MONTGOMERY COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

NEIL K. MAKHIJA, CHAIR
JAMILA H. WINDER, VICE CHAIR
THOMAS DIBELLO, COMMISSIONER

WWW.MONTGOMERYCOUNTYPA.GOV

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PLANNING COMMISSION

MONTGOMERY COUNTY • PO BOX 311
NORRISTOWN, PA 19404-0311

610-278-3722
PLANNING@MONTGOMERYCOUNTYPA.GOV

SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

March 19, 2025

SUBJECT: Sketch Plan Review – 220 S. Chestnut Street (MCPC #25-0054-001)

TO: Kyle Detweiler, Borough Manager;
Glenn Kucher, Code Enforcement Officer
Ambler Borough Planning Commission;

FROM: Tim Konetchy, Senior Community Planner

We have reviewed the above-referenced sketch plan as you requested on March 4, 2025. We forward this letter as a report of our review. John J. Jefferson and Sally Jefferson-Stephens ('the applicant') have submitted a sketch plan that provides for the construction of 16 stacked townhomes on a 0.9-acre lot that is roughly a 'T' shape. The site is currently occupied by a 10,000 square foot warehouse-style building, which is proposed for demolition. The existing building is oriented towards and takes vehicular access from S. Maple Street, while the frontage on S. Chestnut Street features the rear of the building, a chain-link fence along the sidewalk, and informal vegetation. The proposed stacked townhome development would have a footprint of 9,600 square and would contain eight (8) side-by-side dwelling units along S. Chestnut Street, as well as eight (8) additional dwelling units located above the other eight (8) dwellings. All parking is proposed to the rear of the property, with each townhome being provided with a surface parking space and a garage parking space. 14 additional visitor parking spaces are proposed along the rear access driveway. Several new trees are proposed to be planted throughout the site.

The Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) has reviewed the sketch plan and we present the following comments to serve as preliminary feedback based on the contents of that plan. We encourage the applicant to consider the following comments as the land development process progresses as we believe that they will lead to an improved preliminary plan which better achieves local and regional planning goals.

Please note that these comments are preliminary and are subject to change upon the submission of a preliminary plan. Our comments are as follows:

ZONING

A. Current OC Office Campus District Zoning. The proposed use is not permitted under the current zoning. This is a partial list of considerations related to the current zoning:
    1. Uses. Permitted uses in the OC Office Campus District include office, financial institutions, personal services, training centers, printing/publishing, cafés and delicatessens, light manufacturing, and parking lots. The applicant proposes a multifamily development with a total

of 16 dwelling units; however, multifamily residential use is not permitted within the OC Office Campus District.

2. Minimum lot area. The minimum lot area within the OC Office Campus District is one acre, and the lot area is deficient at 0.9 acres.
3. Traffic Impact Analysis. Pursuant to §27-1604.6, a Traffic Impact Analysis is required for any development within the OC Office Campus District.

B. Potential Rezoning to R-3 Residential District. If the applicant intends to pursue rezoning from OC Office Campus District to the adjacent R-3 Residential District, as we infer is the applicant's plan of action based on the inclusion of R-3 Residential dimensional standards on the submitted sketch plan, the following considerations apply:

1. Uses. The R-3 Residential District allows for single-family attached dwellings, also known as townhomes, but the definition of such under §27-202 indicates that stacked townhomes do not qualify ("no unit is located over another"). Instead, it appears that the proposed use would fall under the definition of a multifamily development, a use that is not currently permitted within the R-3 Residential District. Notwithstanding, MCPC would defer to the Borough Zoning Officer for interpretation of these terms.
2. §27-803. If the proposed use is ultimately interpreted as a single-family attached dwelling, then § 27-803 would require a minimum lot area per dwelling unit of 2,500 square feet. With 39,576 square feet available, no more than 17 dwelling units could be accommodated while complying with this standard.
3. §27-807.1. If the proposed use is ultimately interpreted as a single-family attached dwelling, then § 27-807.1. would limit the number of contiguous dwelling units to no more than six (6).
4. If the proposed use is ultimately interpreted as a single-family attached dwelling, then § 27-807.1. would limit the number of contiguous dwelling units to no more than six (6).
5. Height. The maximum permitted height of a building in the R-3 District is 40 feet, while the submitted photo appears to exceed this at 4-5 stories.

