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SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

March 25, 2024

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

Re: MCPC # 19-0018-003
Plan Name: Villanova University Boathouse
1 lot /11,930 sq. ft. comprising +/- 9.02 acres
Whitemarsh Township

Dear Mr. Guttenplan:

We have reviewed the above-referenced subdivision and land development in accordance with Section 502 of Act 247, "The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code," as you requested on February 14, 2024 in an electronic submission to this office. We forward this letter as a report of our review.

BACKGROUND

The applicant, Villanova University has submitted a sketch plan proposing the redevelopment of a former industrial property as a recreational boating facility, utilizing its location adjacent to the Schuylkill River for boating. According to the application, the applicant intends to renovate a portion of an existing building; approximately 3.0 acres of the 9.8 acre tract will be impacted by the development. The property at 601 Washington Street is Tax Parcel # #65-00-12679-00-9, which lies in the township's Heavy Industrial District (HVY); the Riverfront Development District (RDD-1), and the Floodplain Conservation Overlay District. As it pertains to the site's zoning, the township regulations for the Riverfront Development Overlay District are additive to the requirements of the underlying district(s), and in the event of a conflict, take precedence over the underlying zoning district(s). The submitted application indicates that relief from the township's Zoning Code will be sought, including:

Zoning- Variances/Relief:

- A Special Exception- Required for the use of a boating dock in the Floodplain Conservation Overlay District. Section 116-166. Special Exception.

- Conditional Use Approval- needed for a Boathouse in the Riverfront Development Overlay District. Sec. 116-280.F.(2.)

The sketch plan shows the demolition of the majority of the 42,484 sq. ft. industrial building, the re-purposing of approximately 11,930 sq. ft. of the footprint area, and the construction of a facility using this pad. In a letter dated April 20, 2022, The Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) reviewed a land development plan submitted by 601 Washington St. Associates, LP, the developer, proposing the construction of a 4-story, 227 unit apartment for this site. The property was transferred to the applicant in an April 3, 2003 transaction for $11,500,000.

The property has an Environmental Covenant which was recorded with the Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds on April 3, 2023. The Covenant states that the site has a history of industrial operations which consisted of the manufacture of pressure and storage tanks for water, oil and gas. As part of these activities, welding and metal fabrication took place between 1926 and 1967. Currently, the site is primarily vacant, with a portion of it being used for the storage and sale of landscape materials, as well as the storage of boats used by local rowing teams.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLIANCE

Consistency with *Montco 2040*- A Shared Vision

The plan for the redevelopment of this site as a recreational use is consistent with the future land use vision and stated goals of *Montco 2040: A Shared Vison*, the comprehensive plan and future land use vision for the county. The Future Land Use Map of the plan designates the land use vision for the site as part of a larger 'Regional Mixed-Use Center' (RMUC) that extends from the Schuylkill Riverfront to Spring Mill East Elm Street.
"https://www.montcopa.org/1579/Montco-2040-Comprehensive-Plan).

Consistency with the *Whitemarsh Township Selective Comprehensive Plan Update, 2020* & The *Spring Mill Multi-Modal and Land Use Study, March 2022*

The redevelopment proposal for this property appears compatible with the township's future land use vision for this area as a 'Waterfront District Character Area', as recommended by the Whitemarsh Township Selective Comprehensive Plan Update, 2020 and specifically in the plan's Chapter Four- Future Land Use Plan. The future land use goal for this character area is to support high-density development and quality public spaces along the riverfront. The redevelopment proposal supports the goals of creating green space along the Schuylkill River and ensuring recreational access and enjoyment of the river.

RECOMMENDATION

The Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) generally supports the applicant's proposal, however, in the course of our review we have identified several concerns which we believe should be addressed by the township in its assessment of the submission. The future redevelopment of the remaining portion of the 9.8 acre site that is not being developed is an issue that should be addressed. The Washington Streetscape improvements are needed to ensure that this redevelopment is consistent with other adjacent or nearby land developments, and that they will contribute to making Washington Street the type of street the township envisions. Adequate sidewalk design, placement and width along the street, and how public access to the Schuylkill Riverfront is provided and the perpetual access easement for this route are relevant considerations. We recommend the applicant and the township consider these issues as the preliminary plans are developed. Our comments are as follows:

COMMENTS

1. **Future Site Development & Environmental Issues**
   The applicant is only developing approximately a third (3 acres) of the 9.8 acre site. The applicant should provide additional information to the township as to how the remaining 6.0 acres of the site might be redeveloped. We note that the property has a history of industrial activity, and that environmental investigations were conducted at the property as documented by the recorded Environmental Covenant of April 2023. The Covenant states that a determination was made regarding the presence of hazardous contaminants in the soil and groundwater. As a result, activity and uses are limited at the site, as outlined in the environmental covenant recorded in April, 2023. Approval of any development/activity for the site needs to consider the limitations and restrictions outlined in the environmental covenant.

