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**MONTGOMERY COUNTY  
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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 #19-0097-001  
Plan Name: Two Bala Plaza  
(1 lot/204 du and 70,262 sq. ft. commercial on approximately 11.3 acres)  
Situate: City Avenue (north)/Decker Boulevard (west)  
Township of Lower Merion

Dear Mr. Leswing:

We have reviewed the above-referenced tentative sketch plan as you requested on April 18, 2019. We forward this letter as a report of our review.

## BACKGROUND

The applicant, Bala Plaza, Inc., proposes to construct two new buildings on the approximately 11-acre property known as Two Bala Plaza. One existing office building with 262,072 square feet and one existing retail building with 101,475 square feet are proposed to remain. The property is located in the township's CAD-RCA City Avenue District - Regional Center Area zoning district.

The new buildings are proposed to be constructed in two phases:

- Phase 1: Building "R3-A" located to the west of the existing Two Bala Plaza building and fronting on St. Asaphs Road contains 35,131 square feet of retail, 10,000 square feet of restaurant, and 102 residential units over a parking deck
- Phase 2: Building "R3-B" located to the west of the existing Two Bala Plaza building and fronting on City Avenue contains 35,131 square feet of retail, 10,000 square feet of restaurant, and 102 residential units over a parking deck



Multiple access driveways to the parking garage are shown: two off of St. Asaphs Road and one off of Decker Boulevard. A total of 26 surface parking spaces along Decker Boulevard and 1,565 structured and below-grade parking spaces are proposed. A public gathering space is shown in the center of the site connecting the four buildings. An additional public gathering space is shown on the corner of St. Asaphs Road and Decker Boulevard across Decker Boulevard from the proposed buildings.

Additional improvements shown at this time include widened sidewalks and a public multi-purpose path along the St Asaphs Road, Decker Boulevard, and City Avenue frontages of the site; stormwater management facilities; and new internal pedestrian pathways.

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLIANCE

The City Avenue District area of Lower Merion Township is identified as a Regional Mixed Use Center in the Future Land Use Plan of the Montgomery County comprehensive plan, *Montco2040: A Shared Vision*. Regional Mixed Use Centers are intensely developed suburban cores with significant retail, office, and residential land uses. The proposed development 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 the City Avenue District area as a Regional Center which is the primary growth area within the township. The proposed development is generally consistent with the goal of the Regional Center “to transform the predominant auto-oriented, office based environment into a more functionally diverse live/work/shop environment;” however, we encourage the applicant to coordinate with the township to ensure the proposed configuration of new buildings, streets, and pathways helps to advance the goal to create “a pedestrian-friendly district.”

## 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. Maximum Lot Width. Section 155-217.C.(5)(c) of the township’s Zoning Ordinance states that “where additional development is proposed on an existing lot wider than 600 feet, new minor streets shall be constructed to conform to the requirements for a maximum frontage of 600 feet between intersections with public or private access streets.” The Decker Boulevard frontage of the site currently exceeds the maximum lot width dimension of 600 feet.

- B. Maximum Driveway Width. Section 155-217.D.(1)(e) of the township's Zoning Ordinance states that the "maximum driveway width is two lanes and 22 feet unless a dedicated separate left-turn egress lane is required, based on a traffic study." The two proposed driveways on to St. Asaph's Road, as well as the driveway on to Decker Boulevard, appear to be greater than 22 feet in width.
- C. Number of Driveways. Two access driveways are shown along the St. Asaph's Road frontage of the site. Section 155-217.D.(1)(d) states that "only one curb cut/driveway is permitted on each street frontage of each lot."
- D. Phasing and Density Increases. According to the information provided on Sheet 1 of 2 labeled "Concept Development Plan," the applicant proposes to construct the improvements over a series of two phases. It appears that some of the improvements (including public gathering spaces, structured/underground parking, and public multi-purpose pathways) that the applicant proposes to provide in order to qualify for the proposed floor area ratio (FAR) bonuses needed for the total amount of development, would be constructed during certain phases of the development.

