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SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

October 2, 2025

SUBJECT: Tentative Sketch Plan Review – 488 Bethlehem Pike, Whitemarsh Twp. (MCPC #25-0195-001)

TO: Mr. Charles L. Guttenplan, AICP, Director of Planning & Zoning, Whitemarsh Twp.

FROM: Tim Konetchy, Senior Community Planner, Montgomery County Planning Commission
Timothy.Konetchy@montgomerycountypa.gov - 610.292.4917

We have reviewed the above-referenced tentative sketch plan, as you requested on September 19, 2025. The applicant, WB Homes Land Acquisition, LP, has submitted a tentative sketch plan that provides for the redevelopment of a 3.2-acre lot known as 488 Bethlehem Pike, Whitemarsh Township (parcel #65-00-00856-00-6). The property currently contains a single-family home and a garden center ('Marano Gardens, LLC'). The property is located within the VC-1 Village Commercial District. Portions of the lot nearest the Sandy Run also include areas of steep slope (15% and greater), as well as areas subject to the Floodplain Conservation District and Riparian Corridor Conservation District.

The submitted sketch plan includes the retention of an existing home, which would be converted to a duplex, and the construction of 17 townhomes. Townhomes are permitted as a conditional use in the VC-1 District. The proposed townhomes would be accessible via a new loop road. The townhomes would be oriented towards the loop road, and each townhome is provided with a driveway with two surface parking spaces. It is unclear where the four parking spaces for the existing home that is intended to remain will be provided. Eleven (11) parking spaces are provided in a guest parking lot, near the northern entrance to the proposed loop road and townhome #1. An area of reserve parking, to be constructed at a later date if required, is also provided along the loop road, near townhomes #4. A large stormwater management best management practice (BMP) is proposed in the western corner of the property, near townhome #5. Another, smaller stormwater management BMP is proposed near the 11-space parking area and townhome #1.

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 and the supporting documents provided alongside it. 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 the township's vision for residential development. 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 ORDINANCE

As a preliminary sketch plan, there is no expectation that all necessary details of a preliminary plan are included; however, this lack of detail makes a comprehensive zoning review difficult. With that said, only a handful of issues related to compliance with the zoning ordinance are discussed below. It is our intention that these comments assist the applicant and township to rectify any zoning issues prior to submission of a preliminary land development plan. Our comments related to the Whitemarsh Township Zoning Ordinance are as follows:

A. § 116-291.A.(9) of Article XXXVIII, Village Commercial District

While Section 116-291.A.(9) of the Zoning Ordinance permits a maximum of one (1) curb cut for properties under 5 acres in area, it is understood that the applicant would likely be permitted to continue to utilize the two existing curb cuts located along Bethlehem Pike. Regardless, the township and applicant are encouraged to discuss if two points of ingress/egress are necessary for circulation and emergency response, or if a cul-de-sac or one-way in/one-way out would be a suitable alternative. Either option would provide a reduction in impervious surfacing. Should a cul-de-sac be pursued, Section 105-31 of the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance would apply.

B. § 116-294 of Article XXXVIII, Village Commercial District

The maximum permissible building façade width for conditional uses in the VC-1 is 75 feet. The zoning and site data table provided on the submitted sketch plan does not include details on the proposed length of facades. Using the provided scale, it appears that the shared façade of townhomes #5-9 would exceed 75 feet in length. The applicant should clarify the proposed width in future submissions and, should the proposed façade length exceed the maximum allowance, the applicant is encouraged to consider breaking up the townhomes into smaller groups of connected dwelling units.

C. § 116-295, of Article XXXVIII, Village Commercial District

Section 116-295 requires that a minimum of 40% and a maximum of 80% of the building facade(s) be located 10 feet from the ultimate right-of-way, with the remaining facade set back further. The proposed site layout does not conform to this requirement and, as such, may necessitate approval of a variance by the Whitemarsh Township Zoning Hearing Board. The applicant may also consider revising the proposed layout to come into conformance with this requirement.

D. § 116-169.B. of Article XXIII, Steep Slope Overlay District

Section 116-169.B. limits disturbance to portions of a lot where slopes of 15% or greater are present. The submitted sketch plan includes new townhomes on portions of the site that include slopes greater than 15%. The applicant should provide additional detail on future submissions that identify the total percentage of slopes that will be impacted in order to ensure compliance with the disturbance limits of Section 116-169.B. Furthermore, the applicant should provide additional detail on how these areas will be stabilized during and after construction. We encourage the applicant to consider restoring steep slopes to their natural state to the greatest extent possible, including the planting of suitable vegetation throughout any portion of the steep slopes that are currently lacking vegetation.

