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**MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PLANNING COMMISSION**

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JODY L. HOLTON, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

July 24, 2019

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

Re: MCPC #19-0162-001
Plan Name: French International School
(1 lot/6,044 sq. ft. institutional on approximately 1.47 acres)
Situate: City Avenue (north)/Bala Avenue (west)
Township of Lower Merion

Dear Mr. Leswing:

We have reviewed the above-referenced tentative sketch plan as you requested on June 21, 2019. We forward this letter as a report of our review.

BACKGROUND

The applicant, the French International School, proposes to consolidate their existing parcel on City Avenue with a parcel to the rear known as 6 Bala Avenue to create an approximately 1.4- acre lot. A new, one-story 4,780-square foot detached building is proposed to the rear of the existing building fronting on City Avenue. An existing Class II historic building on the 6 Bala Avenue property is proposed to remain with a 1,264-square foot rear addition. The combined properties will be accessed by driveways on City Avenue and Bala Avenue; however, the driveway off of City Avenue will be restricted to ingress only.

Additional improvements shown at this time include 25 surface parking spaces, 17 reserve parking spaces, 2 underground stormwater management facilities, plaza and play area spaces, and internal pedestrian pathways. The City Avenue property is located in the township's CAD-BV City Avenue District – Bala Village zoning district and the Bala Avenue property is located in the township's R6A – Residence zoning district.



COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLIANCE

The Bala Village area of the City Avenue District is identified as a Town Center in the Future Land Use Plan of the Montgomery County Comprehensive Plan, *Montco2040: A Shared Vision*. Town Centers are traditional downtown areas with a mix of retail, institutional, office, and residential uses. The proposed preservation and reuse of the historic building at 6 Bala Avenue is generally consistent with the statement that “historic buildings should be preserved, rehabilitated, and reused”.

The Land Use Element of the 2016 Lower Merion Township Comprehensive Plan identifies this portion of the City Avenue District area as a Neighborhood Main Street which is areas that are typically located within walking distance of residential neighborhoods. The preservation and enhancement of the property at 6 Bala Avenue has the potential to help advance “the goal of making these districts more attractive, pedestrian-friendly, and better connected to the neighborhoods they serve.”

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 land development. Our review comments are as follows:

REVIEW COMMENTS

ZONING ORDINANCE COMMENTS

Based on the information provided, we have identified the following items related to the township’s zoning ordinance that we feel should be addressed as part of any future land development submissions associated with this project:

- A. Greening Standards. Future versions of the plans should demonstrate how the applicant proposes to comply with the greening standards, as required by §155-217.9.(6) of the township’s Zoning Ordinance.
- B. Development Design Standards. Future versions of the plans should demonstrate how the applicant proposes to comply with the development design standards, including the public walkway standards, as required by §155-219.F. of the township’s Zoning Ordinance.

SUBDIVISION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE COMMENTS

Based on the information provided, we have identified the following item related to the Township Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance that we feel should be addressed as part of any future land development submissions associated with this property:

Sidewalk Width and Location. Section 135-28.B. of the township’s Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance states that sidewalks should be located “as far from the curb as is practicable.” It appears that the applicant proposes to construct a 5-foot wide sidewalk abutting the curb along the Bala Avenue frontage of the combined site. We encourage the applicant to widen the sidewalk along the Bala Avenue frontage of the site to at least 5 feet, as shown; however, while maintaining a grass strip between the sidewalk and the curb to buffer pedestrians walking along Bala Avenue from moving traffic.

VEHICULAR CIRCULATION

According to the information provided on Sheet 6 of 10, the applicant proposes to queue buses and passenger vehicles next to each other within the two-lane driveway off of City Avenue. In the proposed vehicle queue configuration, it appears that students exiting the school buses would have to cross the driveway and walk between passenger vehicles to reach the school. In addition, utilizing both lanes of the entrance driveway off of City Avenue could create confusion and traffic back-ups during rush hours if the school buses or vehicles that are queuing back-up on to City Avenue.

Overall, we encourage the applicant to work with the their school bus provider and the township to determine if an alternative school bus drop-off and pick-up location would create a more logical and safer circulation pattern. For example, school buses could queue in the rear parking area where students could disembark and walk down the pedestrian path shown from the rear parking area to the main school building.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

Two underground stormwater management facilities are shown on Sheet 4 of 10, including one under the proposed hard surface plaza area between the existing and proposed school buildings. According to the landscape plan on Sheet 8 of 10, several trees are proposed along the perimeter of the plaza that appear to be planted on top of the proposed underground stormwater management facility. We defer to the township engineer to determine if modifications to either the proposed landscaping or the proposed underground stormwater management facility may be needed.

CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate that MCPC generally supports the applicant's proposal to construct a new institutional building; however we believe that our suggested revisions will help the development better achieve the township's planning objectives for the City Avenue District – Bala Village district.

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.

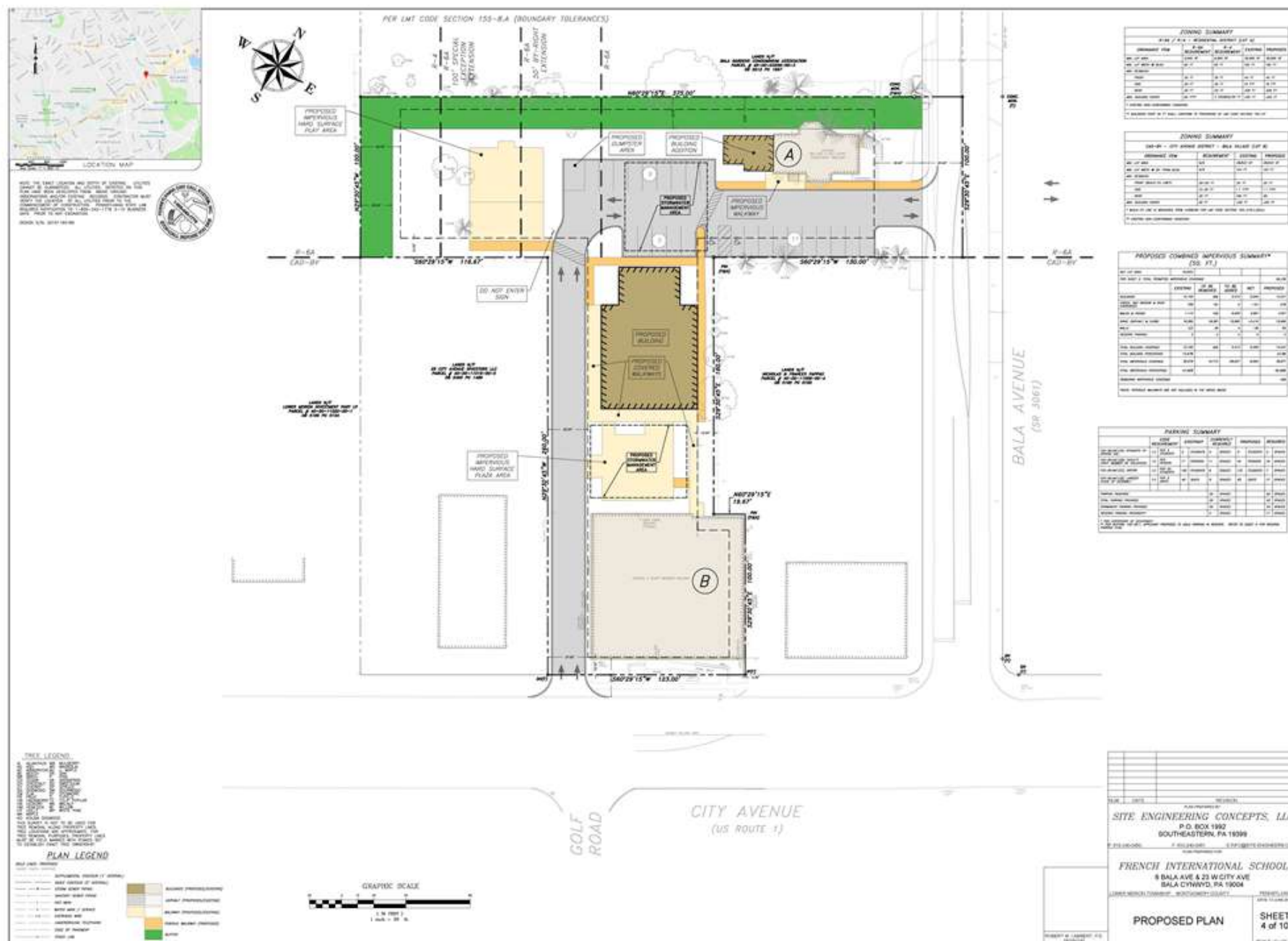
Sincerely,



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

- c: Kathy Kotchick, Applicant's Representative
Site Engineering Concepts, LLC, 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: Aerial Image of Site





French International School
190162001

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

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