We feel that ideally all of the proposed improvements needed to achieve the desired total FAR should be provided during the first phase of development; however, overall we encourage the applicant to coordinate closely with the township to ensure that all of the proposed improvements are being implemented during, or prior to, the development phase in which the development FAR reaches a level that triggers the need for the additional FAR bonuses being proposed.
- E. Greening Standards. Future versions of the plans should demonstrate how the applicant proposes to comply with the greening standards, as required by §155-217.C.(7) of the township's Zoning Ordinance.
- F. Development Design Standards. Future versions of the plans should demonstrate how the applicant proposes to comply with the development design standards, as required by §155-217.F. of the township's Zoning Ordinance.

#### RELATIONSHIP TO CITY AVENUE DISTRICT OFFICIAL MAP

The City Avenue District Official Map indicates the location of several public improvements on the Two Bala Plaza property. A new minor road with a linear public gathering space is shown through the site connecting Decker Boulevard to Kings Grant Drive, essentially bisecting the site parallel to City Avenue. The new minor road and linear public gathering space do not appear to be proposed to be provided through the site, as shown on the City Avenue District Official Map.

#### BUILDING AND PUBLIC GATHERING SPACE DESIGN

The proposed site plan shows two, L-shaped buildings facing in opposite directions. Reorienting the proposed mixed-use building located closer to City Avenue so that both of the proposed L-shaped buildings face towards the existing buildings (see conceptual illustration on the following page) could create additional usable public gathering space that is framed by all four of the buildings. In addition, the central green space in the center of the site could be activated by the proposed ground floor retail to create a concentration of pedestrian activity that could contribute to the vibrancy of the mixed-use site.

In addition, we recommend that special attention be given to the design of the City Avenue building frontages and the pedestrian entrance to the public gathering space from City Avenue. It appears that due to the grading of the site, the City Avenue frontage of the site is the closest to being a flat entrance into the site and public gathering space. Additional design treatments such as distinctive pavement materials, pedestrian-scaled lighting, and wayfinding signage may help to make this important entrance into the site more distinctive and attractive.

In general, future versions of the plans should include detailed designs of the proposed public gathering spaces in order to determine compliance with §155-217.E. of the township's Zoning Ordinance.



#### CONNECTION TO OTHER PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

We have been notified that the applicant is also proposing a mixed-use development on the property known as One and Three Bala Plaza located across St. Asaph's Road from this property. The further development of both of these properties with additional residential, retail, office, and public gathering spaces creates an important opportunity to ensure that these two large sites are well-connected so that future workers and residents on both sites can access and utilize the amenities on either site.

In particular, we feel that it is important to improve the signalized intersection of St. Asaph's Road and Decker Boulevard with high-visibility continental-style crosswalks and pedestrian push-button signals to improve pedestrian connections between the two sites. Improved pedestrian crossings at all intersections, as well as wayfinding signage, would also help to improve pedestrian access to and from the existing SEPTA bus stop located at the corner of Decker Boulevard and City Avenue.

#### PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION

A system of internal pedestrian walkways is shown; however future versions of the plans should include marked crosswalks where the pedestrian walkways cross driveways or streets. In addition, the applicant may wish to work with adjacent property owners to explore whether additional internal pedestrian connections between their site and adjacent office properties may be beneficial. For example, improving pedestrian accessibility between the sites could make it easier for workers from adjacent sites to walk to and patronize the proposed retail spaces.

#### LANDSCAPE DESIGN

In general, future versions of the plans should include a detailed landscape plan. In addition, street trees should be provided along all existing and proposed street frontages.

#### TRUCK CIRCULATION

Future versions of the plans should include a truck turning template demonstrating that large vehicles, including ambulances and fire trucks, can safely access the site.

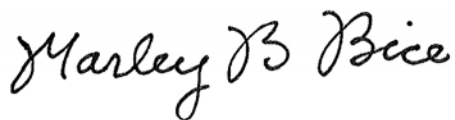
## CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate that MCPC generally supports the applicant's proposal to construct two new residential and commercial buildings; however we believe that our suggested revisions will help the development better achieve the township's planning objectives for the City Avenue District – Regional Center Area.

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 (#19-0097-001) on any plans submitted for final recording.

