

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

VALERIE A. ARKOOSH, MD, MPH, CHAIR  
KENNETH E. LAWRENCE, JR., VICE CHAIR  
JOSEPH C. GALE, COMMISSIONER



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY  
PLANNING COMMISSION**

MONTGOMERY COUNTY COURTHOUSE • PO Box 311  
NORRISTOWN, PA 19404-0311  
610-278-3722  
FAX: 610-278-3941 • TDD: 610-631-1211  
WWW.MONTCOPA.ORG

JOHN S. COVER, AICP  
INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

March 31, 2020

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

Re: MCPC #19-0021-004  
Plan Name: SOPI - 104, 108, 114, 120, 124, 130, 150 & 198 W. Lancaster Ave.  
(279 du and 57,936 sq. ft. commercial on approximately 3.47 acres)  
Situate: W. Lancaster Avenue (S); east of Greenfield Avenue  
Township of Lower Merion

Dear Mr. Leswing:

We have reviewed a revised tentative sketch plan for the above-referenced subdivision and land development. We forward this letter as a report of our review and recommendations; however please also refer to our previous review letters described below for more information.

Two alternative tentative sketch plans for the site at 104-198 West Lancaster Avenue were previously reviewed under MCPC #19-0021-002 (October 3, 2019) and MCPC #19-0021-003 (October 3, 2019). In addition, an earlier tentative sketch plan for this development was reviewed under MCPC #19-0021-001 (March 11, 2019). Township staff provided an updated tentative sketch plan for the previous submission (MCPC #19-0021-002/MCPC #19-0021-003) to MCPC on March 16, 2020.

## BACKGROUND

The applicant, VMDT Partnership, proposes to consolidate eight parcels to create an approximately 3.47 acre parcel on the southern side of West Lancaster Avenue from Greenfield Avenue to Ardmore Avenue. All existing structures are proposed to be demolished and a five-story mixed-use building will be constructed. A total of 279 dwelling units, 57,936 square feet of commercial space, and 582 parking spaces will be provided within the building. Additional improvements shown at this time include 18 on-street parking spaces on Lancaster Avenue; sidewalk along the Greenfield Avenue, Lancaster Avenue, and Ardmore Avenue frontages



of the site; and an underground stormwater management area to the rear of the building along the West Athens Avenue extension.

Similar to the previous submissions (MCPC #19-0021-002 and MCPC #19-0021-003), two alternative circulation options are shown:

- Option #1 on Sheet 1 (see Attachment A) shows West Athens Avenue extending from its current terminus through to Greenfield Avenue with sidewalks on both sides. This option, which would create 9 additional on-street parking spaces and provide for vehicular access to the new building from either Ardmore Avenue or Greenfield Avenue, would require a land swap or other agreement with the owner of the adjacent parking lot. This option also shows a loading dock off of West Athens Avenue with an entrance that is separated from the parking garage entrance.
- Option #2 on Sheet 2 (see Attachment B) shows a smaller extension of West Athens Avenue from Greenfield Avenue, ending in a cul-de-sac, with sidewalks on both sides and 5 additional on-street parking spaces. The cul-de-sac option provides access to the western side of the proposed building's parking garage; however it is unclear where the building's loading dock would be located under this circulation scenario.

The property is located in the township's ASDD1 Ardmore Special Development District 1 and the MUST Mixed-Use Special Transportation overlay zoning district.

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLIANCE

The Ardmore area of Lower Merion Township is identified as a Town Center in the Future Land Use Plan of the Montgomery County Comprehensive Plan, *Montco 2040: A Shared Vision*. Town Centers are traditional downtown areas with a mix of retail, institutional, office, and residential uses. The proposed development of a mixed-use building that is built-up to the sidewalk along Lancaster Avenue is generally consistent with the statement that "development should be built to the sidewalk or close to the sidewalk, with doors that open to the sidewalk and clear windows along the street." In addition, the redevelopment of this site is generally consistent with the goal to "encourage development and transformative investment where infrastructure already exists."

The Land Use Element of the 2016 Lower Merion Township Comprehensive Plan identifies Ardmore as one of the township's Traditional Main Streets. The proposed development of a mixed-use building is generally consistent with the vision of Traditional Main Streets which are described as "compact, transit-oriented and include residential development as part of the mix of uses."