BUILDING DESIGN AND ORIENTATION

A. Front Façade. The front façade of the building should be oriented toward S. Chestnut Street, which is a residential neighborhood primarily composed of attached homes. This appears to be the proposed orientation based upon the submitted image; however, the sketch plan does not support this layout at present. If the front façades are to face S. Chestnut Street, then pedestrian connections from each building to the sidewalk along S. Chestnut Street should be provided and the existing vegetation and fencing must be removed. Furthermore, it is recommended that the front entrances be built close to street-level in order to reduce the overall height of the buildings.

B. Building Scale. Existing homes immediately across S. Chestnut Street appear to be two-stories in height, building materials vary, and both flat and pitched roofs are present. In order to integrate the existing neighborhood, the massing of the building should be carefully considered and should take cues from existing buildings. The maximum allowable height in the R-3 Residential District would be 40 feet, which may exceed the height of the aforementioned homes on S. Chestnut Street. With these factors in mind, it is recommended that the front façade of the building be both vertically and horizontally differentiated with architectural features, such as building recesses and extensions or changes in material, and the

roofline should be varied with a mix of architectural treatments found within the neighborhood (e.g., cornice articulation, dormers, mansard, etc.) in order to break up the massing of the proposed building.

TRANSPORTATION

A. Sidewalk.
   1. The existing sidewalk along S. Chestnut Street is in need of repair. It is recommended that the applicant be required to repair or replace the sidewalk. See also Landscaping comment B, below.
   2. It is recommended that the sidewalk along the rear access driveway be extended to S. Maple Street. This missing segment appears to fall within an access easement that the property is subject to.

B. Parking. The applicant is proposing to provide 14 parking spaces beyond the 32 that are required (two per dwelling unit). While we understand the desire for additional dedicated parking spaces, this does not appear to be necessary given existing availability of on-street parking on S. Chestnut Stret and the shared parking agreement for 22 additional parking spaces (via the neighboring property). Therefore, it is recommended that some or all of the parking spaces along the northern property line be removed. We would strongly encourage the applicant to consider providing residents with an outdoor recreation area within this area, which could be composed of landscaping and seating (e.g., benches, picnic table, etc.).

LANDSCAPING

A. Street Trees. Street trees should be installed along S. Chestnut Street, as required by §100.3. Street Trees of the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance. Street trees are required every 40 feet on average.

B. Existing Vegetation along S. Chestnut Street. In order to meet the design discussed under the heading 'Building Design Orientation' comment 'A', the existing vegetation along S. Chestnut Street must be removed (along with the existing chain-link fencing). New plantings should be provided that accentuate and compliment the front entrances along S. Chestnut Street.

C. Property Line Buffers. We commend the amount of new plantings proposed; however, we would recommend that additional trees be installed along the southern property line between the proposed sidewalk and the neighboring property. Furthermore, a landscape buffer surrounding the proposed trash disposal area would help to screen it from the proposed residences as well as neighboring properties.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

The applicant appears to be proposing to tie into existing storm drains; however, it is recommended that on-site stormwater detention be provided by way of green stormwater infrastructure methods, such as rain gardens, downspout diversion to planters, etc., if feasible.

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

ATTACHMENT A. AERIAL IMAGE OF SITE



220 South Chestnut Street
MCPC#250054001

Montgomery County Planning Commission
Montgomery County Courthouse - Planning Commission
PO Box 311 Norristown PA 19404-0311
(p) 610 278-3722 (f) 610 278-3941
www.montcopa.org/plan.com
Aerial photography provided by Nearmap

0 50 100 200 Feet

N

ATTACHMENT B. REDUCED COPY OF APPLICANT'S SUBMITTED SKETCH PLAN

