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PLANNING COMMISSION

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SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

March 24, 2025

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

FROM: Marley Bice, AICP, Community Planning Assistant Manager
marley.bice@montgomerycountypa.gov | 610-278-3740

SUBJECT: MCPC #24-0227-004
SOPI - 19-21 Bala Avenue

We have received and reviewed a "SOPI" submission for the above-referenced subdivision and land development application as you requested on March 14, 2025. The comments in this memo are based on the most recent submission. We have attached our most recent full review letter (for submission MCPC #24-0227-003) for reference; however, some comments in our previous review letter(s) may have been addressed.

UPDATED BACKGROUND

We have reviewed the most recent "SOPI" submission and noted that the number of residential units has been reduced from 33 to 32 and the number of parking spaces has been reduced from 54 to 53. Other minor revisions have been made to the conceptual landscaping and streetscape design, building façade, pedestrian walkways, and handicapped parking areas.

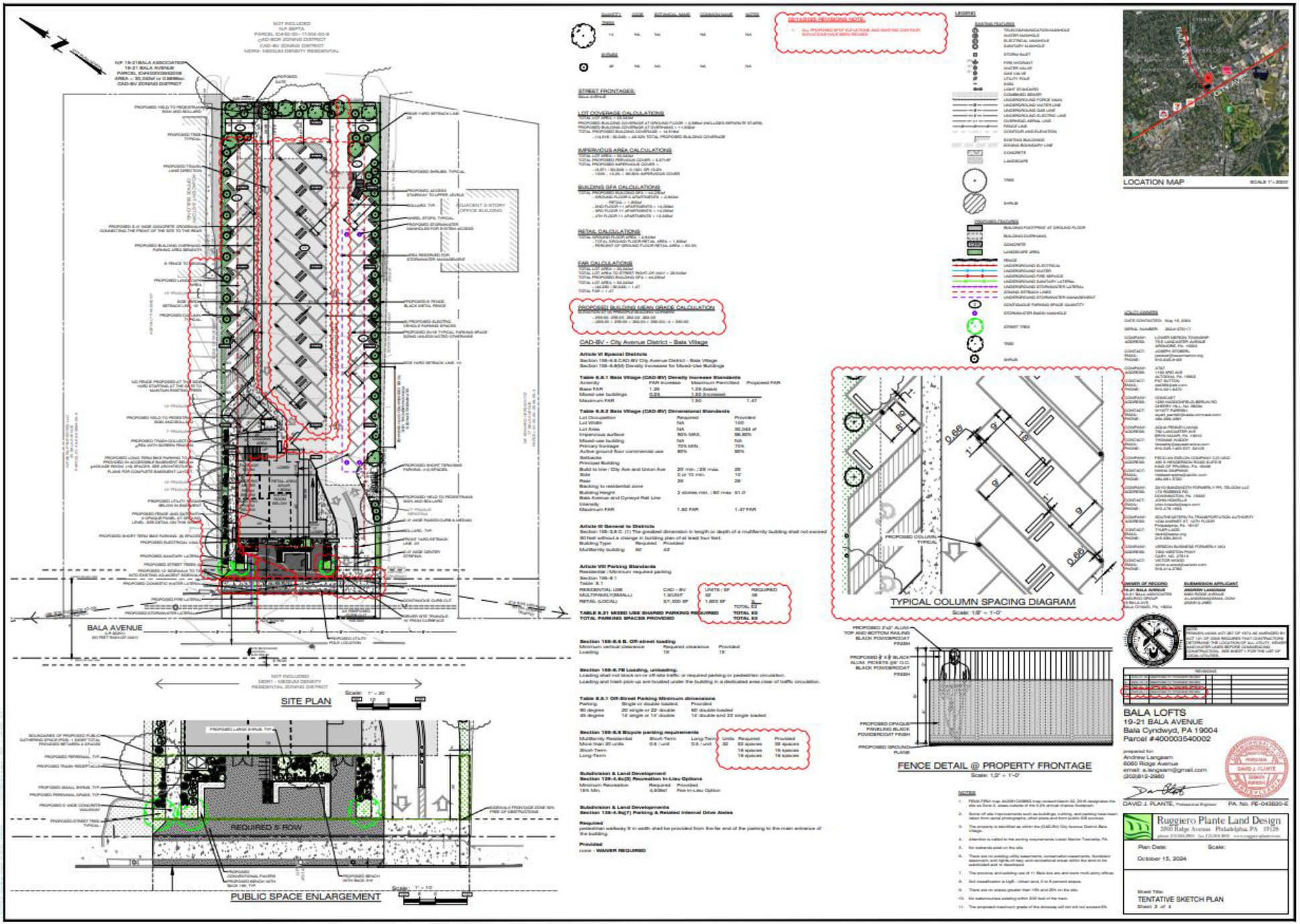
ADDITIONAL REVIEW COMMENTS

We have reviewed the most recent "SOPI" submission and feel that several comments from our January 30, 2025 review letter (please see Attachment B) may still be worthy of discussion, especially related to the need to consider the feasibility of complying with all related landscape and greening standards requirements as part of future submissions. In addition, we wish to offer the following additional comments:

Parking Spaces for Commercial Use: The first five parking spaces along the right side of the entrance driveway are now shown to be designated for the proposed ground floor retail space; however, there is no clearly-marked pedestrian path from these parking spaces to the commercial space.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Reduced Copy of Applicant's Proposed Site Plan
Attachment B: MCPC #24-0227-003 Review Letter Dated January 30, 2025


BALA AVENUE
SITE PLAN
PUBLIC SPACE ENLARGEMENT
REQUIRED 5' ROW
LOCATION MAP
TYPICAL COLUMN SPACING DIAGRAM
FENCE DETAIL @ PROPERTY FRONTAGE
BALA LOFTS
19-21 BALA AVENUE
Bala Cyndwyd, PA 19004
Parcel #400003540002
Ruggiero Plante Land Design
2600 Ridge Avenue Philadelphia, PA 19128
Plan Date: October 15, 2024
Scale:
TENTATIVE SKETCH PLAN
Sheet 3 of 4

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SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

January 30, 2025

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

Re: MCPC #24-0227-003
Plan Name: 19 & 21 Bala Avenue
