

January 21, 2021

TO: Planning Commission Members
FROM: Jillian Dierks, Planner, Department of Building and Planning
SUBJECT: TENTATIVE SKETCH PLAN – 355 W. Lancaster Avenue, Haverford, Ward 4, LD# 3880

Proposal

The applicant, George Broseman, on behalf of 355 West Lancaster Owner, LLC, is seeking Tentative Sketch Plan approval for the following:

- Demolition of all structures on the property;
- Construction of a four-story building with a 58,597 sq. ft. footprint containing 121 residential units and 4,000 sq. ft. of ground floor retail space; and
- Installation of streetscape improvements.

The proposal is illustrated on the attached set of plans that includes nine (9) sheets prepared by Site Engineering Concepts, LLC., dated November 2, 2020, last revised December 18, 2020.



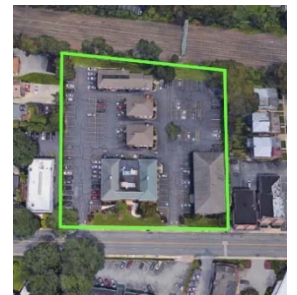
EXISTING ZONING	EXISTING LAND USE	PROPOSAL
Town Center 1 (TC1): A medium intensity, walkable area that serves the entire Township along commercial corridors and between traditional and neighborhood main streets.	Commercial/Office	Construction of a four-story building containing 121 residential units and 4,000 sq. ft. of ground floor retail space

Property Description

The property is 86,416 sq. ft. (1.9 acres) in size. The property is zoned TC1 and is bound by Lancaster Avenue to the west, the Paoli-Thorndale SEPTA Regional Rail to the east, a mix of commercial and single family residential uses zoned MDR2 to the east, and a mix of commercial and single family residential uses zoned VC to the north.

The property is improved with a series of five office buildings, common drives, and parking areas. The full development of the property for commercial purposes came about through a series of approvals granted by the Township Zoning Hearing Board between 1954 and 1969.

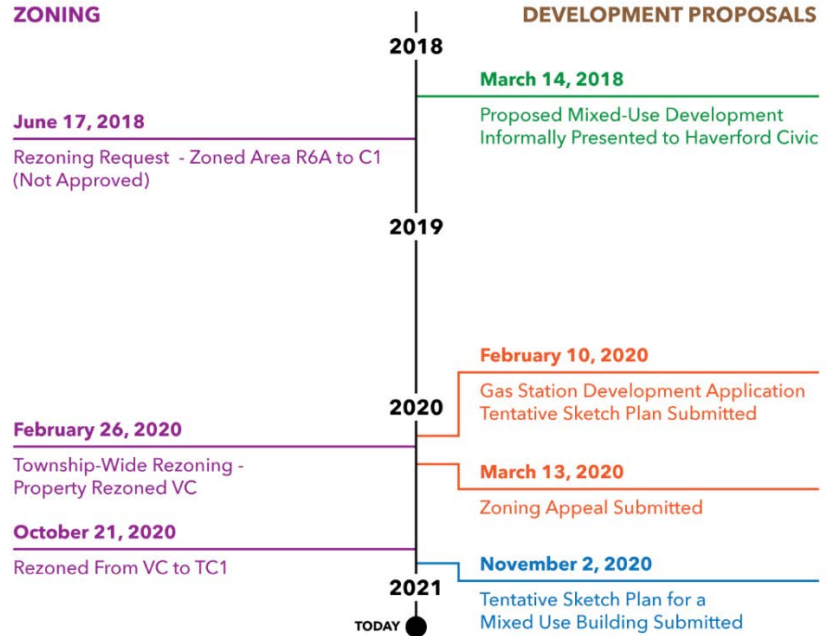
The property abuts Medium Density Residential 2 (MDR2) District to the eastern rear boundary, and Village Center District (VC) along the western boundary, and the rear of the property abuts the railroad.



