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JODY L. HOLTON, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

January 8, 2019

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

Re: MCPC #18-0312-001
ROHO Overlay District Amendment
Township of Lower Merion

Dear Mr. Leswing,

We have reviewed the above-referenced zoning ordinance text amendment in accordance with Section 609 of Act 247, "The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code" as you requested on December 14, 2018. We forward this letter as a report of our review and recommendations.

BACKGROUND

The proposed amendments will modify the mixed-use standards for the Rock Hill Road Overlay zoning district. Currently, the requirement that at least 80% of the building frontage along a street at grade level be occupied by one or more of the specified non-residential uses does not go into effect until new habitable space approved for development in the district after April 30, 2008 has exceeded 600,000 square feet. The proposed amendments will remove this threshold so that the mixed-use standards will be applied to all future development.

RECOMMENDATION

The Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) generally supports the proposed zoning text amendments to modify the mixed-use standards for the Rock Hill Road Overlay zoning district.



However, in the course of our review we have identified the following issues that the Township may wish to consider prior to adoption of the zoning ordinance text amendments. Our review comments are as follows:

REVIEW COMMENTS

MIXED-USE STANDARDS

The proposed amendments will remove a threshold that exempted development in the Rock Hill Road Overlay zoning district from the mixed-use requirements of the district until new habitable space approved in the district had exceeded 600,000 square feet. By removing this threshold, all new development in the district will be required to have “a minimum of 80% of the building frontage along a street at grade level and extending for a depth of at least 50 feet” occupied by one or more of the uses listed in §155-201.B.(6) through (16). The specified uses include small retail stores, personal service shops, food and beverage establishments, hotels, and theaters. We encourage the Township to consider permitting a broader range of non-residential uses on the ground floor to provide greater flexibility to the market and reduce the potential for vacant storefronts.

Alternatively, the Township’s mixed-use vision for the Rock Hill Road corridor could potentially be achieved by simplifying the mixed-use requirement by prohibiting residential on the ground floor of new buildings, but opening up the ground floor to other permitted non-residential uses such as professional office and adult and child day care. Providing for greater flexibility in terms of the permitted ground-floor non-residential uses would also be more consistent with the Township’s Comprehensive Plan recommendation LC30 to “modify ROHO zoning to encourage commercial-retail development at either end of Rock Hill Road and reduce the commercial mix requirement.”

The Township may also wish to consider how the current definition of “mixed-use” in §155-4 of the Township Zoning Code and the mixed-use standard in the Rock Hill Road Overlay District are slightly different in terms of both the percentage of the ground floor that must be occupied by non-residential use(s) and the depth of the ground floor non-residential space. We encourage the Township to consider creating a single standard for a mixed-use building as part of future zoning ordinance amendments.

CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate that MCPC generally supports the applicant’s proposed zoning text amendments related to the use regulations in the Rock Hill Road Overlay zoning district; however, we encourage the Township to consider ways to simplify the mixed-use definition and requirements as part of future zoning ordinance amendments.

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 proposed amendments will be made by the municipality.

Should the governing body adopt these proposed zoning ordinance text amendments, Section 609 of the Municipalities Planning Code requires that we be sent an official copy within 30 days.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marley B Bice". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

c: Ernie B. McNeely, Twp. Manager
Gilbert P. High, Jr., Esq., Twp. Solicitor
Edward P. Pluciennik, P.E., Twp. Engineer