## RECOMMENDATION

The Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) generally supports the applicant's proposal. We recognize that the most recent tentative sketch plan for this development shows greater articulation in the building façade depth along Lancaster Avenue which creates more distinct individual retail spaces, provides

wider sidewalks in some locations, and pulls the building away from the corners of Lancaster Avenue and Greenfield Avenue and Lancaster Avenue and Ardmore Avenue. In addition, the revised tentative sketch plan includes improvements to the intersection of West Athens Avenue and Ardmore Avenue. However, we wish to reiterate several of our review comments from our previous review letters dated October 3, 2019 and March 11, 2019. Our review comments are as follows:

## REVIEW COMMENTS

### VEHICULAR CIRCULATION

- A. Driveway on Lancaster Avenue: We wish to reiterate that it is unclear from the information provided whether the proposed driveway into the site from Lancaster Avenue, which is a State Road, is proposed to provide full turning movements on to and off of Lancaster Avenue. We encourage the applicant to proactively coordinate with the township and PennDOT to explore the best location for the proposed driveway and to discuss whether additional traffic controls may be needed.

It appears that the applicant proposes to provide passenger drop-off and pick-up areas off of the driveway from Lancaster Avenue. Additional improvements such as pavement markings and wayfinding signage may be needed to delineate the flow of traffic entering/exiting the parking garage from Lancaster Avenue and vehicles utilizing or waiting to utilize the drop-off/pick-up areas.

- B. West Athens Avenue: We commend the applicant for continuing to explore the opportunity to extend West Athens Avenue from its current terminus, through to Greenfield Avenue, to provide a logical alternate vehicular access point into and out of the site. We understand that extending West Athens Avenue as shown in Option #1 would require a land swap with the property owner of the adjacent parking lot; however we wish to reiterate that we feel that extending West Athens Avenue from Ardmore Avenue to Greenfield Avenue is extremely important to the flow of vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic in the neighborhood. The full West Athens Avenue extension would also improve access to the proposed parking garage and loading dock and provide more convenient access to all sides of the proposed building for emergency response purposes. In addition, extending the street grid in this part of Ardmore could also improve access to the existing traffic signals at Ardmore Avenue and Greenfield Avenue, and provide additional direct pedestrian connections between the residential neighborhoods of South Ardmore and the existing and proposed commercial amenities along Lancaster Avenue and Greenfield Avenue.
- C. On-Street Parking on Lancaster Avenue: The applicant is proposing to install a total of 18 on-street parking spaces along the Lancaster Avenue frontage of the site. Currently, there is no on-street parking located along Lancaster Avenue in this area of Ardmore. Although we recognize the potential benefits of providing on-street parking, we feel that some of the parking spaces should be removed to improve traffic flow, increase pedestrian visibility, and provide for wider sidewalks. For example, the on-street parking spaces shown closest to the signalized intersection of Lancaster Avenue and Ardmore Avenue could potentially create a conflict between vehicles queuing and turning right at the intersection and vehicles maneuvering into and out of the on-street parking spaces. In addition, the applicant should

explore whether some of the proposed on-street parking spaces on either side of the central driveway might need to be removed to provide sufficient sight distance for vehicles entering and exiting the site. Ensuring clear sight distance at the driveway opening could also improve visibility of pedestrians crossing the driveway.

- D. Truck and Emergency Vehicle Access: According to the floor plans provided on Sheet 4, a loading dock is proposed to be located adjacent to the easternmost rear entrance to the proposed parking garage. However, it appears that this loading dock configuration would require the full extension of West Athens Avenue to be constructed (as shown in Option #1). Future versions of the site plan should demonstrate where the loading dock would be located, and how it would be accessed in the development scenario shown in Option #2, where a full extension of West Athens Avenue is not constructed. In addition, future versions of the plans should include a truck turning template demonstrating how large trucks will be able to access the proposed loading dock and safely enter and exit the site in both circulation scenarios.

## PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION

Recognizing that the redevelopment of this large block along Lancaster Avenue creates an important opportunity to enhance the pedestrian environment of the western portion of the Ardmore commercial area, we wish to reiterate several comments related to pedestrian circulation:

- A. Sidewalk Width: We recognize that by creating greater variation in the setback of the ground floor façade, the applicant has created areas of wider sidewalk along the Lancaster Avenue frontage of the site, especially at the building corners. However, we feel that an even wider sidewalk could be accommodated across the full Lancaster Avenue frontage of the site by removing some or all of the on-street parking. We feel that pedestrian comfort and safety in this part of the Ardmore commercial area could be improved by providing a consistent, wide sidewalk as part of this significant redevelopment. Based on the proposed height of the building and the development's location along a portion of West Lancaster Avenue that is five-lanes-wide, we recommend that a 20-foot sidewalk width be considered. A wider sidewalk could provide sufficient space for groups of pedestrians to safely pass one another, while also creating spaces along the building frontage that could be activated by temporary merchandise displays and outdoor dining areas. In addition, the pedestrian zone of the sidewalk should be significantly buffered from Lancaster Avenue through a combination of landscaping (including street trees) and street furniture, as well as a change in the pavement material.

