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SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

July 3, 2025

Ms. Jayne Musonye
Director of Planning and Development
Municipality of Norristown
235 East Airy Street
Norristown, Pennsylvania 19401-5048

Re: MCPC #25-0118-001
Plan Name: Norristown Public Library
(1 lot comprising 2.18 acres)
Situate: Powell Street (north)/Swede Street (east)
Municipality of Norristown

Dear Ms. Musonye:

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 requested on June 6, 2025. We forward this letter as a report of our review.

BACKGROUND

The applicant, Montgomery County, proposes improvements, including additions to the Norristown Public Library building, as part of the facility's renovation. The property is located within the areas identified as Central A (front plaza) and Central B (remainder of property) on the Municipality's Historic District map. The majority of the library building and its existing parking lot located behind the building will remain intact. The applicant proposes the addition of 6,882 square feet of the main building: 2,617 square feet expansion at the library's front entrance and 4,265 square feet on the west side of the building.

A formal entrance featuring a small courtyard and a sitting area is proposed at the south end of the building at the corner of Powell and Swede Streets. This area will feature porous pavers; the stair treads will feature non-porous pavers. Four ADA-accessible parking spaces, including two van-accessible spaces and ADA ramps will be incorporated to facilitate access to the building's rear entrance from the parking lot. Three employee parking spaces and a screened area for two dumpsters are proposed behind the building along Grady Alley. Existing sidewalks and walkways will be replaced.

Montgomery County was granted several variances at the Norristown Zoning Hearing Board meeting held on June 24, 2025. These variances pertained primarily to the dimensional criteria provisions, including yard setbacks, impervious coverage, building coverage, building height, and fence height.

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 Municipality may wish to consider prior to final plan approval. Our comments are as follows:

REVIEW COMMENTS

SPECIAL EXCEPTION USE CRITERIA

Per the Section 320-41.C.(8), libraries are a special exception use in the Municipality's R-2 District. Per Section 320-216.G., Special Exception Conditions for libraries, a sketch plan shall be submitted to the Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB) for review. We ask the Municipal Zoning Officer to confirm whether sketch plan review by the HARB is required for the proposed expansion to an existing use.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

A note on plan sheet 3 under the Impervious Calculations Table identifies that a green roof and porous pavers will be constructed to offset the additional impervious area created by the proposed improvements. The note proposes that these features would reduce the amount of impervous coverage below the existing amount of impervious coverage, and the project would be exempt from stormwater management requirements. Note E23 on Building Elevations plan sheets A3.1 and A3.2 refers to "pedestal roof pavers and green roof."

It is unclear where the green roof is proposed, as E23 is not labeled on the elevation plan. We ask the Municipality to have the applicant confirm whether a green roof will be incorporated as stormwater management for this project as proposed. We also ask the Municipal Engineer to ensure that the green roof, or other stormwater control measure proposed, is designed properly to manage rooftop runoff in compliance with the Municipality's existing stormwater management ordinance requirements.

LANDSCAPING CONSIDERATIONS

A. Green Wall Feature along Swede Street - The landscape plan on Sheet L5.0 features a wire trellis with a climbing vine beginning at the front entrance steps and extending approximately 200 feet along Swede Street to just past the Swede Street entrance. A note on the Plant Schedule indicates the trellis feature will consist of a braided stainless steel wire mounted to the concrete wall. We ask the applicant to provide a detail of the trellis structure that clearly illustrates the design and type of wire material to be used and how it will be affixed to the wall.

The species of vine proposed for the trellis area, Margarita Carolina Jessamine, is highly poisonous to humans in addition to being heat-tolerant and suited to full sun exposure. In addition to the concern that children could be exposed to poison by interacting with the vines, it is noted that this section of Swede Street is shaded most of the day. For these reasons, we ask the Municipality to consider asking the applicant to select a more regionally-native species of flowing vine that is suited to shaded areas and cooler conditions.

B. Trees to be Retained - Sheet L1.0 identifies a mature London Plane Tree or Sycamore near the front entrance to remain. A second tree of the same type and size located further to the north on Powell Street is to be removed due to the impact of new construction, steps, and walk. There is concern that the depth of excavation required for the reservoir for the porous paving system will encroach significantly into the retained tree's structural root zone. We ask the Municipality to consider whether an alternative location for stormwater management would be possible in lieu of saving the tree. If the tree is to be retained, we strongly suggest adding a detail to the Erosion and Sedimentation Plans in addition to the Tree Protection Detail currently shown that identifies the how to mitigate the potential for damage to the tree's structural root zone caused by the extent of encroachment of the pavers' reservoir into the root zone. Damage to the structural root zone will be detrimental to the tree's survival.

   If the tree ultimately will need to be removed, we strongly recommend that replacement trees shall be accommodated for in accordance with Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance Section 282-433.1.C.5, Tree Planting Requirements. Section 282-433.1.C.5)c. permits the governing body to accept an equivalent fee-in-lieu for the municipal shade tree planting fund if the site does not reasonably contain enough room for the required replacement trees.