E. § 116-259.A. of Article XXXV, Riparian Corridor Conservation Overlay District

Section 116-259.A. requires a setback from the Riparian Corridor Conservation District (RCCD) that is equal to half (50%) of the applicable setback, which would equate to 17.5 feet in this instance (half of 35 feet). Using the provided scale, the setback between the RCCD and townhomes #10-13 appears to be right around the minimum. The applicant should provide a measurement of the proposed setback in this location in future submissions.

SUBDIVISION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE

As a preliminary sketch plan, there is no expectation that all necessary details of a preliminary plan are included; however, this lack of detail makes a comprehensive subdivision and land development ordinance review difficult. With that said, only a handful of issues related to compliance with the subdivision and land development ordinance are discussed below. It is our intention that these comments assist the applicant and township to rectify any issues prior to submission of a preliminary land development plan. Our comments related to the Whitemarsh Township Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance are as follows:

A. §§ 105-30, 105-47, and 105-56.1.H of Article V, Design Standards

Section 105-30 and Section 105-47 of the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance require the installation of 5-foot-wide sidewalks along existing and proposed roadways. Future submissions should provide for sidewalk along Bethlehem Pike and along both sides of the proposed loop road. Suitable crosswalks should also be provided at ingress/egress points, in accordance with Section 105-56.1.H.

B. § 105-39 of Article V, Design Standards

Section 105-39 requires the installation of one 3-inch caliper tree for every two parking spaces provided within a parking area. The 11-space parking area would be required to provide six trees, which are not noted on the provided sketch plan. It is not clear if this requirement applies to parking provided in driveways; however, if it does, each townhome would be required to provide one additional tree. If required, these are encouraged to be planted between each driveway to reduce the heat island effect and promote stormwater absorption near impervious surfaces.

C. § 105-48 of Article V, Design Standards

Section 105-48 requires the installation of street trees along existing and proposed streets; however, none are noted on the submitted plan. Future submissions should provide for the installation of street trees along Bethlehem Pike and the proposed loop road, in accordance with the requirements of Section 105-48.

D. § 105-54 of Article V, Design Standards

Section 105-54 requires the provision of open space suitable for recreation including lawn, natural areas, and recreation areas. Because of the location of this proposed residential development, being relatively isolated, it is encouraged that the applicant provides a usable recreation area for residents on the property. Future submissions should indicate where such facilities will be provided.

E. § 105-56.1.E. of Article V, Design Standards

Section 105-56.1.E.(1). requires that surface parking lots be located between, behind or to the side of principal buildings. The proposed visitor parking area is not immediately behind a building, and it is unclear if the proposed location conforms with the requirement to be located behind the principal building. Further, Section 105-56.1.E.(2). requires screening of parking areas that are not located in a suitable location as previously described. Therefore, we encourage the applicant to consider revising the site layout so that the visitor parking area is not visible from Bethlehem Pike. This could be done by shifting the parking area into the area occupied by townhomes #1 and #2 and relocating townhomes #1 and #2 to the area currently proposed for the parking area. The result would be two blocks of two homes (i.e., twin homes) and a parking area that is located behind dwellings #18 and #19 (within the existing home). We also recommend that the plan be revised to accommodate a pedestrian connection from the visitor parking area to dwellings #18 and #19, as it appears that no parking is provided for these dwellings.

PENNDOT HIGHWAY OCCUPANCY PERMIT REQUIRED

Bethlehem Pike is a PennDOT roadway and, as such, a PennDOT highway occupancy permit will be required for any work within the right-of-way. The township and applicant are encouraged to begin coordination with PennDOT early on in the process to ensure that ingress/egress points are properly planned for and to avoid future revisions. We have copied PennDOT staff on this letter.

c: Craig McAnally, Township Manager
David Sander, Esq., Township Solicitor
Krista Heinrich, PE, Township Engineer
Aaron Kostyk, Chairman, Township Planning Commission
John Gallagher , PennDOT
Mirlene Saintval, PennDOT
Fran Hanney, P.E., PennDOT District 6-0