Process

Application History: The subject property has been the topic of several discussions in the past two years. The current Tentative Sketch Plan application was submitted in November 2020. Prior to the submission of this Tentative Sketch Plan the property was rezoned from VC (Village Center) to TC1 (Town Center 1), which is discussed in more detail below.

The applicant also has another pending Tentative Sketch Plan for the site that was submitted under the previous zoning (VC), which proposes the demolition of all present structures and the construction of a gas station with a one-story commercial store with a 6,383 sq. ft. footprint. The applicant has appealed a determination by the Township Zoning Officer for the proposed use and would require review by the Zoning Hearing Board, should the applicant seek to move forward with that proposal in the future. The applicant has indicated that the current mixed-use proposal being reviewed by the Planning Commission is their preferred development plan.



Tentative Sketch Plan: The purpose of a Tentative Sketch Plan is to determine appropriate locations for buildings, driveways and parking lots and how such improvements can least impact a site’s natural features. It has become practice in the Township to use the Tentative Sketch Plan phase to flesh out other issues and give applicants a program to address at the Preliminary Plan phase.

Meeting Schedule: The tentative schedule for the conditional use requests and land development review of the proposal is as follows:

January 25, 2021	Planning Commission	Review of the Tentative Sketch Plan
January 27, 2021	Building & Planning Committee	Review of the Tentative Sketch Plan
TBD	Board of Commissioners	Review of the Tentative Sketch Plan

Additional information about the Township’s Land Development approval process is illustrated in the [Subdivision & Land Development Flowchart](#). This application is currently in the *Stage 4: Public Meetings* portion of the process.

Zoning

Rezoning: On October 21, 2020 the Board of Commissioners adopted an ordinance ([4197](#)) to amend the Code of the Township of Lower Merion, Chapter 155, entitled Zoning Map, to rezone the properties shown on the Montgomery County Assessment Map Block 6B, Units 300, 302, 303, 304, and 554 and Map Block 7B, Unit 115, more commonly known as 331-355 W. Lancaster Avenue from VC, Village Center District to TC1, Town Center District.

District: The property is located within the [Town Center 1 \(TC1\) zoning district](#). TC Districts are the medium to larger commercial areas, related to major transportation corridors, mixing local, regional and national retail, with some residential uses above the first floor. The TC1 Districts are the Township’s traditional shopping districts that developed around train stations and grew as corridors over time. They are pedestrian-oriented with buildings entered from street-front sidewalks,

with a variety of retail and service uses, and may include shared and municipal parking. The Zoning Code states that the intent of the TC Districts is to preserve and enhance the multifaceted uses of the Township’s established commercial areas.

Form Standards: The proposal is subject to the form standards contained within Article 4; [TABLE 4.3.2 TC1 Dimensional Standards](#). The following table details the applicable standards and proposed conditions:

TC1- ZONING DISTRICT				
TABLE 4.3.2		Requirement	Existing	Proposed
Lot Occupation	Lot Width	16 ft. min.	299 ft.	299 ft.
	Lot Area	1,600 sq. ft. min.	86,416 sq. ft.	86,416 sq. ft.
	Impervious Surface	80% max.	83%	79.5%
	Frontage Occupation	90%	n/a	90%
Setbacks	Front	12 ft. min. / 15 ft. max.	25 ft.	12 ft.
	Side	0 or 5 ft. min.	5.7 ft.	21.8 ft.
	Rear	none	7.8 ft.	13.4 ft.
	Buffer [1]	20 ft.	0 ft.	20 ft.
Height, Frontage & Façade Type	Principal Building [2][3]	2 stories min. to 4 stories max.	2 stories	4 stories
	Frontage Yard Type	Shallow; Urban; Pedestrian Forecourt, Vehicular Forecourt	n/a	Urban
	Façade Type	Common Entry, Arcade, Gallery, Storefront	n/a	Storefront

[1] Where a Lot abuts a property zoned LDR, MDR1, or MDR2, there shall be a Buffer of 20 feet in width along the rear property line and side property line extending to the front yard setback.