(33 du and 1,800 sq. ft. commercial on approximately 0.69 acres)
Situate: Bala Avenue (E); south of Union Avenue
Lower Merion Township

Dear Mr. Leswing:

We have reviewed the above-referenced tentative sketch plan as you requested on January 17, 2025. We forward this letter as a report of our review.

BACKGROUND

The applicant, Andy Langsam, proposes to consolidate two existing lots at 19 and 21 Bala Avenue and construct a four-story, mixed-use building. The proposed building will have 1,800 square feet of retail space on the ground floor and 33 apartments on the upper floors, partially cantilevered over a surface parking lot containing 54 parking spaces. All existing structures on the combined properties are proposed to be removed. Additional improvements shown at this time include widened sidewalks and a public gathering space along Bala Avenue (which is a State Road) and an underground stormwater management facility. The property is located in the township's CAD-BV City Avenue District – Bala Village zoning district.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLIANCE

The Land Use Element of the 2016 Lower Merion Township Comprehensive Plan identifies this property as Commercial. Furthermore, the Commercial Land Use Element of the Township Comprehensive Plan identifies the Bala Avenue commercial area as a Traditional Main Street. The proposed development appears to be consistent with the desired form of Traditional Main Street commercial areas because it is a mixed-use building with a ground floor commercial use and a limited front yard that is activated as a public gathering space.

In addition, this area of the 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 Center areas are traditional downtown areas with a mix of retail, institutional, office, and residential uses. The proposed building placement appears to be consistent with the criteria that buildings in Town Center areas be pedestrian-oriented with buildings built close to the sidewalk and parking located to the rear of buildings.

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 issues that the applicant and Lower Merion Township may wish to consider prior to final plan approval. 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 property:

A. Landscape Buffer. Section 155-3.10.B. requires that a landscape buffer be provided in compliance with the standards in Chapter 135. Future submissions should include a landscape plan demonstrating compliance with the landscape buffer requirement, as applicable.

B. Greening Standards. Future versions of the plans should demonstrate how the applicant proposes to comply with the greening standards, as required by §155-3.10.E. of the township's zoning ordinance.

