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JODY L. HOLTON, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

August 29, 2019

Mr. Christopher Leswing, Director of Building & Planning
Building & Planning Department
Township of Lower Merion
75 East Lancaster Avenue
Ardmore, Pennsylvania 19003

Re: MCPC #19-0060-003

Plan Name: Lower Merion School District – Middle School
(1 lot/218,000 sq. ft. institutional on approximately 22.23 acres)
Situate: West Montgomery Avenue (west)/south of Saybrook Road
Township of Lower Merion

Dear Mr. Leswing:

We have reviewed the above-referenced subdivision and land development plan in accordance with Section 502 of Act 247, "The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code," as you requested on July 24, 2019. We forward this letter as a report of our review and recommendations.

BACKGROUND

The applicant, Lower Merion School District, proposes to consolidate two parcels to create an approximately 22.23-acre parcel. The combined parcel has frontage on Montgomery Avenue, which is a State road, North Stone Ridge Lane, and Saybrook Road. All existing structures, including a Class II historic resource, are proposed to be demolished and a 3-story, 218,000-square foot middle school building will be constructed. Additional improvements shown at this time include 198 surface parking spaces, stormwater management facilities, sports courts and fields, and internal pedestrian pathways. A one-way parent drop off/pick-up loop is shown in front of the middle school building while another one-way "school bus arrival and dismissal loop" road is shown around the building. The property is located in the township's R1 Residence Zoning District. This proposal was previously reviewed in a review letter dated April 8, 2019.



COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLIANCE

The Land Use Element of the 2016 Lower Merion Township Comprehensive Plan identifies this parcel as Institutional. In addition, this area of Lower Merion Township is identified as a Suburban Residential Area in the Future Land Use Plan of the Montgomery County Comprehensive Plan, *Montco2040: A Shared Vision*. Suburban Residential Areas are primarily residential areas that can include institutional uses. In general, “non-residential buildings should have a residential character, with pitched roofs, small building footprints, residential building materials, and residentially-scaled windows and doors.”

RECOMMENDATION

The Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) generally supports the applicant’s proposal. However, in the course of our review we identified the following issues that we feel should be addressed prior to moving forward with the proposed subdivision and land development. Our review comments are as follows:

REVIEW COMMENTS

GENERAL DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

We commend the applicant for taking efforts to incorporate some of the building materials from the existing Class II historic resource into the proposed middle school building and site design. In addition, the applicant is proposing to relocate the existing stone entrance walls on either side of the Montgomery Avenue driveway into the site which will help to preserve an element of the existing viewshed into the site from Montgomery Avenue.

As part of the proposed middle school development, the applicant will construct two, 10-foot tall retaining walls around the proposed parking lot closest to Montgomery Avenue with a 4-foot high fence on top of each retaining wall. This proposed series of retaining walls is likely to be a prominent visual feature from both Montgomery Avenue and North Stone Ridge Lane. Therefore, we encourage the applicant to utilize materials for the proposed retaining walls that will be similar in color and texture to the stone entrance walls that are being preserved to help soften the appearance of the proposed retaining walls.

PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION

1. Sidewalks Along Street Frontages. A series of internal pedestrian walkways is shown connecting the proposed middle school building with the parking areas and the on-site athletic fields. In addition, the current version of the proposed site plan shows sidewalk along the Montgomery Avenue, North Stone Ridge Lane, and Saybrook Road frontages of the site. However, according to a note on Sheet 05 of 28, the applicant is requesting a waiver from §135-28.A. of the township’s Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance “to defer the installation of proposed sidewalks along the Lower Merion School District property frontage until future off-site sidewalk construction and connectivity is provided by Lower Merion Township”. We feel that the development of a modern middle school on this site warrants the construction of sidewalks on all street frontages of the site so that they are already in

place when additional pedestrian infrastructure in the future is constructed to improve multi-modal access to the middle school site.