[2] Where adjacent to LDR, MDR1 and MDR2 Districts each story above the third story shall be stepped back 15 feet after the third floor or 40 feet, whichever occurs first, in the front and rear.

[3] Four stories up to 50 feet with a front setback of 15 feet after the 3rd floor or 40 feet, whichever occurs first, subject to compliance with Section 155-4.3.C.4.d. or 155-4.3.C.4.e.

Uses: The proposal is subject to the Article 5, [Table 5.1 Uses](#) & [Table 5.3 Regulations](#). The proposed use is Multifamily (Large) which is defined as “a building containing more than six dwelling units, where each unit has direct access to the outside or to a common hall, and each unit is designed for and occupied exclusively as a permanent residence for a single family. Multifamily housing where dwelling units are available for lease or rent for less than one month shall be considered lodging.”

Use	District	Regulations
Multi-Family (Large)	TC1	Multifamily (large) shall be permitted subject to the following regulations: (1) Active ground floor commercial use is required. The depth of the space devoted to the ground floor commercial use shall be a minimum depth of 40 feet. (2) No single-use residential building shall be permitted. (3) The ground floor of the primary front facade shall comply with § 155-3.9D , Storefronts Architectural Standards.

Parking: The proposal is subject to the Article 8, [Table 8.1 Minimum Parking Requirements](#) and [Table 8.7.1 Minimum Bicycle Parking Requirements](#) which is calculated below:

		Requirement	Calculation		Total Required	Total Provided
Vehicle	Multi-Family (Large)	1.5 per unit	121 units x 15 = 182 spaces		198 spaces	200 spaces
	Retail	4 per 1,000 sq. ft.	(4,000/1,000) x 4 = 16 spaces			
Bicycle	Multi-Family (20+)	Short Term	.5 per unit	121 units x .5 = 61 spaces	123 spaces	127 spaces
		Longer Term	.5 per unit	121 units x .5 = 61 spaces		
	Commercial	.5 per 1,000 sq. ft.	(4,000/1,000) x .5 = 2 spaces			

The vehicular parking is provided below grade (162 spaces) and in a surface lot located beneath the building (38 spaces). The bicycle parking is located along the property frontage (8), internal to the building (60) and within the covered surface parking lot (56).

Regional and Township Comprehensive Plan Compliance

The [Land Use Element of the 2016 Lower Merion Township Comprehensive Plan](#) identifies W. Lancaster Avenue as one of the Township's Traditional Main Streets. The proposed mixed-use building is consistent with the statement that "residential uses are integral to these districts and are located in mixed use buildings over street level commercial."

In addition, the Haverford area of Lower Merion Township is identified as a Town Center in the Future Land Use Plan of the Montgomery County Comprehensive Plan, [Montco2040: A Shared Vision](#). Town Centers are "traditional downtown areas with a mix of retail, institutional, office, and residential uses." The proposed development is generally consistent with the statement that town centers "are pedestrian-oriented, with buildings built close to sidewalks and often attached, side to side."

Applicable Studies and Reports

- Lower Merion Township Comprehensive Plan, [Commercial Land Use Element](#) (2016)
- Lower Merion Township Comprehensive Plan, [Housing Element: Affordability](#) (pg. 332) (2016)
- [US 30 Corridor Study: Creating Linkages and Connecting Communities](#) (2011), Prepared by Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

Additional Reviews

- Community Meeting: Planning Staff held a community meeting on September 17, 2020 at which the property rezoning was discussed and the applicant presented the proposal.
- Haverford Civic Association: The Haverford Civic association reviewed the applicant's proposal on December 8, 2020.
- Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) Review: (Attached) MCPC generally supports the applicant's proposal in their review included recommendations on vehicular and building circulation, streetscape design, inclusion of garden units, and stormwater. The County recommendations have been either addressed on the attached plan, have been incorporated into the issues below, and/or included as recommended conditions of approval.
- Township Engineer's Review: (Attached) The Township Engineer's review focused on stormwater and traffic. The review comments have been incorporated into staff's recommended conditions of approval.
- Environmental Advisory Council (EAC): The EAC reviewed the plans at their December 15, 2020 meeting. The EAC discussed requiring the applicant provide a larger green roof, pushing the property frontage back from the street, incorporating additional green infrastructure, incorporating porous paving, managing the stormwater in the landscape of the subject property, and applying standard green infrastructure conditions of approval to this application.