Sincerely,

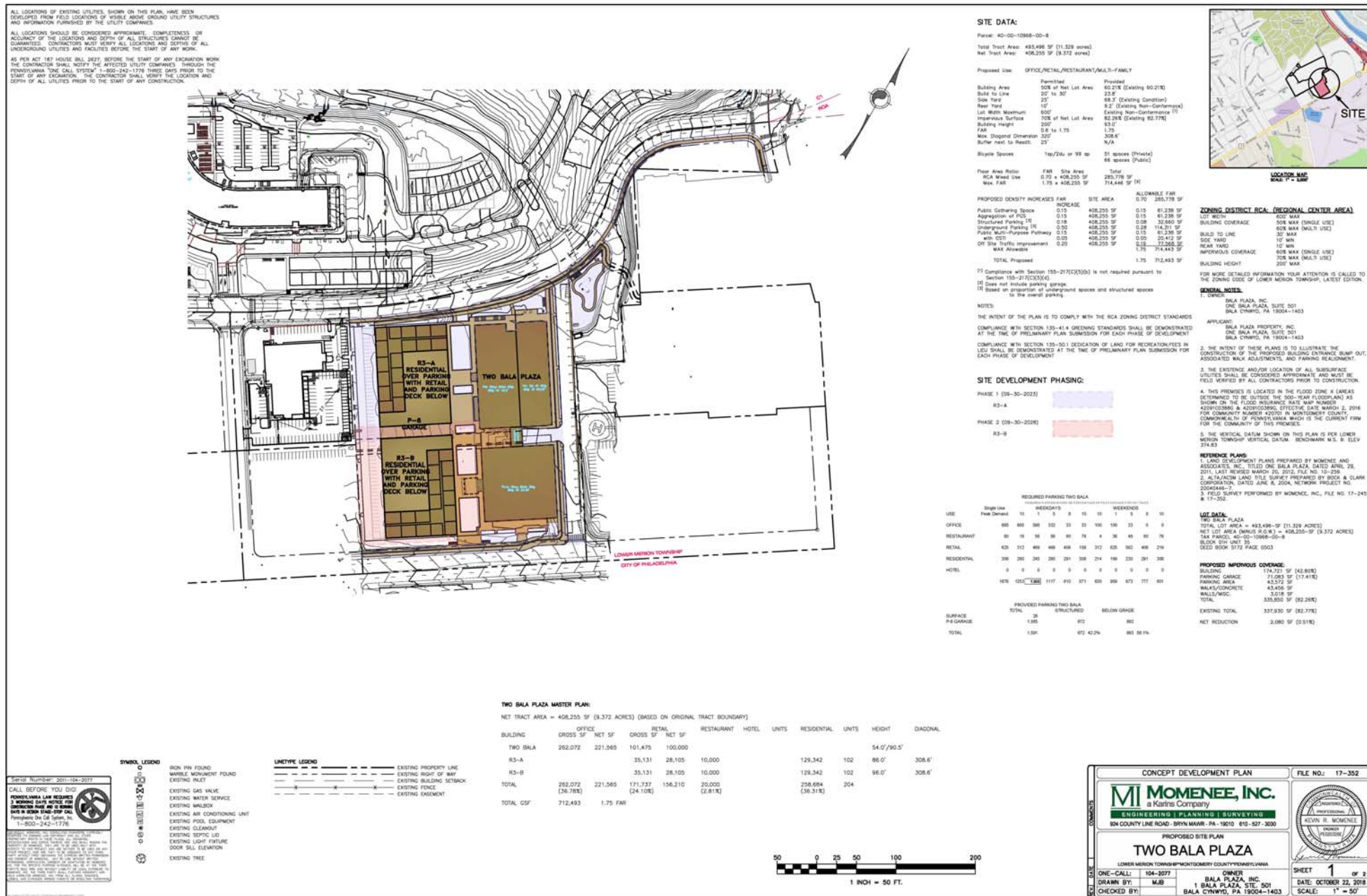
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marley B Bice". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