C. Street Trees - A half-dozen tree pits are proposed along Swede Street to be planted with Honeylocust. In order to ensure the survival of trees in an urban paved environment, we ask the Municipality to consider requiring the applicant to incorporate a suspended paving system that would connect all the tree pits via a singular trench. Doing so would expand the area available for tree roots to grow and contribute to their long-term survival.

D. Street Tree Label Conflict with Symbol - Plan Sheet L5.0 identifies seven Amelanchier candensis to be planted along Swede Street. The label identifies these as being "tree form", i.e., single stem. The symbol used for these trees indicates multi-stem plantings. We recommend updating either the label or the symbol correctly identify the type of tree to be planted in this area.

CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate that MCPC supports the applicant's proposal, but we believe that our suggested revisions will better achieve Norristown's objectives for redevelopment.

Please note that the review comments and recommendations contained within are advisory to the municipality and final disposition for the approval of any proposal will be made by the municipality.

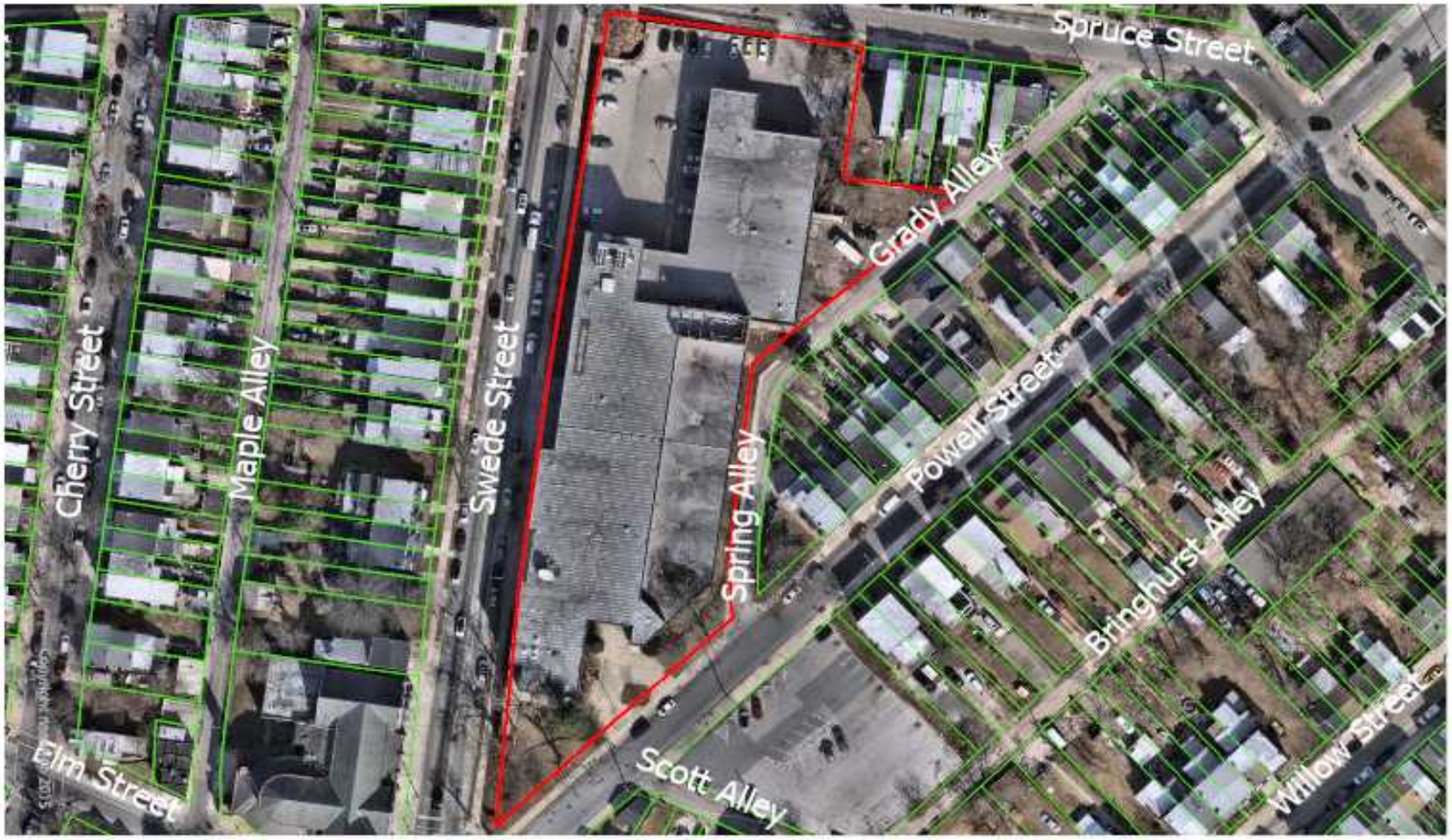
Should the governing body approve a final plat of this proposal, the applicant must present the plan to our office for seal and signature prior to recording with the Recorder of Deeds office. A paper copy bearing the municipal seal and signature of approval must be supplied for our files. Please print the assigned MCPC number #25-0118-001 on any plans submitted for final recording.