In addition, we recommend that any existing or proposed structures within the sidewalk area that could potentially be obstructions, such as lamp posts and signal control boxes, be identified and clearly marked on future versions of the plans.

- B. Driveway Crossings: In order to maintain a continuous pedestrian path along the Lancaster Avenue frontage of the development, we feel that the proposed driveway off of Lancaster Avenue in the center of the block should be carefully designed with a focus on pedestrian safety. For example, accentuated crosswalk treatments, other pavement markings, and signage may help to slow down traffic and alert

drivers entering the site from Lancaster Avenue to the presence of the pedestrian crossing across the driveway.

## PUBLIC TRANSIT

There are two SEPTA bus stops currently located along the Lancaster Avenue frontage of the proposed development. The most recent version of the site plan indicates the current locations of the two existing bus stops near Greenfield Avenue and near Ardmore Avenue; however previous site plans indicated that a bus enclosure was to be provided at the bus stop closer to Ardmore Avenue. We feel that the installation of bus enclosures at both bus stops would improve transit access to the site and could contribute to the branding and aesthetic appearance of the development overall. We encourage the applicant to continue to coordinate with SEPTA regarding the design and location of the existing bus stops and any proposed bus stop enhancements.

## LANDSCAPE & STREETSCAPE DESIGN

- A. General Streetscape Design: The Ardmore Storefront Design Guidelines document provides guidance for how new construction can fit into the unique Ardmore commercial area: "Develop buildings with storefronts that interact with the street. Recommended features include operable windows, planted window boxes, retail and restaurants that open onto the street, and storefront windows that offer maximum transparency." In general, we encourage the applicant to ensure that the proposed streetscape of the development is thoughtfully designed to incorporate landscape and hardscape elements that contribute to a sense of place, provide shade and other environmental benefits, and encourage pedestrian activity.
- B. Street Trees: The proposed street tree planting pits are shown to be approximately 4-feet by 4-feet, which we feel may not provide sufficient room for tree growth and water capture. Typically, street trees need 900-1,000 cubic feet of soil for proper tree growth. The addition of structured soils underneath the sidewalks could help provide more space for tree growth without having to increase the size of the tree pit opening. Alternatively, the applicant may wish to consider incorporating larger street tree pits which could potentially allow the street trees to grow larger, and also allow for the potential incorporation of stormwater management benefits.
- C. West Athens Avenue Landscaping: The most recent version of the site plan provides for increased green space between the proposed sidewalk along the northern side of the West Athens Avenue extension near Greenfield Avenue; however it is unclear from the information provided what landscaping, such as street trees, will be provided in this area. Overall, future versions of the plans should include a detailed landscape plan.

## CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate that MCPC generally supports the applicant's proposal to construct a mixed-use building; however we believe that additional information and coordination regarding the proposed circulation patterns within the large site and streetscape design along Lancaster Avenue may be beneficial.

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 (#19-0021-004) on any plans submitted for final recording.

Sincerely,



Marley Bice, AICP, Principal Planner II  
610-278-3740 – [mbice@montcopa.org](mailto:mbice@montcopa.org)

c: VMDT Partnership, Applicant  
George Broseman, Applicant's Representative  
Bohler Engineering, Applicant's Engineer  
Gilbert P. High, Jr., Esq., Twp. Solicitor  
Ernie B. McNeely, Twp. Manager  
Edward P. Pluciennik, P.E., Twp. Engineer  
Jillian Puleo-Dierks, Twp. Planner  
Holly Colello, Twp. Planning Technician  
Greg Prichard, Twp. Historic Preservation Planner  
Fran Hanney, PennDOT  
Steve D'Antonio, SEPTA

Attachment A: Reduced Copy of Applicant's Proposed Site Plan (Option #1)  
Attachment B: Reduced Copy of Applicant's Proposed Site Plan (Option #2)  
Attachment C: Aerial Image of Site











104, 108, 114, 120, 124, 130,  
150 & 198 W. Lancaster Avenue  
19-0021-004

Montgomery  
County  
Planning  
Commission  
Montgomery County Courthouse - Planning Commission  
PO Box 311 • Norristown PA 19404-0311  
(p) 610.278.3722 • (f) 610.278.3941  
[www.montcopa.org/openhome](http://www.montcopa.org/openhome)  
Year 2015 aerial photography provided by the  
Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

