures.
- RCA 8. Building signage shall be mounted no higher than 20 feet as per §155-9.8(A)(5). The applicant shall consider installing signage on awnings or in the area immediately above the ground floor windows.

2. Public Gathering Space and Pedestrian Connections

As noted above, the Property is situated at the heart of the City Avenue District and the required multipurpose paths required by the City Avenue District Official Map are integral to the creation of the Township's pedestrian and active transportation network, connecting residents, employees and visitors to the Cynwyd Heritage Trail, Main Line Greenway and regional trail network.

The proposed public gathering space will be a centrally located within in the district as shown on the City Avenue District Official Map below and will complement the existing and future planned network of trails and pedestrian oriented spaces. With the presence of a rapidly growing residential community and active on-site and nearby office and commercial uses, the Property's public gathering space will be an axis of activity that will be accessible by a short walk or bike ride for many. Opportunity exists for future programming including the Bala Cynwyd Farmer's Market and other community events.



The City Avenue District Official Map shows the Township's vision for a network of public gathering spaces and trails through, and connecting to/from, the district. The Property is centrally located and will be an axis of activity.

This is an exciting time for trail and public space development in the Township. A number of current and proposed projects in the City Avenue District are spurring the implementation of the envisioned trail network and public gathering spaces. The installation of wayfinding signage and the bike share station will promote the development's location on the Township's trail network and the proposed food-related uses provided in the plan will provide a much-needed community resource and destination.

The following recommended condition of approval (RCA) furthers this consideration:

- RCA 55. The Applicant shall work with staff and the City Avenue District to design and install Wayfinding signage and Entry Plaque Signage to support the public gathering space and public trails. Wayfinding signage shall show the location of the proposed public gathering space and trails in relation to the City Avenue District, Cynwyd Trail and Pencoyd Landing trail networks, and include residential and commercial landmarks, bike share/transit infrastructure and locations accessible to the open space/trail network.



Wayfinding signage will show pedestrian and active transportation connections between the Property, City Avenue District and the Township's trail network.

ACTION

The Planning Commission must take the following actions with respect to this application:

1. A recommendation on the request to waive the Tentative Sketch Plan.
2. A recommendation on the Preliminary Land Development Plan.