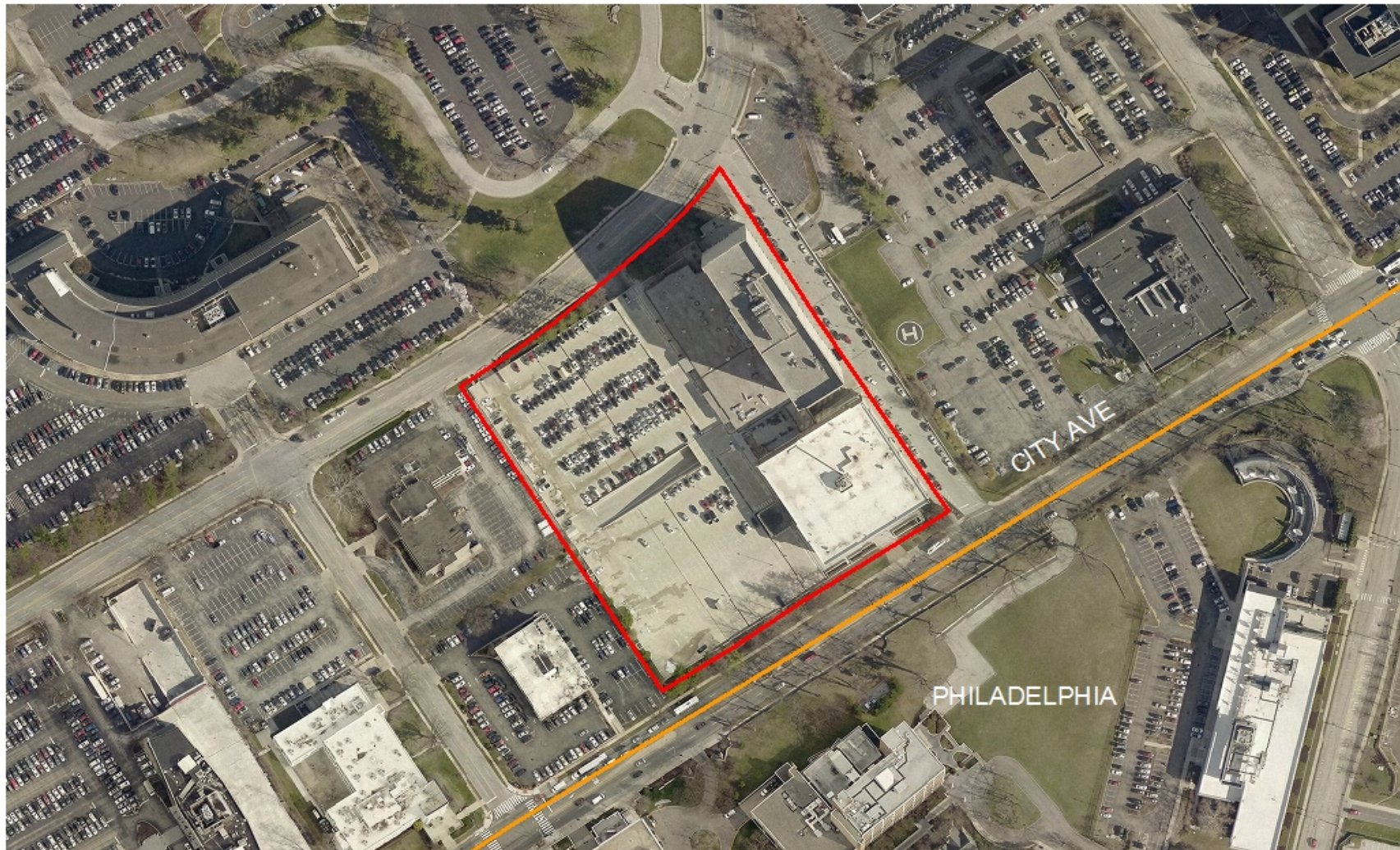
c: Bala Plaza Property, Inc., Applicant  
Alfred R. Fuscaldo, Applicant's Representative  
Momenec, Inc. Applicant's Engineer  
Gilbert P. High, Jr., Esq., Twp. Solicitor  
Ernie B. McNeely, Twp. Manager  
Edward P. Pluciennik, P.E., Twp. Engineer  
Fran Hanney, PennDOT  
Steve D'Antonio, SEPTA

Attachment A: Reduced Copy of Applicant's Proposed Site Plan

Attachment B: Aerial Image of Site







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Two Bala Plaza, Bala Cynwyd  
190097001

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

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