2. Potential Pedestrian Connection to Saybrook Road. We understand that the applicant is proposing to construct a fence along the Saybrook Road frontage of the site for security reasons that could limit pedestrian access into the middle school site. However, we feel that a potential pedestrian connection from the Saybrook Road frontage could still be considered in conjunction with a slightly reconfigured security fence. For example, if the security fence was constructed so that it extended further into the site along the edge of the bus loop driveway, a pedestrian path could potentially be provided between the bus loop driveway and the eastern property line. In this configuration, the pedestrian pathway could extend into the site and pedestrians could cross the bus loop driveway at the proposed crosswalk closest to the main public entrance to the building. Please see Attachment B for an illustration of this concept.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN

1. Planted Buffer. Section 155-11.E.(8) of the township's Zoning Ordinance states that, "a minimum ten-foot planted buffer shall be required along the side and rear property lines when a public school property abuts a residential zoning district." An area of land labeled as "No Mow Zone" on the landscape plan on Sheet LP-1 in the southeast corner of the site between the proposed track and the Montgomery Avenue entrance driveway is shown within the required planted buffer area; however, no shrubs or trees are proposed in this area of the site. We defer to the township to determine if additional shrubs and trees may need to be provided in this area of the site to meet the township's buffer requirements.
2. Existing Trees Along Montgomery Avenue. A note on the landscape plan on Sheet LP-1 regarding the existing white pine trees along Montgomery Avenue states that these trees are "to be preserved unless proposed roadway and sidewalk improvements impact existing trees. Required street trees along Montgomery Avenue provided elsewhere on site." We commend the applicant for taking efforts to preserve this existing grouping of established evergreen trees as we feel that it contributes to the existing screening of the site; however, we feel that clarification may be needed regarding any additional street trees that would be provided in this location if the existing White Pine trees were to be negatively impacted by the proposed roadway and sidewalk improvements. We recommend that additional street trees at the same spacing as the proposed street trees along North Stone Ridge Lane be provided along the full Montgomery Avenue frontage as an alternative if the existing White Pine trees are removed later.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

Several large stormwater management facilities are shown as part of the proposed development. It appears that some of the stormwater runoff will be routed through biofiltration areas, which will allow for some of the sediment in the stormwater runoff to settle out of the stormwater prior to reaching the infiltration areas. However, some of the stormwater runoff is shown being discharged directly from the building and surrounding paved areas to infiltration areas. Where no biofiltration facilities appear to be provided to remove sediment before the stormwater runoff reaches the infiltration bed, siltation of the infiltration bed may be an important maintenance concern in the long-term.

Based on the information provided, it appears that several of the sediment traps (see Sheet 15 of 28) proposed to be used during construction, are located in the same areas of the site where infiltration and biofiltration basins are shown (see Sheet 06 of 28). It is our understanding that it is best practice to limit potential sedimentation during construction within areas of a site that are proposed to be used as infiltration and biofiltration basins. We feel that utilizing areas of the site that are intended to be used as infiltration and biofiltration basins as sediment traps during construction could cause sediment to clog the existing pore spaces in the soil, reducing the post-construction infiltration capacity of the soils within the infiltration or biofiltration basins. Ideally, we feel that the post-construction infiltration and biofiltration basins would function most effectively if alternate locations for the sediment traps were utilized during construction. However, overall we defer to the township engineer to determine if additional measures, such as post-construction infiltration testing in the vicinity of the sediment traps that are proposed to be converted to infiltration and biofiltration basins, may be beneficial.

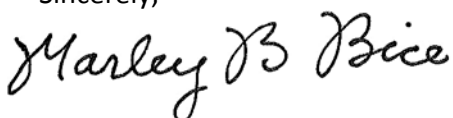
CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate that MCPC generally supports the applicant's proposal to construct a new middle school; however we believe that our suggested revisions will better achieve the township's planning objectives for institutional development.

Please note that the review comments and recommendations contained in this report are advisory to the municipality and final disposition for the approval of any proposal will be made by the municipality.

Should the governing body approve a final plat of this proposal, the applicant must present the plan to our office for seal and signature prior to recording with the Recorder of Deeds office. A paper copy bearing the municipal seal and signature of approval must be supplied for our files. Please print the assigned MCPC number (#19-0060-003) on any plans submitted for final recording.