SUBDIVISION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE COMMENTS

Based on the information provided, we have identified the following items related to the township's subdivision and land development ordinance that we feel should be addressed as part of any future land development submissions associated with this property:

A. Pedestrian Access within Parking Lot. Section 135-4.9.Q.(7) contains standards for pedestrian pathways and crosswalks that apply to all surface parking lots with 10 or more new parking spaces. The proposed site plan does not appear to provide a 5-foot-wide pedestrian pathway from the far end of the parking lot to the main entry of the building that is clearly separated from vehicular use areas. Alternatively, the applicant is proposing two concrete pedestrian walkways through the parking area to connect to gates along the rear property line that appear to leave open future opportunities for trail connections along the railroad right-of-way to the rear of the property. We defer to the Township Engineer to determine if additional pavement markings and signage may be needed to further distinguish the proposed in-driveway pedestrian pathway.

B. Street Trees. Section 135-5.1.C.(7) states that street trees shall be planted at a rate of at least one tree per 30 feet of street frontage, or portion thereof. Based on the site's frontage length of 100 feet, four street trees should be provided; however, it is unclear whether any street trees are proposed. The

placement of street trees may be impacted by utilities and easements that run along the Bala Avenue frontage. Therefore, we encourage the applicant to work with the township to explore ways to maximize tree cover within the public gathering space.

C. Landscape Plan. In general, future submissions should include a landscape plan demonstrating compliance with the landscaping requirements in the township's subdivision and land development ordinance, including the buffer planting requirements (§135-5.2), parking lot greening standards (§135-5.3), and greening standards (§135-5.5), as applicable.

PARKING LOT DESIGN

A. Handicapped Parking. It appears that a proposed support column is located along the passenger side of the middle handicapped parking space, potentially obstructing access to that parking space's adjacent accessible aisle. In addition, we noted in reviewing ADA guidelines for accessible parking spaces (https://www.ada.gov/topics/parking/) that angled parking is required to have an accessible aisle on the passenger side of each parking space. The third handicapped parking space does not include an accessible aisle on the passenger side. Overall, we defer to the township engineer to review the ADA compliance of the proposed parking area.

B. Parking Lot Edging. It is unclear from the information provided how the edge of the surface parking lot will be defined. If the parking lot will not be curbed, we suggest that wheel stops be used to define the edge of the parking lot and protect adjacent landscaping.

CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate that MCPC generally supports the proposed development; however, we believe that our suggested revisions will better achieve Lower Merion Township's planning objectives for mixed-use development.

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 (#24-0227-003) on any plans submitted for final recording.

