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SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

June 5, 2025

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

Re: MCPC #25-0101-001
Plan Name: Smith Zoning Hearing Board #2024-19
(1 lot comprising 14.04 acres)
Situate: 717 Ridge Pike (Parcel No. 65-00-09628-00-9)
Whitemarsh Township

Dear Mr. Guttenplan:

We have reviewed the above-referenced special exception application as you requested on May 9, 2025. Please note that the review comments and recommendations contained in this report are advisory to the Whitemarsh Township Zoning Hearing Board ('ZHB'), in compliance with Section 116-217.D. of the Whitemarsh Township Zoning Ordinance, and final disposition for the approval of any proposal will be made by the ZHB. We forward this letter as a report of our review.

BACKGROUND

James J., Theresa, Mathew, Joseph and Francis V. Smith (collectively the "applicant") have submitted a special exception application to the Whitemarsh Township Zoning Hearing Board to permit nursing home use on a 14.04-acre (+/-) lot on Ridge Pike that is located within the AA Residential District and the Institutional Overlay District. The proposed use, nursing home, is permitted by special exception in the Institutional Overlay District pursuant to Section 116-175.L, Special Exception Uses, of the Whitemarsh Township Zoning Ordinance. It is important to note that the easternmost portion of the lot features steep slopes; however, due to a calculated steep slope ratio of 11.8% of the total lot area, the requirements of the Steep Slope Conservation District do not apply (the steep slope ratio threshold is 15%).

The submitted site plan, which is to be considered a sketch plan for the purposes of this review, would provide for the development of a 500-bed nursing home facility. The proposed building occupies much of the property frontage along Ridge Pike, and it is irregularly shaped with alternating recesses and protrusions in roughly 't' shapes. As proposed, the property would take vehicular access in roughly the same locations as three existing curb cuts along Ridge Pike, though it is worth noting that one of the curb cuts does not appear to be in use and the others appear to allow only one-way traffic. A total of 279 parking spaces are proposed: 231 parking spaces

are proposed within structured parking underneath the building that would be accessible via four entrances/egresses; 26 spaces are proposed in a parking area along the northernmost accessway, and 22 parking spaces are proposed at the main entrance to the proposed building, which is accessible via a main entrance. The northeast corner of the property currently features a roughly 1-acre stormwater detention basin, which was constructed by Montgomery County as part of the Ridge Pike Improvement Project. The applicant is proposing to install six (6) new stormwater management areas throughout the site. The provided 'illustrative plan' also provides for extensive landscaping throughout the site.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLIANCE

***Whitemarsh Township's Selective Comprehensive Plan Update* (2020)**

The 2028 Future Land Use Plan for Whitemarsh Township categorizes this area of the township as "Conservation District Residential" character area. The intent of the Conservation District Residential is to "facilitate residential development that retains open space and larger lot sizes to prevent parcels from being over-developed by future subdividing," (page 31). The plan goes on to state that development within this character area is encouraged to provide private open space that maintains important viewsheds, natural features, and environmental characteristics. Three potential uses are provided for the Conservation District Residential Character Area: open space, large lot residential, and cluster residential. Although the future land use plan does not address institutional uses as is proposed, the overall site design appears to align with the goals of the conservation district residential.

***Montco 2040: A Shared Vision* (2015; amended 2021)**

The proposal appears generally consistent with the *Montco 2040: A Shared Vision* (2015; amended 2021). The Future Land Use Plan for Montgomery County defines this area of the township as a "suburban residential area." These areas are envisioned with variety of housing types with single-family detached homes as the most prominent land use; however, other appropriate uses include less dense multifamily development, single-family attached uses (e.g., townhomes and twins), and institutional uses. Extensive landscaping, buffers, and street trees should be provided by all developments, and recreation facilities (e.g., a central open space) should be provided. Buildings should have a 'residential' character, with pitched roofs, small building footprints, traditionally residential building materials, and appropriately scaled windows and doors. Development in a Suburban Residential area should be designed to limit potential adverse impacts of traffic, noise, and light.