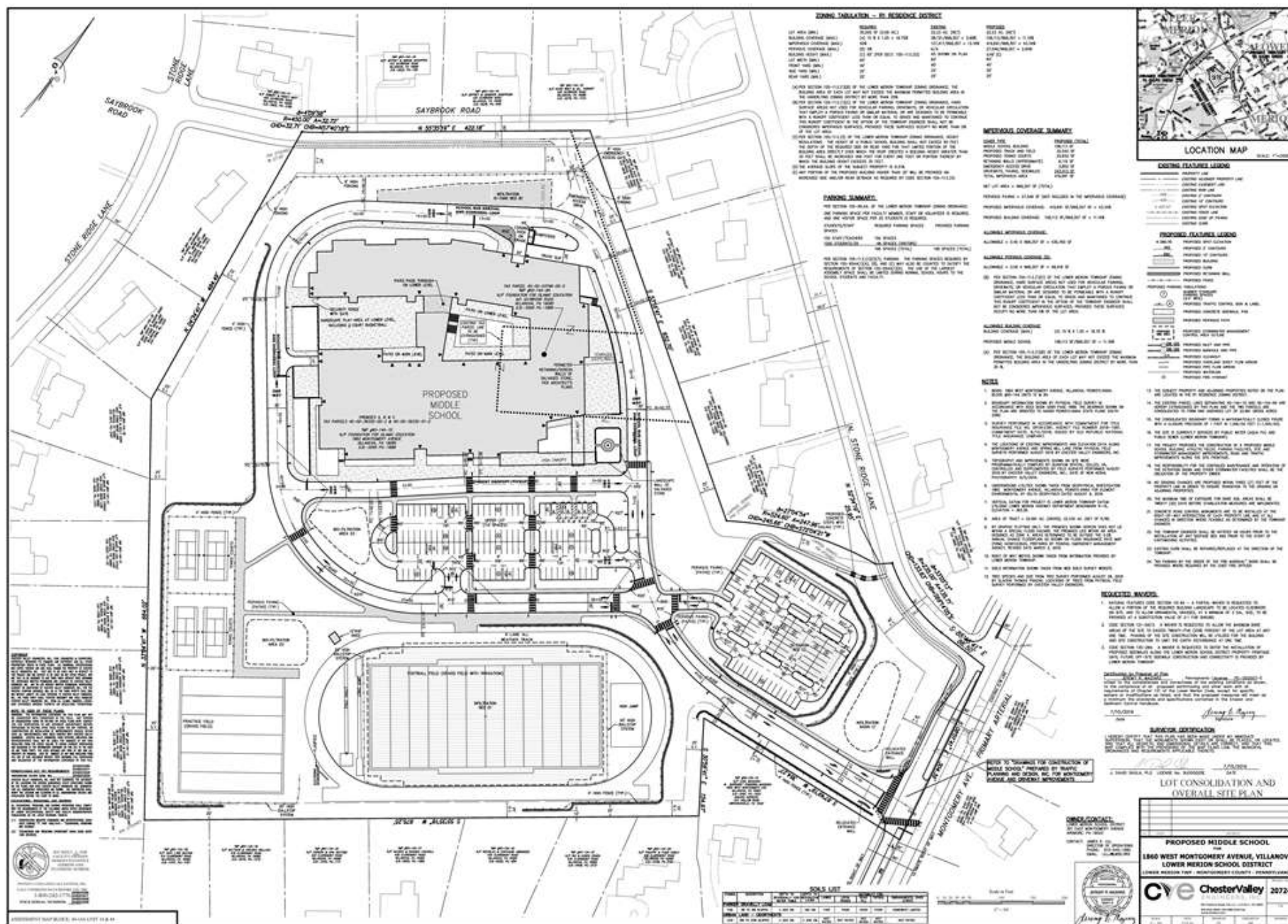
Sincerely,



Marley Bice, AICP, Principal Planner
610-278-3740 – mbice@montcopa.org

c: Lower Merion School District, Applicant
Fred Fromhold, Applicant's Representative
Chester Valley Engineers, Inc., Applicant's Engineer
Gilbert P. High, Jr., Esq., Twp. Solicitor
Ernie B. McNeely, Twp. Manager
Edward P. Pluciennik, P.E., Twp. Engineer
Fran Hanney, PennDOT

Attachment A: Reduced Copy of Applicant's Proposed Site Plan
Attachment B: MCPC Comments on Applicant's Proposed Site Plan
Attachment C: Aerial Image of Site







Lower Merion Middle School
190060003

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Year 2015 aerial photography provided by the
Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

