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SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

May 6, 2024

Mr. Henry Sekawungu
Director of Planning and Zoning
Cheltenham Township
8230 Old York Road
Elkins Park, PA, 19027

Re: MCPC #17-0261-003
Plan Name: Westminster Theological Seminary – Phase 2
(1 lot comprising 16 acres)
Situate: Church Road and Willow Grove Avenue
Cheltenham Township

Dear Mr. Sekawungu:

We have reviewed the above-referenced land development in accordance with Section 502 of Act 247, "The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code," as you requested on April 5, 2024. We forward this letter as a report of our review.

BACKGROUND

The Applicant, Westminster Theological Seminary, has been in the process of updating its campus in Cheltenham Township for several years. This multi-phase redevelopment includes a new trail, new parking areas, several new buildings, stormwater management, and the demolition of one existing building to create a public outdoor gathering space. This redevelopment is already underway, with the trails, some of the new parking areas, and some site work already complete.

The applicant wishes to amend their already approved site plan to revise the size and configuration of one proposed building and one parking area. The configuration or some of the pedestrian pathways will also change. The adjusted proposal results in less impervious surface than was previously approved. The building that is proposed to be changed is an academic building with an attached chapel. The applicant wishes to build the three-story academic building now, and the proposed chapel at a later date.

The property is located in MU-2 Mixed Use Zoning District. The applicant obtained a variance from the Zoning Hearing Board on June 9, 2023, to exceed the maximum building height in this zoning district. The proposed building is three stories and 50 feet tall, while the maximum height in the MU-2 district is 35 feet. As a condition of approval, the Zoning Hearing Board stipulated that there should not be a bell in the belfry of the proposed chapel or of any other building on the property.

Various variances were granted by the Zoning Hearing Board in 2017 that allowed approval the site plan that is now being amended. We previously reviewed proposals for this campus redevelopment on December 5, 2017 and March 29, 2019.

RECOMMENDATION

The Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) generally supports the applicant's proposal, however, in the course of our review we have identified the following minor issues that the applicant and Cheltenham Township may wish to consider prior to final plan approval. Our comments are as follows:

REVIEW COMMENTS

PEDESTRIAN PATHWAYS

A. Pathways around new building– The proposed three-story academic building with attached chapel (to be added at a later date) is located adjacent to a small turnaround area with four parking spaces. Pedestrian walkways lead from that paved area to both sides of the building. A gravel pathway is also shown on the plan set from the Church Road side of the building traveling east to connect to the rest of the site. We suggest that the applicant consider how pedestrians on the gravel path parallel to Church Road might connect into the parking area or turnaround area near the proposed building. The pathway does not appear to connect to the other proposed pedestrian pathways.

B. Phasing– As the academic portion of the building will be built in phases, we urge the applicant to consider pedestrian routes of travel both while undergoing construction and upon completion.

PLAN SUBMISSION MATERIALS

A. Revisions– It is very helpful that the applicant submitted the previously approved site plan for reference. However, it does not appear that the applicant has included an overall site plan with the new building. To facilitate the evaluation of the entire site, we suggest the applicant include an overall site plan that includes the newly proposed building configuration, parking areas, and walkways in addition to the detailed plan submitted.

CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate that MCPC generally supports the applicant's proposal. 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. Please print the assigned MCPC number (*#17-0261-003*) on any plans submitted for final recording.