Sincerely,

Donna Fabry, CFM, Principal Open Space Planner
donna.fabry@montgomerycountypa.org – 610-278-3445

c: David Hahn, Capital Projects Program Director, Montco Dept. of Assets and Infrastructure
Amber Queen-Curnew, Chair, Municipal Planning Commission
Khaled R. Hassan, PE, Municipal Engineer

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

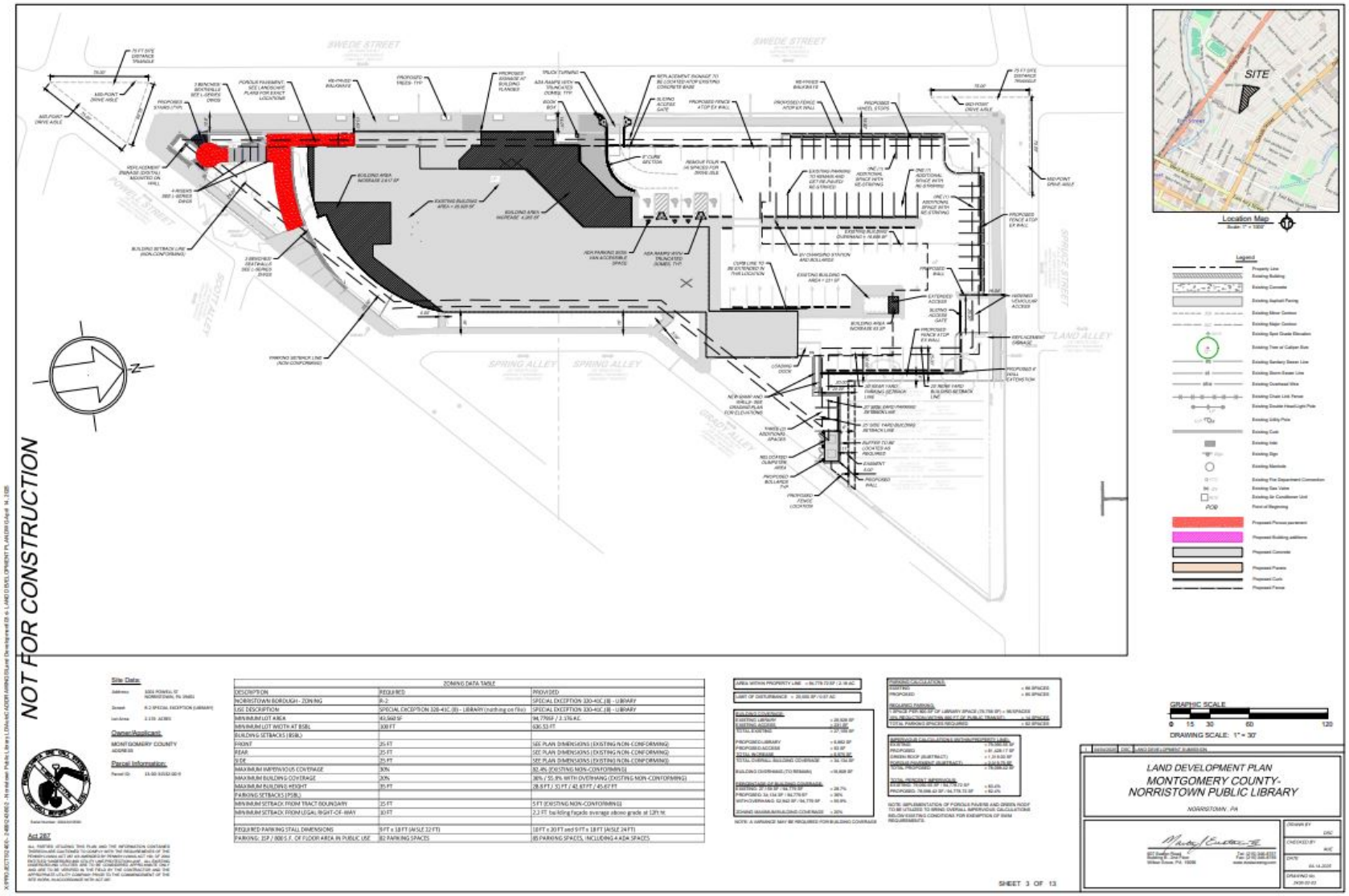


Norristown Public Library
MCPC#250118001

Montgomery County Planning Commission

0 50 100 200 Feet

N


NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION
SITE
Location Map
Legend
GRAPHIC SCALE
0 15 30 60 120
DRAWING SCALE: 1" = 30'
LAND DEVELOPMENT PLAN
MONTGOMERY COUNTY-
NORRISTOWN PUBLIC LIBRARY
NORRISTOWN, PA
SHEET 3 OF 13