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SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

December 19, 2024

Mr. Charles L. Guttenplan, AICP
Director of Planning & Zoning Officer
Whitemarsh Township
16 Germantown Pike
Lafayette Hill, Pennsylvania 19444

Re: MCPC # 24-0235-001
Plan Name: Gemma Services- Whitemarsh Campus
Situate: 5200/5168 Butler Pike
2 lots/ 28,150 Sq. ft. / 22.67 acre site
Whitemarsh Township

Dear Mr. Guttenplan:

We have reviewed the above-referenced subdivision and land development proposal in accordance with Section 502 of Act 247, "The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planned Code," as you requested in an electronic submission received on November 1, 2024. We forward this letter as a report of our review.

BACKGROUND

The applicant, Gemma Services has submitted a preliminary land development plan for the redevelopment of a 22.64 acre site that was home to a former office/research building and the Lulu Temple Rodeo and grounds. The proposed new use is as an educational facility with a large multi-purpose recreational field and related amenities. The plan shows the demolition of several out-buildings and the rodeo area with approximately 8.0 acres of disturbance. The existing 78,000 sq. ft. office building will be repurposed and the plan proposes the construction of a 2-story, 28,150 sq. ft. addition to it. The repurposed building will be renovated with approximately 45 classrooms. The project shows the demolished rodeo area and grounds will be replaced by a +/- 106,000 sq. ft. multi-purpose, synthetic turf field with a track, bleachers and a field house. A new driveway is shown that connects two existing surface parking lots and a one-way thru driveway lane that circles the perimeter of a 126-space parking lot adjacent to the recreational field is shown.

The development tract consists of 2 lots and it is situated in the CLI- Campus- Type Limited Industrial District; the I-Institutional District, the Floodplain Conservation Overlay District and the Riparian Corridor Conservation District. The development tract consists of:

- 5200 Butler Pike- Tax Parcel- 65-00-01333-00-6
- 5168 Butler Pike- Tax Parcel- 65-00-01327-00-3

The applicant was granted a Special Exception under Section 11`6-175.B of the Zoning Ordinance to operate a private academic school on the property. A variance from Section 116-175.B of the Zoning Code was granted to permit a portion of the proposed gymnasium building within an area designated as floodplain soil.

CONSISTENCY WITH COUNTY AND MUNICIPAL PLANS

The proposal for the redevelopment of the site appears consistent with the *Montco 2040: A Shared Vision*, Montgomery County Comprehensive Plan, 2015. The county's plan recommends that the future land use for the applicant's site and surrounding neighborhood should support 'Business-Area' land uses. The proposal appears somewhat inconsistent with the 2028 Future Land Use Plan recommendations contained in the *Whitemarsh Township Selective Comprehensive Plan Update*, Nov. 2020. The future land use vision for this area recommended by the plan is for an area designated as a 'Residential Character' Area. The future land use envisioned for this character area includes a single-family residential, semi-detached homes and condos with an emphasis on connectivity and walkability.

RECOMMENDATION

The Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) generally supports the applicant's redevelopment plan, however in reviewing this proposal we identified several concerns regarding the lack of any proposed safety and landscape improvements to the two existing surface parking lots shown in the proposed redevelopment of the site. We believe that a more considered approach to pedestrian safety and movement and the provision of shade trees within the parking lot's interior is needed and should be included in the redevelopment for an educational campus with a large recreational activity space. We recommend the township consider these issues and ensure that the applicant's redevelopment plan includes a more robust parking lot improvements plan to ensure pedestrian safety. As well, consideration should be given to potential environmental and aesthetic benefits that could result from the site's redevelopment. An annotated sketch of one of the existing parking lots is shown below that summarizes our recommendations.

COMMENTS

1. **Parking Lot Improvements - Section 105-38. Parking lot design standards (I. & K.)**

   The applicant's plan to redevelop the site does not address multiple requirements of the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance – *Design Standards- Section 105-38 Off-Street Parking Facilities*. The two existing parking lots are wide expanses of un-differentiated pavement with re-stripping and lighting and improvements. It appears the parking lots are proposed to continue as non-conforming parking facilities. We recommend the applicant revise the plan to meet the requirements of the township's landscape island requirements for parking lots (One island per 15 spaces-- *§105-38.I.*) and the required 10 ft. wide planting strip for parking lots with more than 30 spaces *(§105-38.K.*) We recommend the plan address the Design Standards for Off-Street Parking Facilities. We believe the redevelopment of the site is the township's best opportunity to ensure that these two large surface parking lots are developed to 21st century best parking lot design standards for the future.