RECOMMENDATION

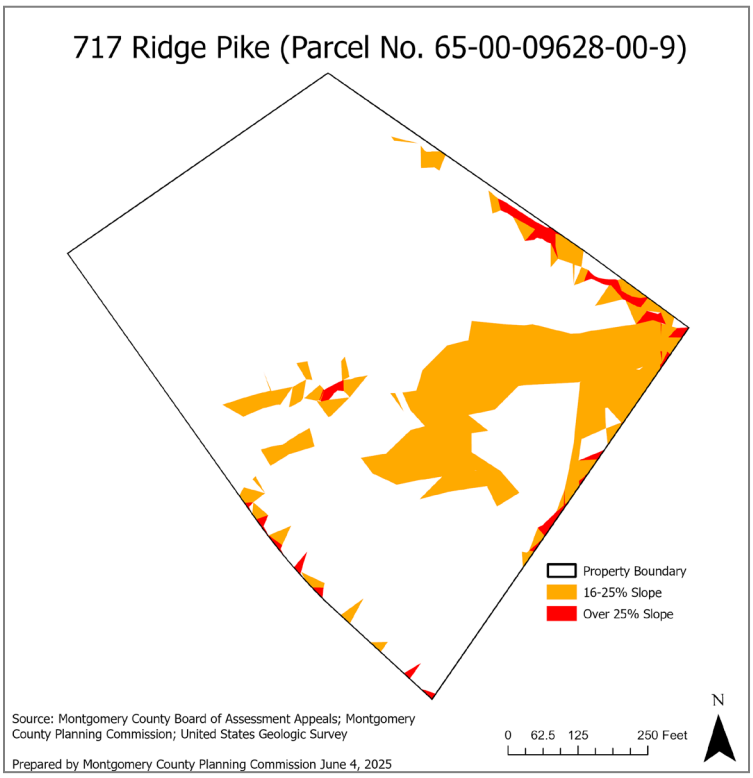
The Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) generally supports the applicant's proposal, however, in the course of our review we have identified the following issues that the applicant and Whitemarsh Township may wish to consider prior to review and approval of the required Special Exception by the Township Zoning Hearing Board. Our comments are as follows:

REVIEW COMMENTS

STEEP SLOPE OVERLAY (ARTICLE XXIII)

A. Section 116-33.2, Overlay Districts, states that "For overlay uses, the requirements of the overlay district shall apply, and in the event of a conflict, the overlay district requirements take precedence over those of the underlying zoning district(s)," and goes on to state that "Unless otherwise stated in any section of this chapter, Steep Slope, Riparian and Floodplain overlay provisions shall take precedence over all underlying or overlying provisions." The latter section appears to state that the regulations of the Steep Slope Overlay District (Article XXIII) takes precedence over all other underlying and overlying zoning designations. The applicant should work with the Township Zoning Officer to ensure compliance with this Article.

B. Section 116-169.B., Modification of Regulations, states that any property in any zoning district that features slopes exceeding 15% are subject to limitations on grading and vegetation removal. A note on the submitted 'site layout plan' states that the steep slope ratio of 11.8% would not require compliance with Section 116-169; however, this only takes into account subsection A. As previously noted, subsection B would limit the amount of disturbance within steeply sloped portions of the property regardless of a set steep slope ratio threshold. Our analysis revealed that a significant portion of the property features slopes that would trigger compliance with Section 116-169.B. Please see the map, below, which highlights slopes of 16-25% and those exceeding 25%. Although this generally aligns with the steeply sloped land noted on the submitted site layout plan, the applicant should confirm the limits of any slopes that would require compliance with Section 116-169.B in coordination with the township.



SECTION 116-217, STANDARDS FOR ACTIONS [BEFORE THE ZONING HEARING BOARD]

The ZHB has sole jurisdiction over review of the criteria set forth in Section 116-217 of the Zoning Ordinance. MCPC provides the following comments related to Section 116-217 to aid in the ZHB's review of the application:

A. Regarding Section 116-217.A., subsection (1), the proposed use, nursing home, is expressly permitted by Special Exception in the Institutional Overlay District. Furthermore, the proposal meets all dimensional requirements for such use (Section 116-176). Please note that the site plan may be subject to change if/when the applicant proceeds with Land Development.
B. Regarding Section 116-217.A., subsection (2), the proposed use of nursing home is substantially similar to the use of the property abutting to the southeast ('Masonic Village at Lafayette Hill'). Furthermore, another institutional use, a place of worship ('Congregation Or Ami'), is established across Ridge Pike from the proposed development site. The ZHB should consider if additional concentration of institutional uses in this corridor is appropriate.
C. Regarding Section 116-217.A., subsection (3), MCPC has identified potential conflicts with vehicular and pedestrian traffic, which are outlined in following section (under the heading 'Transportation and Circulation').
D. Regarding Section 116-217.A., subsection (4), please refer to our previous section related to comprehensive plan compliance.
E. We make no comment regarding Section 116-217.A., subsections (5) and (6).
F. Lastly, MCPC would like to acknowledge that Article XXIV, Institutional Overlay District, does include specific criteria related to this land use. We encourage the township to consider reviewing this article and determining if these unique institutional uses warrant additional standards to aid with the review.

TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

In the course of review, MCPC has identified multiple potential conflicts with the accommodation of vehicular, pedestrian, and transit access.

A. Highway Occupancy Permit required. A Highway Occupancy Permit (HOP) is required for all construction within the right-of-way of a county road or adjacent to a county road. Please contact the Montgomery County Division of Roads and Bridges to learn more about the HOP process.
B. Vehicular access and circulation.
    a. Although multiple entrances/exits may appear to provide convenient access to the site, this may cause confusion for residents and visitors of the nursing home. It is therefore recommended that the applicant consider reducing the number of entrances/exits and/or install signage that clearly marks the main entrance for residents and visitors.
    b. Left turns into and exiting the site may cause excessive queuing, delays, and safety concerns for travelers on Ridge Pike. Therefore, the applicant, Whitemarsh Township, and the Montgomery County Division of Roads and Bridges should discuss options to avoid such conflict (e.g., right-turn-only for entrance and egress).
C. Pedestrians and transit users.
    a. Although we commend the applicant for providing sidewalk along the property frontage, this section of sidewalk neither connects to existing sidewalk nor does it provide access to nearby transit stops. It is therefore recommended that the applicant seek cooperation from neighboring property owners to pursue access to nearby transit stops, which are located on the east side of Ridge Pike at Park Avenue and Church Road (to the north of the site) and Manor Road (to the south of the site) and on the west side of Ridge Pike at Manor Road (to the south of the site) and at 700 Ridge Pike ('Holod's Garden Center'). A potential option would be the creation of a pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Ridge Pike and Barren Hill Road, which would enable access to many of the aforementioned bus stops. Alternatively, the applicant could seek

cooperation from neighboring property owners to install new sidewalk to the north and south of the site.

b. It is unclear what is provided within the large grey circle at the main entrance on the submitted site plan (i.e., are sidewalks provided?); regardless, this area would appear to pose a potential conflict between pedestrian and vehicles entering the site. If it is understood that any pedestrians accessing this site must cross an accessway at the main entrance, because there is no other sidewalk connecting Ridge Pike to the building, then MCPC must point out that vehicles entering the property from Ridge Pike will likely enter at a speed that would pose safety concerns for pedestrians. The applicant may wish to reconsider this design, and may also wish to provide additional pedestrian connection from the sidewalk along Ridge Pike to the building.

COUNTY STORMWATER BMP

Montgomery County owns a drainage easement covering the stormwater management BMP that was installed as part of the Ridge Pike Improvement Project and intends to assert their easement rights to ensure continued safe drainage of the roadway. The BMP is subject to a joint utility easement with Whitemarsh Township, an agreement that ensures access by both parties to the site. This agreement requires that no building or structure may be constructed within this area and no ditch or pipe may be connected to this BMP without express permission from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. We recommend that the applicant work with the township to ensure that all required stormwater management for the proposal can be accommodated outside of the county's stormwater easement area.

OUTDOOR AMENITIES

MCPC wishes to commend the applicant for the vast areas of open space and landscaping included on the submitted concept plan. We would, however, like to acknowledge that the concept plan lacks a defined outdoor amenity space for use by future employees and residents of the nursing home. We recommend that the applicant consider how outdoor amenities can be accommodated within the open space surrounding the proposed building. Examples of such may include an outdoor patio or gathering space, a loop trail, and other infrastructure such as benches to allow for the enjoyment of nature by residents and staff.

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 planning objectives for institutional 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 Zoning Hearing Board approve the application for special exception, the applicant will be required to seek land development approval. Please note that MCPC must be afforded an opportunity to review said land development application, pursuant to Section 502 of Act 247, "The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code."

Please print the assigned MCPC number (25-0101-001) on any future review requests related to this proposal.

Sincerely,

Timothy Konetchy

Timothy Konetchy, Senior Community Planner
timothy.konetchy@montgomerycountypa.gov – 610-292-4917

c: Craig McAnally, Township Manager
Aaron Kostyk, Chair, Township Planning Commission
Krista Heinrich, PE, Township Engineer
David Sander, Esq., Township Solicitor
Jessica Buck, District Manager, MCCD
John Gallagher, PE, PennDOT
Fran Hanney, PE, PennDOT

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

ATTACHMENT A: AERIAL IMAGE OF SITE



Smith Zoning Hearing Board #2024-19
MCPC#250101001

Montgomery County Planning Commission

0 100 200 400 Feet

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ATTACHMENT B: REDUCED COPY OF APPLICANT'S PROPOSED SITE PLAN