Sincerely,

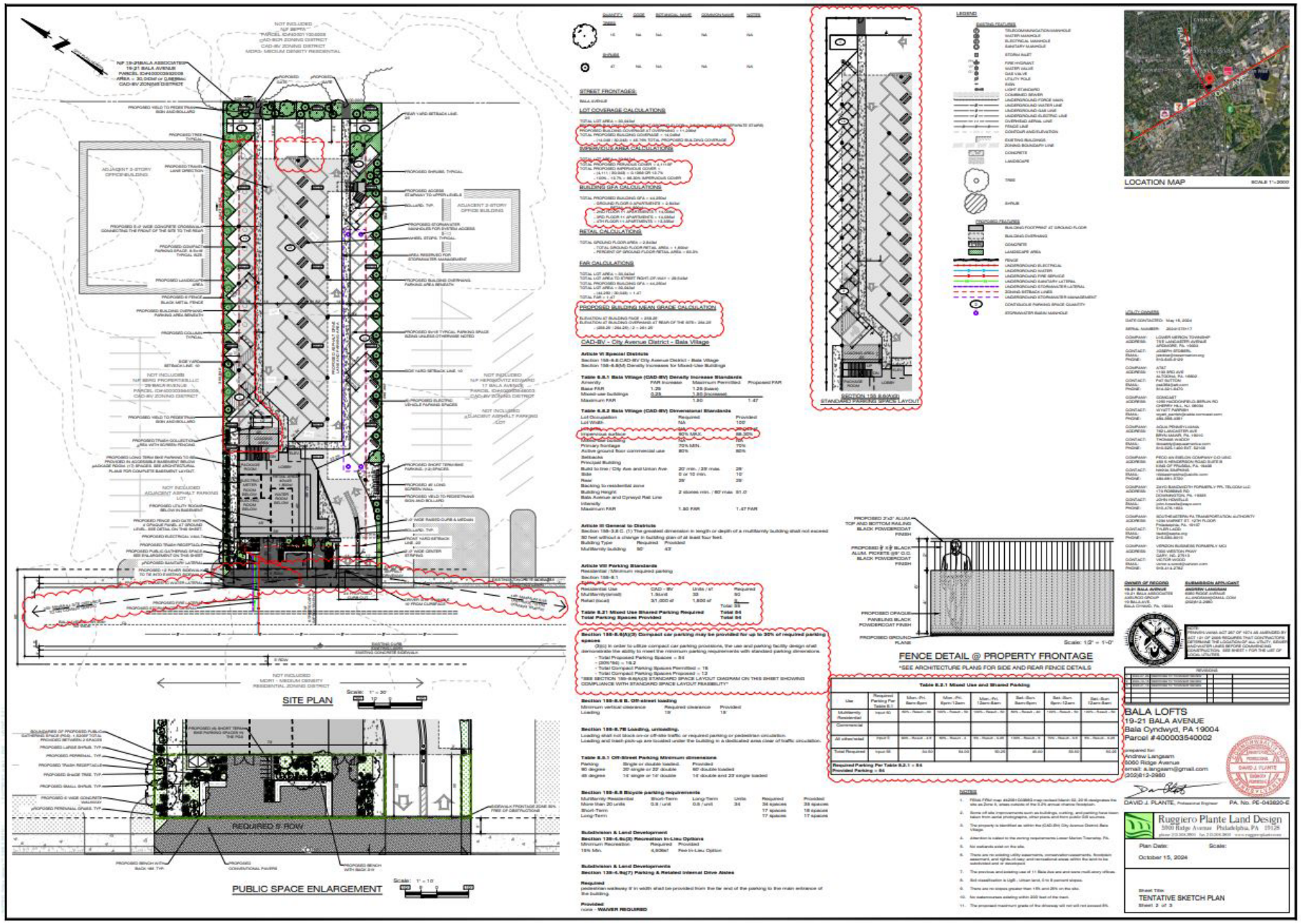
Marley B Bice

Marley Bice, AICP, Community Planning Assistant Manager
610-278-3740 – marley.bice@montgomerycountypa.gov

c: Andy Langsam, Applicant

Ruggiero Plante Land Design, Applicant's Engineer
Gilbert P. High, Jr., Esq., Twp. Solicitor
Ernie B. McNeely, Twp. Manager
Jody Kelley, Twp. Secretary
Joseph Mastronardo, P.E., Twp. Engineer
Charlie Doyle, Twp. Asst. Dir. of Planning
Colleen Hall, Twp. Senior Planner
Greg Prichard, Twp. Historic Preservation Planner
Holly Colello, Twp. Planner
Sarah Carley, Twp. Planner
Hope Viviani, Twp. Planning Technician
Fran Hanney, Scott Burton, Paul Lutz, PennDOT

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


SITE PLAN
PUBLIC SPACE ENLARGEMENT
REQUIRED 5' ROW
LOCATION MAP
FENCE DETAIL @ PROPERTY FRONTAGE
*SEE ARCHITECTURE PLANS FOR SIDE AND REAR FENCE DETAILS
STANDARD PARKING SPACE LAYOUT
STREET FRONTAGES
LOT COVERAGE CALCULATIONS
BUILDING GFA CALCULATIONS
RETAIL CALCULATIONS
FAR CALCULATIONS
PROPOSED BUILDING MEAN GRADE CALCULATION
CAD-BV - City Avenue District - Bala Village
Table 8.2.1 Mixed Use and Shared Parking
BALA LOFTS
19-21 BALA AVENUE
Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004
Parcel #400003540002
Andrew Langsam
8060 Ridge Avenue
email: a.langsam@gmail.com
(302)812-2680
DAVID J. PLANTE, Professional Engineer
PA. No. PE-043930-E
Ruggiero Plante Land Design
Plan Date:
October 15, 2024
Scale:
TENTATIVE SKETCH PLAN
Sheet 2 of 3



SOPI 19-21 Bala Avenue
MCPC#240277002