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PLANNING COMMISSION

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SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

July 3, 2024

Mr. Henry Sekawungu
Director of Planning and Zoning
Cheltenham Township
8230 Old York Road
Elkins Park, PA, 19027

Re: MCPC ##24-0136-001
Plan Name: Ashlyn Apartments (1900 Ashbourne Road)
1 lot comprising 7.99 acres
Situate: Ashbourne Road at Spring Avenue
Cheltenham Township

Dear Mr. Sekawungu:

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 June 4, 2024. We forward this letter as a report of our review.

BACKGROUND

The Applicant, Lynnewood Gardens Properties, LLC, proposes three new, 3-story buildings in the northeast corner of the existing Lynwood Gardens apartment complex. A total of 99 residential units, 8,394 square feet of office space, and 8,511 square feet of commercial space are proposed. Building A is proposed to be located parallel to Ashbourne Road and contain 36 dwelling units along with all of the office and commercial space. Building B is proposed to be located along a newly realigned entrance driveway that connects to Spring Avenue across Ashbourne Road, and contain 26 dwelling units along with the leasing office and an 8,911 square foot amenity space. Building C is proposed to be located in the interior of the site, near several existing apartment buildings that are part of the Lynnewood Gardens community, and contain 37 dwelling units.

The applicant proposes a parking lot that is connected to all three buildings with 217 vehicle parking spaces and 11 bicycle parking space. Seven of the vehicle parking spaces will have electric vehicle charging stations. An outdoor plaza or amenity area is proposed between Buildings B and C and a gazebo is proposed in the parking area.

The property is located in the MU-1 Mixed Use zoning district. The property contains a designated wetland. The applicant proposes to construct a retaining wall around the wetland.

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 Cheltenham Township may wish to consider prior to final plan approval. Our comments are as follows

REVIEW COMMENTS

WETLAND AND STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

A. Water Quality. The stormwater is proposed to be discharged to the existing wetland. Ideally, water runoff should be managed as carefully as possible for rate, volume, and quality to maintain the health of the wetland. This wetland is beautiful (See attachment see – the wetland through the season) and currently is a functional natural system. The disturbance around the wetland will impact the runoff coming into the wetland. Existing stormwater runoff entering the wetland may not be managed in as sensitive way as possible. This new development is an opportunity to improve the surrounding stormwater system for the benefit of the wetland. Decreasing the velocity of runoff will help prevent erosion in the wetland area. The subsurface infiltration basins should utilize every possible design feature to reduce the rate of and increase the quality of discharged water. We hope this development will also take the opportunity to improve the quality of the discharge that appears to be currently coming from the pool area.
B. Interpretive or educational signage. The retaining wall around the wetland may provide an opportunity for some educational or interpretive signage about water systems, wetlands, and stormwater runoff. The applicant may wish to consider including signage that will assist residents and visitors in understanding what they can see over the wall.
C. Gazebo. The proposed gazebo in the parking area may provide an opportunity to view the wetland area, which would create a lovely opportunity to observe nature and wildlife. It's not clear from the plan whether the wetland will be visible from the gazebo. We encourage the applicant to place the gazebo in such a way that occupants have a good view of the wetland.

PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS

A. Post Office. Adjacent to this development along Ashbourne Road is a U.S. Post Office. The new sidewalk on this property will reach the shared property line with the post office. We strongly recommend that the applicant work with PennDOT to complete the sidewalk within the right-of-way to reach the post office driveway. There is existing sidewalk on the other side of the driveway along the frontage of the post office property.
B. Lynnewood Gardens Pathways. Although the applicant proposes pedestrian pathways throughout the parking lot, along the driveway, and to the pool area, we recommend consideration be given to other ways for pedestrian routes to tie into the existing development. Lynnewood Gardens has an extensive system of pedestrian pathways that lead throughout the development, including many places that cars cannot drive. There may be opportunities for connections to the Lynnewood Gardens pathway system at some or all of the following locations: to the south of Building C where there is an existing stub of a pathway from a parking lot; from the proposed plaza/outdoor amenity area; and further south along the entrance driveway. We encourage the applicant to consider whether any of these options are possible.