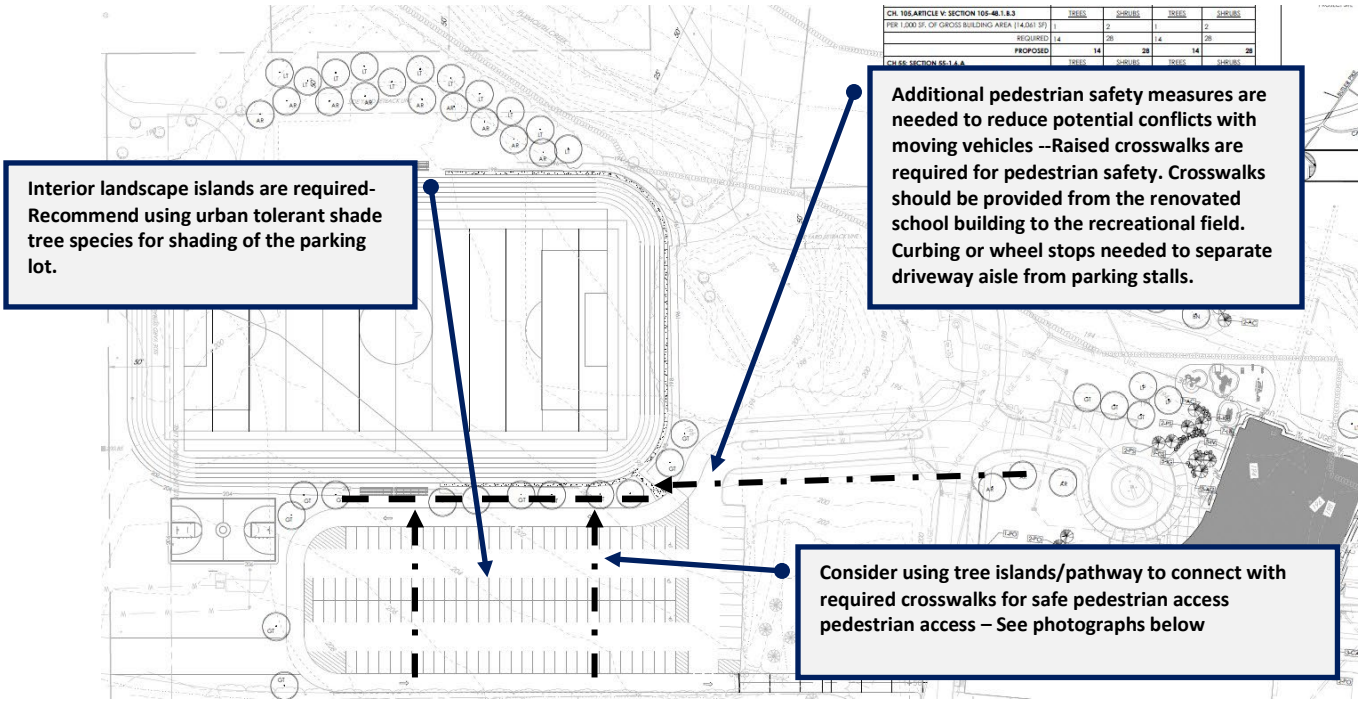
2. **Parking Lot Safety and Accessibility Improvements**

   a. Pedestrian Safety & Raised Crosswalks. – Section 105-38.S.

   The redevelopment plan does not provide pedestrian safety measures needed to minimize potential conflicts between pedestrians and motor vehicles. The plan should include dedicated pedestrian access

routes and crosswalks for pedestrian safety and comfort from the parking lot to the recreational field's sidewalk. As shown, motorists exiting their parked vehicles must weave their way through parked vehicles and across the one-way driveway aisle without any crosswalks or other safety measures. The applicant is required by *Section 105-38.S.*- to provide *"raised pedestrian crosswalks and refuge island at intervals not exceeding 200 ft. along the length of each parking area."* The attached photographs below illustrate how the required tree islands and raised crosswalks could be used to improve pedestrian safety within the parking lots and provide shade.

b. *Curbing between the One-Way Drive Aisle & Parking Stalls*.
The redevelopment plan should include a device to separate the parking stalls along the one-way driveway from the driveway aisles and vehicular traffic. Separation devices could include wheel stops and painted caution markings or raised curbing with a sidewalk. We recommend the township engineer assess the proposed arrangement and ensure that parked vehicles are physically separated from the one-way driveway aisle.



Parking Lot Improvements- Recommendations



Pedestrian safety measures: Raised crosswalk



Pedestrian safety measures: Tree islands and walkway for pedestrian refuge

CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate that MCPC generally supports the applicant's proposal, however we recommend the township assess to its satisfaction, our concerns and comments regarding how this site's redevelopment can assist in accomplishing the goals and objectives of the township.

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 # 24-0235-001.

Sincerely,

Barry W. Jeffries

Barry W. Jeffries, ASLA , Senior Design Planner

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c: Joan Plump, Gemma Services, Applicant
Paul Lepard, Jr., RLA, PP, Nave Newell, Applicant's Representative
Aaron Kostyk, Chair, Whitemarsh Township Planning Commission
Karen Weiss, Manager, Plymouth Township

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

ATTACHMENT A, B



Gemma Services - Whitemarsh Campus
MCPC#240235001