2. **Washington Street Streetscape-Improvements**
   The sketch plan does not address the needed improvements to Washington Street along the applicant's parcel frontage. The various amenities and streetscape improvements needed will ensure a pedestrian-friendly streetscape on Washington Street as required by Section 116-283.D.- Design Standards. The Township's requirement for pedestrian-oriented development, §116-283 D.1- requires a number of pedestrian oriented elements, including: pedestrian lighting, benches, wide sidewalks, pavement variety, and a planting strip between the curb and sidewalk. The applicant should ensure that a unified streetscape is in place, with a sidewalk along the entire frontage of the applicant's parcel that meets the township's district requirements. The preliminary plan submission should be coordinated with the improvements planned at other related land developments proposed along Washington Street.
3. **Redevelopment Within the Schuylkill River's 100-Year Floodplain**
   The development tract lies within the Schuylkill River's 100-year floodplain, and residential developments along Washington Street are experiencing increasingly frequent and

sometimes disastrous impacts. Most recently, the street was partially inundated by flood waters on January 10, 2024 and experienced a disastrous event with Hurricane Ida on September 1-2, 2021. Several hundred cars were damaged and many were a total loss caused by the impacts of the hurricane. Our concern is that the redevelopment of a recreational center may place additional burdens on local and county emergency services responding to Schuylkill River flooding events and rescues at this site, and on the neighboring properties. The applicant should work with Whitemarsh Township to ensure that an effective evacuation plan for any outdoor boats and vehicles is in place for flooding events.

4. Schuylkill Riverfront – RDD Requirements

a. Section 116-283- Design Standards

The sketch plan does not address a number of township's regulations in Section 116-283. A.; B.; and C. These include various requirements for: A. Architectural standards; B. Public Amenities and C. Landscape and Screening. These improvements are essential to ensure that the township's vision for the Waterfront Character Area are realized, and the applicant should ensure these regulations are addressed in the preliminary plan.

b. Section 116-284. – Riverfront Access & Open Space

The sketch plan proposes the required perpendicular public access to the riverfront to be provided, as required by Section 116-284. The applicant should ensure that the requirements for public amenities and related improvements of dedicated open space parallel to the Schuylkill River and the pedestrian riverfront trail are addressed in the preliminary plan submission.

5. Site Improvements

a. Landscape Plan

A significant portion of the applicant's parcel will not be developed as shown in the sketch plan. In light of our prior comments above concerning the remainder of the redevelopment tract and how it may be envisioned for boating or other recreational uses, we believe the vacant areas of the tract should receive attention. We recommend the applicant undertake a robust landscape restoration of the areas currently used for outdoor storage of various materials. Restoration could include more extensive riparian forest plantings, the removal of invasive vegetation, and establishment of meadow areas. We recommend the applicant consider these measures in their future landscape plans.

b. Debris and Industrial Storage Containers

Recent aerial photographs of the site show various areas of scattered debris and other objects, and what appear to be metal containers. We recommend that a condition of approval for the site's redevelopment include a clean-up of the remnants of the previous activities and any debris from previous industrial land activities.

CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate that MCPC generally supports the applicant's proposal but we believe that our suggested revisions will better achieve the township's vision of riverfront redevelopment. We recommend the township address the sketch plan review comments to your satisfaction.

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 # 19-0018-003.

Sincerely,

Barry W. Jeffries

Barry W. Jeffries, ASLA, Senior Design Planner

Barry.Jeffries@montgomerycountypa.gov , 610.278.3444

c: John Camusi for Villanova University, Applicant
Michael Roth, Pennoni, Applicant's Representative
Aaron Kostyk, Chair, Whitemarsh Township Planning Commission