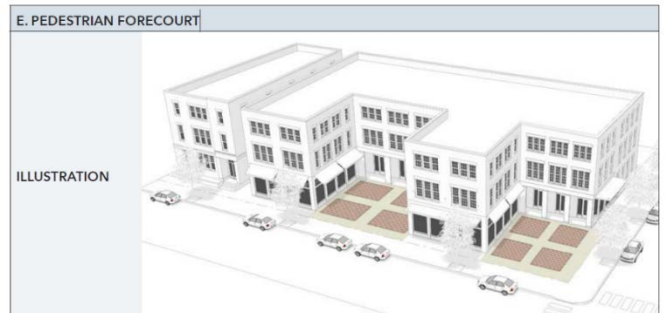
Issues

1. Frontage

Forecourt: Both Planning Staff and the MCPC have provided the applicant with recommendations on the building frontage and streetscape. Planning Staff recommended that the applicant consider increasing the distance between the curb line and the front façade of the building to provide a forecourt for gathering or outdoor dining. In response the applicant revised the plan to increase the space along the front of the building an additional 2-2.5 feet, increasing the greatest depth to 21 feet, which staff feels is inadequate.

The plan currently includes a large 14,230 sq. ft. outdoor residential amenity space to the rear of the street facing retail. Shifting the retail and first floor space back toward the rear of the site would require internal building layout changes but not a reduction of building footprint. Staff has included a condition requiring the applicant to investigate providing a forecourt along the frontage.

Staff also notes that providing a forecourt aligns with recommendation LC13 of the Comprehensive Plan, which recommends the integration of appropriate locations for permanent or seasonal civic space to encourage public gathering and that foster economic viability, pedestrian activity and a sense of community.



Site as Proposed



Site with a Pedestrian Forecourt

LC13

RECOMMENDATION Identify appropriate locations for permanent or seasonal civic space in all commercial areas and ensure that areas considered for public gathering space are appropriately landscaped.

Streetscape: Staff has expressed the importance of creating an attractive and high-quality streetscape along the property frontage. In their review the MCPC noted that the proposal includes varying building setbacks and foundation planting areas, which create obstructions and visual inconsistency. Staff has included a condition of approval requiring the applicant to work with staff and the Shade Tree Commission to redesign the streetscape layout to create a consolidated trench of street trees and plantings between the curb and the sidewalk along the W. Lancaster Avenue frontage. Given the speed of vehicular traffic along W. Lancaster Avenue a continuous strip of plantings adjacent to the curb would provide a safer and more pleasant pedestrian environment and sense of enclosure for pedestrians.

2. Moderate Income Housing

The [Housing Element](#) of the Township's Comprehensive Plan acknowledged the need to provide affordable units at appropriate densities in desired locations and included a recommendation (H8) that the Township explore the potential for including affordable housing as part of commercial area revitalization. The plan included the strategies of (1) developing appropriate incentives for affordable housing that maintains the form and scale of the existing built environment in conjunction with mixed-use projects and to (2) continue to actively work with developers in the early planning stages to inform them of mixed-use potential.