We also encourage the consideration of logical walking routes for existing residents of Lynnewood Gardens to the new office and retail space that will be created along with this development. How will residents from different parts of Lynnewood Gardens reach these new opportunities safely and comfortably on foot? The Township's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance requires that pedestrian circulation be provided throughout any new development (§260-40.B).

C. Other Sidewalks. The portion of Lynnewood Gardens immediately to the west of this development along Ashbourne Road does not have sidewalks. We hope the owners of Lynnewood Gardens plan for the addition of these sidewalks now or in the future as a safety feature for residents.

SITE LAYOUT

A. Building Orientation. We understand that Buildings B and C will have their front facades towards the parking lot. We encourage the applicant to ensure that views of all three buildings are attractive from both of the long facades. This development will be a part of Lynnewood Gardens, and residents from the existing apartment units will view the new development from their homes and from the nearby amenities. We hope that the new additions to the community will be attractive from the existing development as well as from the parking lot.

B. Parking Quantity. The majority of trees being removed for this development are along Ashbourne Road between Building A and the post office. Since this proposal exceeds the number of parking spaces required, we wonder if consideration may be given to retaining a few more of the existing trees in this area and reduce the parking lot size by a few spaces. It also appears that this site may be eligible for a shared parking reduction due to the combination of residential, office, and commercial uses on site. The retention of existing trees may help protect the wetland from erosion and improve water quality.

C. Electric Vehicle Parking. It is not clear from the plan whether the designated EV spaces have adequate clearance for the charging equipment to still allow for pedestrian (including wheelchair) access around them on the walkways. The applicant should ensure adequate space is allotted for EV charging infrastructure while maintaining adequate pedestrian facilities.

LANDSCAPING

A. Shade. We commend the applicant for an extensive landscape plan. We encourage the applicant to include shade trees everywhere possible that will shade the parking lot, as that is one of the hottest surfaces in a developed area. Might there be some opportunity for trees near the retaining wall that would shade a section of the parking lot by Buildings B and C?

B. Gazebo. The gazebo is not shown on the landscape plan. We recommend the plan sheet be revised to show the gazebo to ensure that the landscaping and gazebo are placed with each other in mind.

CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate that MCPC generally supports the applicant's proposal but we believe that our suggested revisions will better achieve the Cheltenham Township's planning objectives for new, 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 (*#24-0136-001*) on any plans submitted for final recording.

Sincerely,

Chloe Mohr, AICP, Principal Planner
chloe.mohr@montgomerycountypa.gov – (610) 278-3739

c: Robert E. Blue, Jr. PE, PLS, Applicant's Representative
Alyson Elliot, Township Manager
Thomas Cross, Chair, Township Planning Commission
Adam Schantz, Montgomery County Planning Commission
Jessica Buck, District Manager, Montgomery County Conservation District
Scott Burton, PennDOT
Paul Lutz, PennDOT
Fran Hanney, PE, PennDOT

Attachment A: Aerial Image of Site
Attachment B: Reduced Copy of Applicant's Proposed Site Plan
Attachment C: Aerial Photographs of the Wetland throughout the Seasons