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

ATTACHMENTS A & B

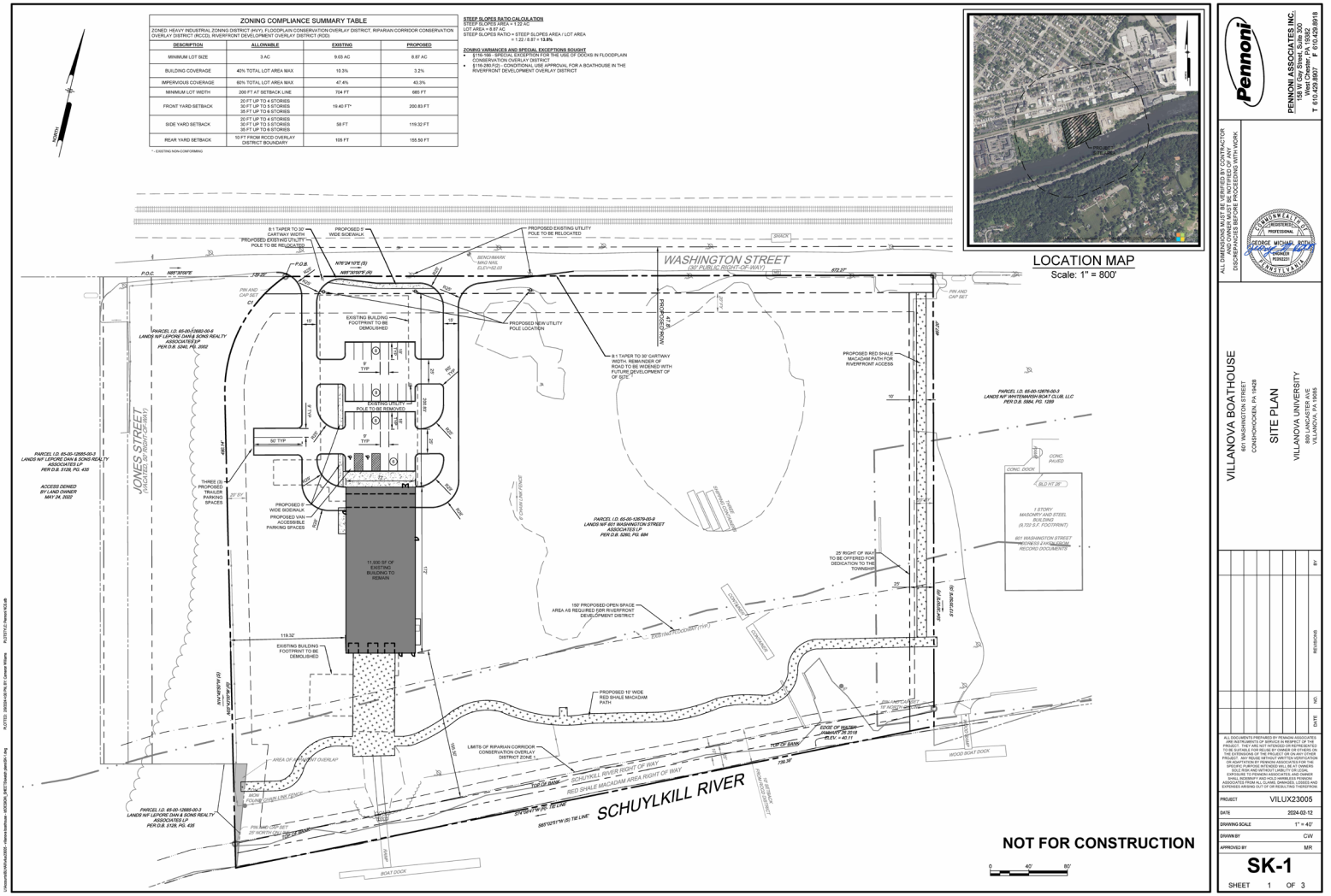


Villanova University Boathouse
MCPC#190018003

Montgomery County Planning Commission
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Aerial photography provided by Nearmap

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ALL DIMENSIONS MUST BE VERIFIED BY CONTRACTOR AND OWNER MUST BE NOTIFIED OF ANY DISCREPANCIES BEFORE PROCEEDING WITH WORK

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA REGISTERED PROFESSIONAL GEORGE MICHAEL MARA ENGINEER PE059231

VILLANOVA BOATHOUSE

601 WASHINGTON STREET
CONSHOHOCKEN, PA 19428

SITE PLAN

VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY
800 LANCASTER AVE.
VILLANOVA, PA 19085

NO.	DATE	REVISIONS	BY

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PROJECT	VILUX23005
DATE	2024-02-12
DRAWING SCALE	1" = 40'
DRAWN BY	CW
APPROVED BY	MR

SK-1

SHEET 1 OF 3