

February 27, 2020

TO: Planning Commission Members

FROM: Jillian Dierks, Planner, Department of Building & Planning

SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY LAND DEVELOPMENT AND CONDITIONAL USE PLAN – 549 Bowman Avenue, Merion Elementary School, Merion Station, LD# 3865 & CU# 3865C, Ward 12.

Proposal

The applicant, Fred Fromhold, Esq., and property owner, the Lower Merion School District, are seeking Preliminary Land Development Plan approval for the following:

- Construction of a 4,400 sq. ft. modular classroom building and associated walkways and fencing;
- Installation of 16 previously approved surface parking spaces currently held in reserve.
- Construction of 62 space surface parking spaces in a new lot, which includes 18 previously approved reserve spaces and 44 new parking spaces;
- Installation of a six-foot-high gated fence along the Rockland Avenue frontage;
- Installation of walkway lighting for the pedestrian pathway that extends from Rockland Avenue; and
- Installation of three stormwater management systems.



Merion Elementary School

The applicant is also seeking Conditional Use approval to hold some or all of the required parking spaces in reserve, per [Zoning Code Section 155-95.1.A](#).

A Conditional Use Hearing has been scheduled for 4:00 p.m. on [Monday, March 9, 2020](#) in the Caucus Room of the Township Administration Building located at 75 E. Lancaster Avenue, Ardmore.

The proposal is illustrated on the attached four sheet plan set dated January 24, 2020, prepared by Chester Valley Engineers, Inc. Also submitted were architectural renderings prepared by Titan Modular Systems, Inc., dated April 23, 2018 and a landscape plan prepared by Glackin Thomas Panzak, dated January 24, 2020, last revised February 14, 2020.

Property Description

The parcel is approximately 8 acres and contains the existing elementary school, athletic and play fields, and associated parking areas. The property is bordered by residential properties and has frontage on both Bowman Avenue and Rockland Avenue.

Montgomery County Planning Commission Review

At the time that this memo was completed, staff had not received the County's review. If received prior to the March 2, 2020 meeting, staff will provide it to the Planning Commission.

Historical Commission

The property is a Class II Historic Resource on the Township' Historic Resource Inventory. The applicant appeared before the Historic Commission at their February 24, 2020 meeting. The Commission recommended approval of the temporary

modular classrooms and parking changes, citing Secretary of the Interior's Standards 9 and 10 (provided below), with the understanding that the modular classrooms are to remain for 3-5 years, buffering between the modular classrooms and the historic resources to the west will be installed, and lighting standards at the parking area will be relocated or replaced in-kind.

9. *New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.*

10. *New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*

Environmental Advisory Council

The Environmental Advisory Council reviewed the application at their February 25, 2020 meeting and was supportive of the applicant holding parking spaces in reserve rather than paving them. The EAC recommended that the applicant consider providing electric vehicle charging facilities in either the new spaces or in an existing space. The EAC also recommended that the applicant consider the use of porous paving for pathways.

Zoning

The property is located in the R4 Zoning District; however the Public School Use is regulated by Zoning Code Section [155-11.E](#). The following table details the applicable bulk and area requirements for the existing and proposed conditions. There are no proposed changes to lot area, lot width, required setbacks or building height.

R4 Zoning District		Existing	Proposed
Minimum Net Lot Area (sq. ft.)	6,000 sq. ft. .1 acres	350,744 sq. ft. 8 Acres	
Maximum Building Area	37.5%* 131,529 sq. ft.	15.2% 53,450 sq. ft.	16.5% 57,850 sq. ft. (increase of 4,400)
Maximum Impervious Surface	44%** 154,327 sq. ft.	33.5%*** 117,578 sq. ft.	42.2%*** 147,973 sq. ft. (increase of 30,395 sq. ft.) (6,354 sq. ft remaining)

*Per Section [155-11.E.1.b](#) the building area of each lot may not exceed the maximum permitted building area in the underlying zoning district by more than 25%. R4 max. is 30% x 1.25 = 37.5%