ATTACHMENTS A, B, C

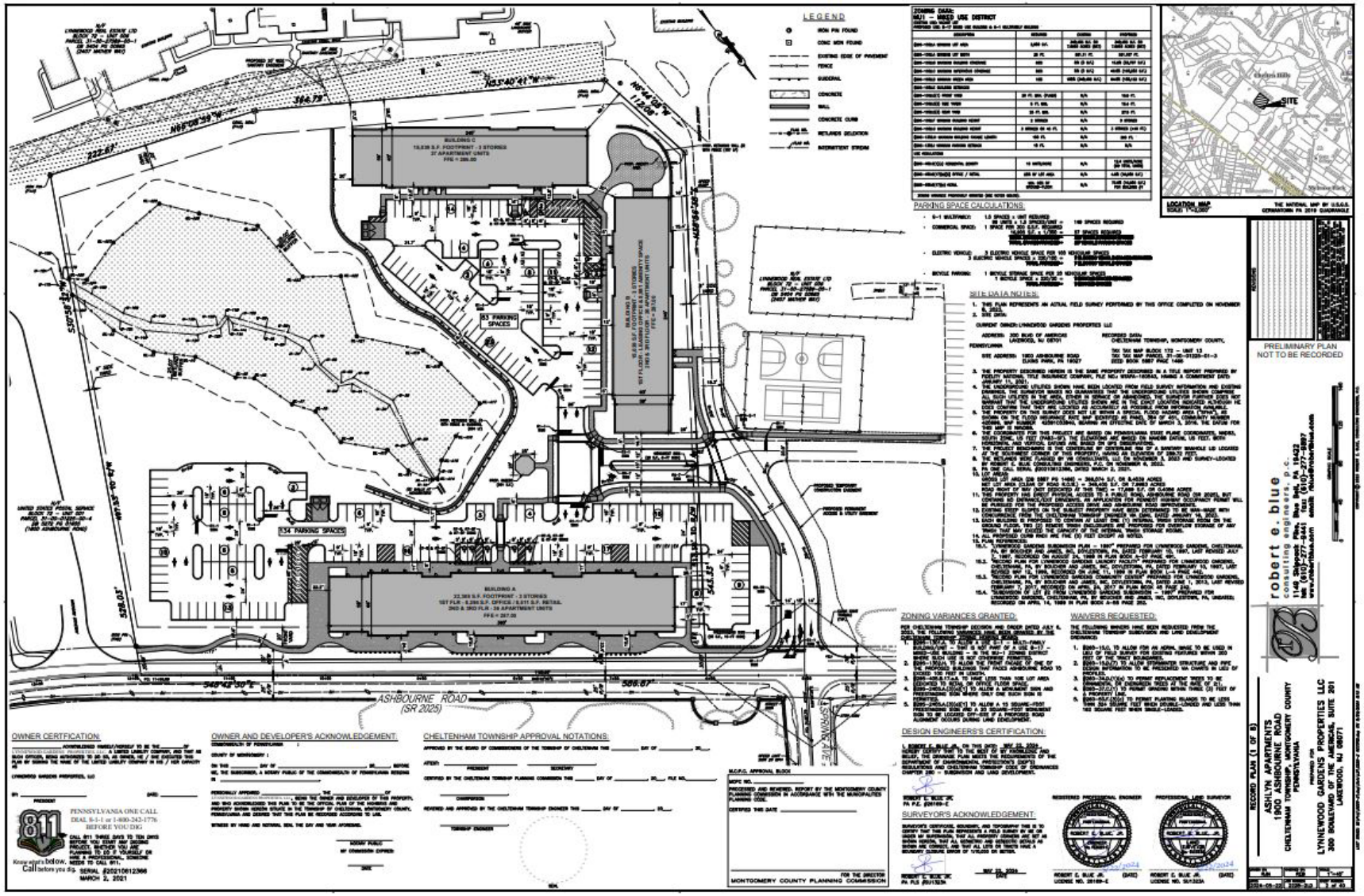