Attachments: A. Aerial Image of Site
B. Applicant’s Submitted Sketch Plan



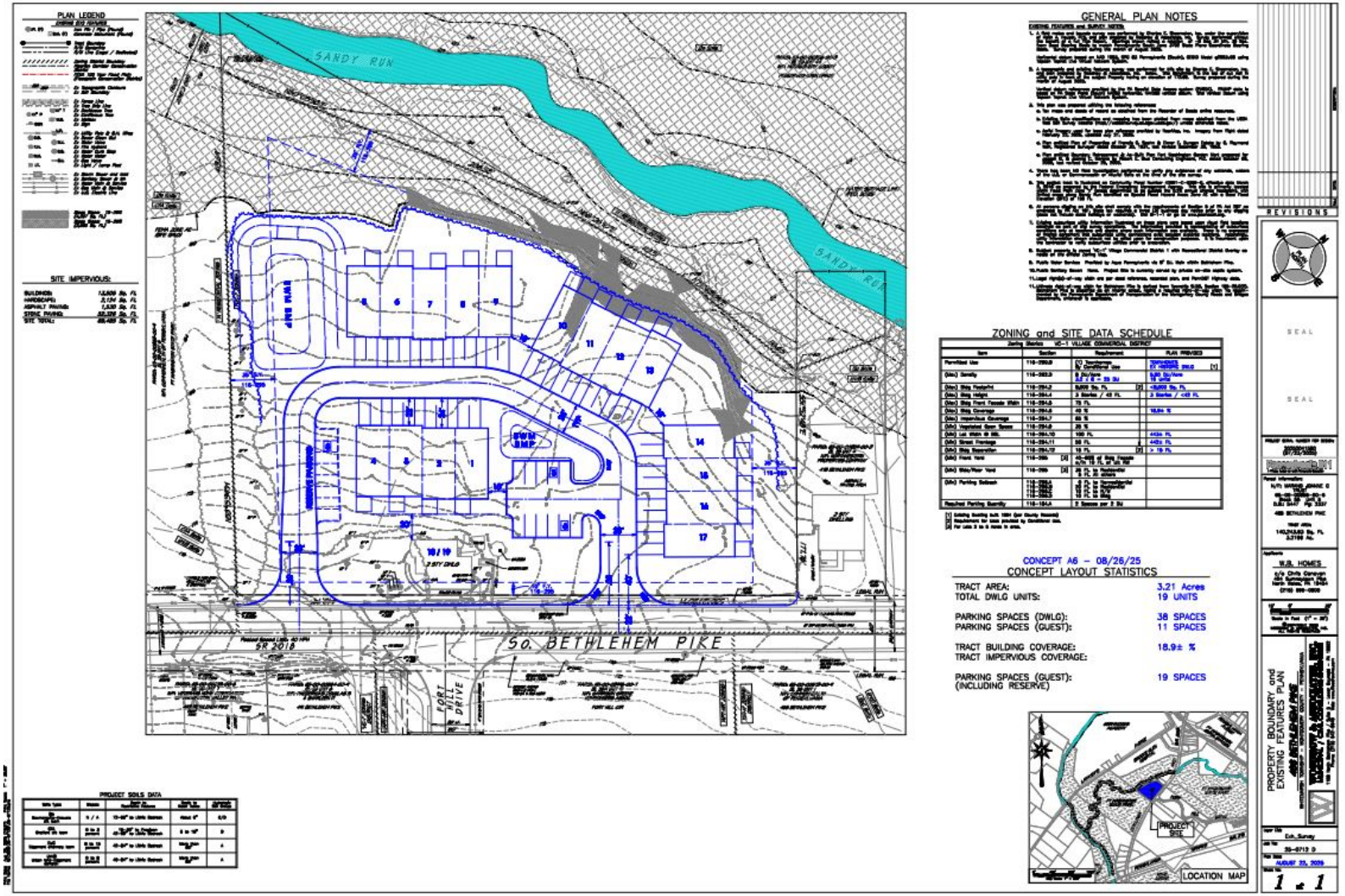
488 Bethlehem Pike
MCPC#250195001

Montgomery County Planning Commission

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www.montcopa.org/plancom
Aerial photography provided by Nearmap


PLAN LEGEND
SITE IMPERVIOUS:
SANDY RUN
SANDY RUN
SWM BMP
So. BETHLEHEM PIKE
SR 2018
FORT HILL DRIVE
GENERAL PLAN NOTES
REVISIONS
ZONING and SITE DATA SCHEDULE
CONCEPT A6 – 08/26/25
CONCEPT LAYOUT STATISTICS
TRACT AREA: 3.21 Acres
TOTAL DWLG UNITS: 19 UNITS
PARKING SPACES (DWLG): 38 SPACES
PARKING SPACES (GUEST): 11 SPACES
TRACT BUILDING COVERAGE: 18.9± %
TRACT IMPERVIOUS COVERAGE:
PARKING SPACES (GUEST): (INCLUDING RESERVE) 19 SPACES
PROJECT SOILS DATA
PROJECT SITE
LOCATION MAP
PROPERTY BOUNDARY and EXISTING FEATURES PLAN
1 of 1