**Per Section [155-141.5.D](#) the maximum impervious surface in the underlying zoning district applicable to the lot on which the building is located may be exceeded by up to 5% on lots less than 40 acres. R4 max. is 39% x 5 = 44%

***Includes the impervious associated with the proposed reserve parking.

Parking Per Zoning Code Section 155.95.AA	Existing	Proposed	Staff Recommendation
Paved	55	133	71*
Reserve	34	-	62
Total	89	133	133

*55 existing + 16 new parking spaces

Reserve Parking- Conditional Use

[Zoning Code Section 155-95.1](#) enables the applicant to hold parking in reserve without actually paving the spaces when land development approval is required for proposed improvements through Conditional Use approval. The code states that the conditional use approval by the Board is subject to the following:

- A. Expansion of use. Where a use regulated by § 155-95 is being expanded and the Board determines that the additional number of parking spaces required by this expansion are not currently needed, it may authorize the applicant to hold in reserve the number of spaces that the Board determines are not currently required to meet the needs of the uses to which the property will be put.*
- B. New or changed use. Where a new use regulated by § 155-95 is created or there is a change of use on the property, and the Board determines that the number of parking spaces required are not currently needed, it may authorize the applicant to hold in reserve up to 50% of the total number of spaces required.*
- C. The applicant must document that the full number of required parking spaces can be paved without violating any applicable provisions of this chapter. When constructed, the reserve parking must meet all applicable provisions of this chapter as of the date the construction permit is sought.*
- D. The applicant shall install stormwater management facilities, as required by the Township, for the total required number of parking spaces, including those held in reserve, unless the applicant demonstrates to the Board's satisfaction that the economic and practical benefit of currently installing such facilities for the reserve parking spaces is not significant when compared to the destruction that would be caused to natural features on the site.*
- E. The applicant must agree in a recorded covenant, approved by the Township Solicitor, to install the reserve parking spaces at any future time if and when the Zoning Officer determines that the reserve parking spaces are needed to accommodate the use of the property. The applicant may appeal such order to the Zoning Hearing Board.*
- F. Regardless of the number of spaces actually developed, a parking area to accommodate the aggregate number of parking spaces required shall be fully designed, and the area held as reserve parking shall be clearly designated on the plan. The reserve parking area shall be considered in calculating the impervious surface ratio. The parking reserve area shall be planted with vegetative cover and integrated into the site's land development plan. Such area shall be required to be developed as designed if and when the Zoning Officer determines the need.*

In 2003 the applicant was granted Conditional Use approval to hold 34 of the required parking spaces in reserve. The applicant has submitted a Conditional Use request to hold all or some of the required 44 parking spaces in reserve.

The Township Code (155.95.AA) requires one new parking space for each staff member and one new parking space for every 25 students (for visitors). The increase in student population and staff/faculty generate a requirement for 44 additional parking spaces.

There are currently 55 existing on-site paved parking spaces contained in two parking areas, a smaller eastern lot featuring designated visitor parking and a larger, primarily faculty/staff parking lot to the west. There is also a bus stacking area in between the two parking areas that is used by delivery vehicles and occasionally other vehicles.

It is well known that some faculty/staff park on neighboring streets, a practice that has existed for decades. The applicant submitted a Parking Supply/Demand Investigation which documented that an average of 28 vehicles are utilizing on-street parking and concluded that should conditional use approval be granted to hold all of the 44 new required spaces and continue to hold the 18 spaces previously held in reserve, there are sufficient existing on-site and on-street parking spaces to continue to meet the parking needs of the school.

Staff recommends that the Conditional Use be approved subject to the following conditions:

- The applicant shall agree in a recorded covenant, to be approved by the Township Solicitor, to install the reserve parking spaces at any future time if and when the Zoning Officer determined that the reserve parking spaces are needed to accommodate the use on the property.
- The stormwater management system for the reserved parking spaces shown beneath the 62-space lot be installed when those parking spaces are constructed.
- The landscape material shown adjacent to the 62-space lot be installed when those parking spaces are constructed.