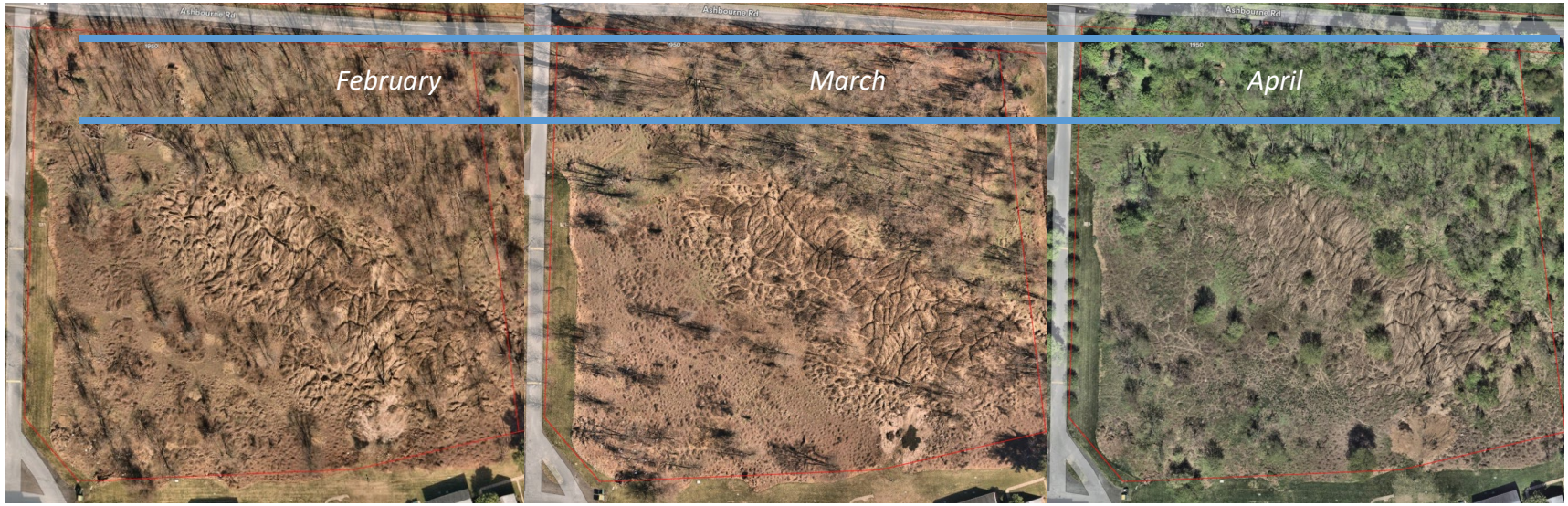
Ashlyn Apartments
1900 Ashbourne Road
MCPC#240136001