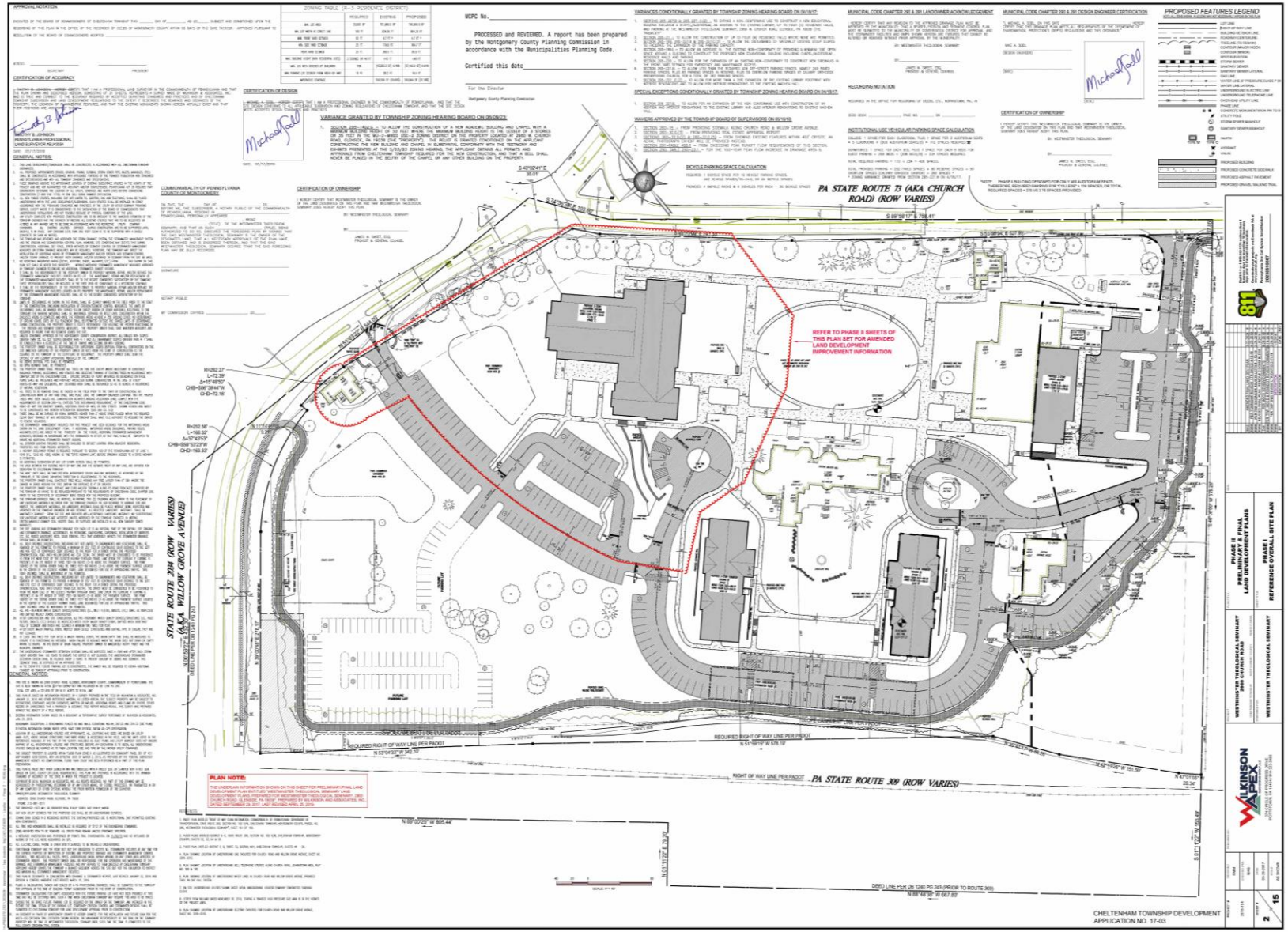
Sincerely,

Chloe Mohr, AICP, Principal Planner
chloe.mohr@montgomerycountypa.gov – (610) 278-3739

c: Vincent Brown, Applicant
Michael A. Sodl, P.E., Applicant's Representative
Alyson Elliot, Township Manager
Thomas Cross, Chair, Township Planning Commission
Jessica Buck, District Manager, Montgomery County Conservation District

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

ATTACHMENTS A & B





Westminster Theological Seminary - Phase 2
MCPC#170261003

Montgomery County Planning Commission
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Aerial photography provided by Nearmap

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