Issues

1. Pathway Improvements & Multi-Modal Access

Staff commends the applicant for the proposed pedestrian pathway improvements given that on-street parking in the adjacent neighborhood is utilized for their parking needs. The proposed lighting will create a more comfortable pedestrian experience for faculty, students, and parents accessing the school on foot or bike. Staff recommends that the applicant consider expanding the pathway width to accommodate both bicycles and pedestrians. There are signs of wear on both sides of the path indicating that users are not able to be fully accommodated on the existing width.

Lastly, staff would like to see depressed ADA access curbs provided at the crosswalks adjacent to the pathway at the intersection of Rockland Avenue and Woodside Avenue. Staff notes that the right of way associated with this intersection is located in the Borough of Narberth and has included a condition requiring the applicant to coordinate with Narberth Borough to investigate providing this ADA improvement.



Given the site's physical limitations and access to the regional rail station, staff would like the applicant to work with their staff/faculty to promote the use of multimodal transportation to access the site. Staff notes that the school is located a two-minute bike ride or ten-minute walk from the Merion Station (Paoli/Thorndale Line, formerly known as the R5). In the past, staff has recommended that applicants consider implementing the following actions to reduce vehicle trips:

- A. Join the Greater Valley Forge Transportation Management Association (GVFTMA) which advocates increased mass transit service in the area and helps organizations develop Travel Demand Management plans; and
- B. Join the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission's (DVRPC) RideECO program, which can be offered as an employer-paid benefit, through a pre-tax payroll deduction, or with the employer paying a portion of RideECO.

Staff notes that a stretch of Bowman Avenue and the intersection of Rockland Avenue and Woodside Avenue is included in the initial plans for the Lower Merion Greenway, a low stress bicycle route being planned through the Township.

1. Landscaping

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission consider recommending partial relief from the minimum planting requirements to allow the applicant to not install the plantings associated with modular building given that it is not intended to be a permanent use on the site. A similar condition exists with the temporary fencing located on the Cynwyd Elementary School/Bala Cynwyd Middle School property and decorative fencing was utilized to screen the use.



2. Stormwater

In his review the Township Engineer noted that the proposed stormwater management basins do not recharge the full increased volume of runoff for the twenty-five-year storm as required by code. A condition of approval has been included requiring the increased volume of stormwater generated by the proposed development for the twenty-five (25) year storm be recharge. The Township Engineer also recommended the plan be revised to provide an additional recharge facility downgrade of the modular classroom building to provide the required volume control.

3. Relief

The applicant seeks the following relief:

A. Subdivision & Land Development Code Section, 135-7, to not provide a Tentative Sketch Plan.

- Given the scope of the proposed improvements staff recommends relief to not provide Tentative Sketch Plan be granted.

B. Natural Features Code Section 101.9, to not provide plantings generated by the additional modular building area and instead provide decorative fencing.

- As noted above, the applicant has not requested this relief, but staff has recommended it given that the landscape material would not be permanent.

4. Action

The Planning Commission must take the following actions for this application:

- Provide a recommendation on the **Conditional Use** request and consider the following staff recommendations:
 - a. The applicant shall agree in a recorded covenant, to be approved by the Township Solicitor, to install the reserve parking spaces at any future time if and when the Zoning Officer determined that the reserve parking spaces are needed to accommodate the use on the property.
 - b. The stormwater management system for the reserved parking spaces shown beneath the 62-space lot be installed when those parking spaces are constructed.
 - c. The landscape material shown adjacent to the 62-space lot be installed when those parking spaces are constructed.
- Provide a recommendation on the **Preliminary Land Development Plan**.
- Provide a recommendation on the following relief.
 - A. Subdivision & Land Development Code Section, 135-7, to not provide a Tentative Sketch Plan.
 - B. Natural Features Code Section 101.9, to not provide plantings generated by the additional modular building area and instead provide decorative fencing.