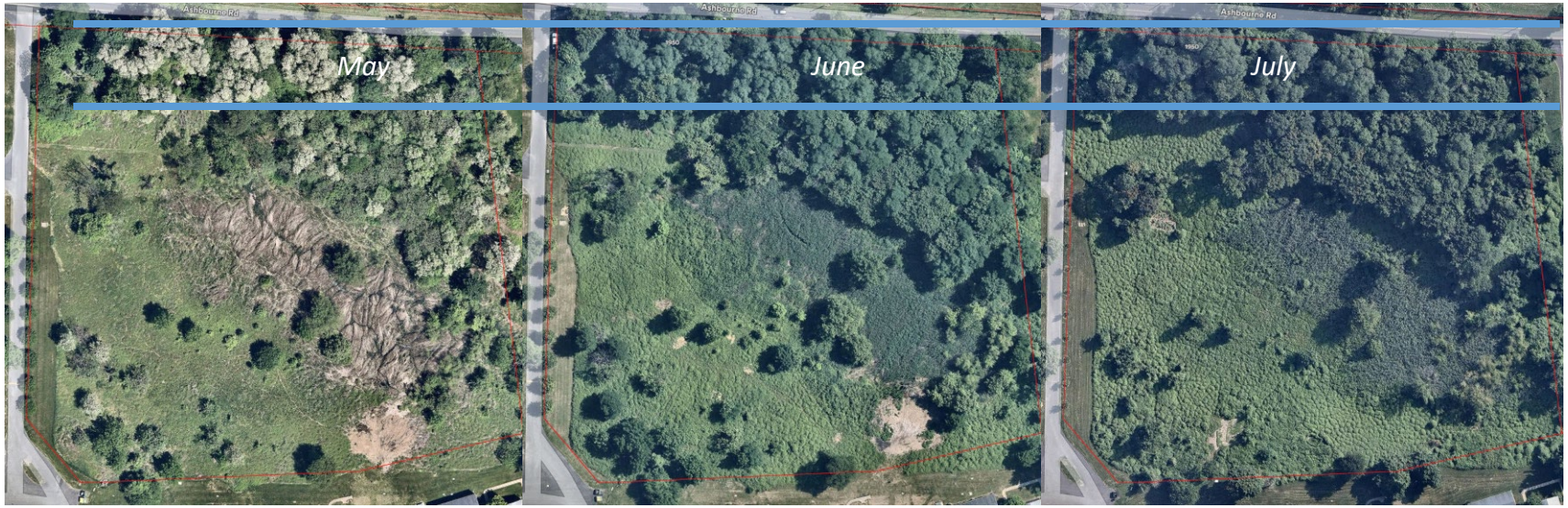
Montgomery County Planning Commission

0 100 200 400 Feet

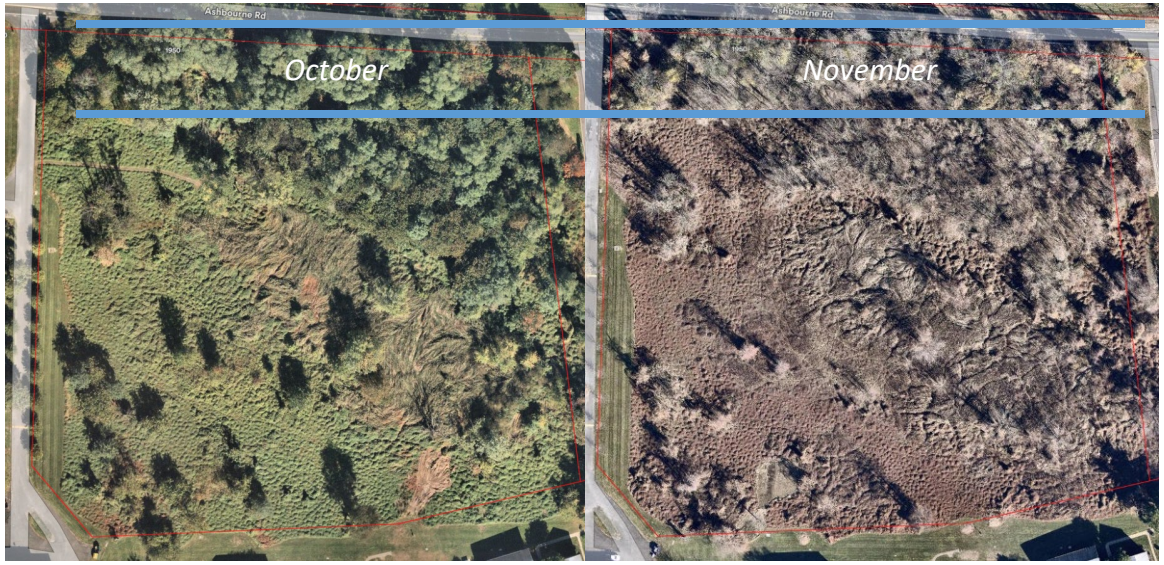
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LEGEND
PARKING SPACE CALCULATIONS:
SITE DATA NOTES:
ZONING VARIANCES GRANTED:
WAIVERS REQUESTED:
DESIGN ENGINEER'S CERTIFICATION:
SURVEYOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:
OWNER CERTFICATION:
OWNER AND DEVELOPER'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:
CHELTENHAM TOWNSHIP APPROVAL NOTATIONS:
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
ASHBOURNE ROAD (SR 2025)
PRELIMINARY PLAN NOT TO BE RECORDED
RECORD PLAN (1 OF 5)
ASHLYN APARTMENTS
1900 ASHBOURNE ROAD
CHELTENHAM TOWNSHIP, MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PENNSYLVANIA
LYNNEWOOD GARDENS PROPERTIES LLC
300 BOULEVARD OF THE AMERICAS, SUITE 201
LAKEWOOD, NJ 08701
robert e. blue
consulting engineers, p.c.


February
March
April


May
June
July





Aerial imagery from Nearmap; photos taken in different years.