In line with the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan a height incentive was incorporated into the TC1 District. The [Zoning Code Section 155-4.3.C.4](#) states:

4. *The height of a mixed-use building with a residential component in TC1 may be increased to a maximum of four stories, provided that the development complies with either §155-4.3C(4)(a) or (b).*
 - a. *A mixed-use building that provides either five dwelling units or 20% of the total number of dwelling units (whichever is greater) of moderate-income housing units as described in §155-10.13, Moderate-income housing.*
 - b. *The developer shall contribute a sum of money equal to 5% of the construction costs of the building. This fund shall be controlled by the Township and be dedicated to use for moderate-income housing units as described in § 155-10.13, Moderate-income housing. The method of payment of this contribution shall be established during the land development approval process.*

The proposed building is shown to be four stories and the plans indicate that the applicant will provide a minimum of 20% or 25 of the 121 units proposed in the building as moderate income units per Zoning Code Section [§155-10.13](#), which states:

The total number of residential units and/or the amount of commercial space may be increased when an application provides on-site housing opportunities for a mix of household incomes, including both market-rate housing and housing that is affordable to moderate-income households, and provided that such units shall be so maintained by a covenant running with the land. Price and income guidelines for moderate-income households shall be as defined by the [Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency \(PHFA\) Keystone Home Loan Program income guidelines](#) in effect at time of application. Developers and subsequent transferees of moderate-income units shall provide documentation showing compliance with these family incomes and rental/purchase price limits. The amount of the density increase shall be noted on the plan and recorded in the deed.

Staff has included conditions requiring the following:

1. A draft covenant shall be submitted with the Preliminary Plan submission for review by the Township Solicitor;
2. The amount of the density increase shall be noted on the plan and recorded in the deed; and
3. The plan shall include a note documenting the that the applicant shall submit an annual report to the Planning Division which demonstrates that the building is in compliance with the affordability requirements. The report shall provide information on the number of affordable units and the incomes of the tenants occupying all of the affordable units within the building. The Township reserves the right to request documentation of the tenants' income and rent at any time. The back-up income documentation shall be maintained by the property owner for a minimum of three years.

3. Access

Loading & Unloading: The plan shows the loading and unloading area to be accessed from the proposed access driveway. The MCPC review expressed concern with the location creating confusion for vehicles entering the site for the retail use. The applicant has stated that a garage door would be provided for the loading area, which will reduce vehicular confusion. Staff

has included a condition requiring the applicant to provide plans for the garage door and for it to be architecturally complimentary to the building design.

Street Level Parking Connection: The entrance to the at-grade parking and loading area creates an approximately 50' long curb cut. Visitors utilizing the at-grade parking would be required to cross this large curb cut to access the street facing business entrances. Staff has included a condition requiring the applicant to work with staff to provide a walkway with a hardscape treatment across the curb cut and investigate the feasibility of a pedestrian refuge between the loading and at-grade parking access to break up the curb cut distance.



4. Landscape Plan

As noted in the zoning chart, the plan is required to include a 20' wide landscape buffer along the eastern property boundary where the property abuts the MDR2 District. The bordering residential properties along N. Wyoming Avenue are zoned MDR2. The landscape buffer is to be used for no other purpose than planting and screening. Zoning Code Section [155-3.10.3](#) requires:

Landscape buffers shall in the opinion of the Director of Building & Planning, provide a sustainable filtered visual screen that will mature up to a height of at least six feet. Pedestrian access through buffer shall not be limited. Buffers shall be as established in the Township Code, Chapter 101.

Staff has included a condition of approval requiring the applicant to work with staff prior to the submission of the Preliminary Plan on the design of the landscape plan to consider the quality and quantity of the buffer plantings.

5. Stormwater Management

In his review, the Township Engineer stated that since the principal buildings on the existing parcels have been or will be demolished, stormwater rate and volume controls shall be provided considering the pre-development ground cover condition as meadow and the stormwater facilities shall be capable of recharging the minimum infiltration volume (Rev) and be able to drain in the code required ninety-six (96) hours for the water quality recharge volume and twenty-four (24) hours for the rate control volume.

Action

The Planning must take the following actions:

1. Recommendation on the Tentative Sketch Plan