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Montgomery County • PO Box 311
Norristown, PA 19404-0311

610-278-3722
planning@montgomerycountypa.gov

Scott France, AICP
Executive Director

September 21, 2026

Ms. Jamie Worman, Assistant Township Manager
Lower Gwynedd Township
1130 North Bethlehem Pike, Box 625
Spring House, Pennsylvania 19477

Re: MCPC #24-0218-005
Plan Name: BT 309 Development
(264 units, 117520 square feet comprising 24.10 acres)
Parcel ID: 39-00-02956-00-2
Situate: Norristown Road (north/Route 309 Expressway (east)
Lower Gwynedd Township

Dear Ms. Worman:

We have reviewed the above-referenced conditional use application as you requested on August 3, 2026. Although this review is not conducted pursuant to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, we offer the following comments and recommendations for the Municipality's consideration during its review of the application.

BACKGROUND

Our office has received a conditional use application for review of a proposed development along Norristown Road and Route 309 in Lower Gwynedd Township. The applicant, BT 309, LLC, proposes a mixed-use development on approximately 24.1 acres within the MF-3 Multifamily Residential District. The development includes a four-story apartment building with 264 dwelling units (96 one-bedroom and 168 two-bedroom units), including 27 workforce housing units, along with a mix of commercial uses, including a 30,000-square-foot grocery store, a 16,000-square-foot retail building, a 4,000-square-foot retail building, a 6,000-square-foot restaurant, and a 3-story, 71,520-square-foot office building.

The planned apartment building is located along the western portion of the site, adjacent to Route 309, and includes an integrated four-story parking garage with 412 parking spaces. Surface parking areas are distributed throughout the commercial portion of the site, with parking allocated among office, retail, and restaurant uses. The plan outlines a total mixed-use program of residential, office, retail, and restaurant use, connected by an internal circulation network and sidewalks.

Regarding open space features, the plan includes a native/pollinator garden, a bird sanctuary, tree preservation areas with enhanced meadow plantings, walking trails, trail connections, benches, and pedestrian pathways. A historic barn preservation area is also identified on the property. Several underground stormwater management facilities are proposed beneath portions of the site, including beneath parking areas.

The MF-3 District permits mixed-use development only through conditional use approval. Unlike traditional MF-3 developments, which are governed by the district's base multifamily standards, mixed-use developments must satisfy the conditional use requirements of §1276.02 of the Zoning Ordinance and the development standards of §1276.09. The conditional use process evaluates the proposed development's overall design and functionality and requires the applicant to demonstrate a cohesive master plan, coordinated architecture, interconnected pedestrian and open space systems, appropriate landscaping and streetscape treatments, and adequate transportation planning. These qualitative design considerations are supplemented by the objective standards of §1276.09, which regulate density, building height, setbacks, parking, and other site development criteria.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLIANCE

TOWNSHIP COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Overall, the proposal is generally consistent with the Lower Gwynedd 2045 Comprehensive Plan because it concentrates mixed-use development in an appropriate growth area, provides workforce housing, preserves open space and historic resources, and incorporates trail and environmental amenities. However, the development may be less consistent with the plan's goals for walkability, pedestrian-oriented design, interconnected transportation networks, and green parking practices.

Much of the site's circulation appears structured around vehicular movement, with extensive surface parking and large parking fields serving the commercial uses. This development pattern is less consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's vision for pedestrian-friendly mixed-use environments that prioritize walkability, active transportation, and public gathering spaces.

Although parking is needed to support the development, the Comprehensive Plan encourages green parking practices, enhanced landscaping, and sustainable stormwater management within parking areas. If large, paved areas reduce opportunities for tree planting, shade, and naturalized landscaping, the development may not fully realize the plan's objectives related to green infrastructure, tree canopy expansion, and environmentally conscious site design.

The Comprehensive Plan places substantial emphasis on improving pedestrian and bicycle connections, filling sidewalk and trail gaps, and integrating developments into broader township circulation networks. While the proposal contains trail segments and internal pedestrian facilities, opportunities may exist to strengthen connections between the buildings, Norristown Road, adjacent properties, future phases of the master plan, and surrounding destinations. Stronger external pedestrian linkages would better support the Comprehensive Plan's goals for active transportation and community connectivity.

RECOMMENDATION

The Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) supports this proposal; however, during our review, we identified the following issues for the applicant and municipal officials to consider before granting final conditional use approval.

REVIEW COMMENTS

CONDITIONAL USE REQUIREMENTS

A. Architectural Renderings. Section 1276.02.(E).(2) requires the submission of architectural renderings showing perspective views of the proposed buildings and parking garage from adjoining roadways and neighboring properties, as well as elevations of all building facades. The renderings are intended to illustrate the proposed building massing, architectural character, materials, colors, streetscape treatment, and relationship to surrounding development. It appears that the conditional use application submitted to MCPC for review did not include architectural renderings. As a result, our office lacks sufficient information to evaluate whether the proposed development satisfies the ordinance's design objectives and achieves appropriate architectural and visual integration with the surrounding area.

B. Transportation Impact Study. Section 1276.02.(E).(2) requires the submission of a Transportation Impact Study (TIS) prepared in accordance with the township's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) and applicable PennDOT guidelines. The TIS is intended to evaluate site-generated traffic, analyze levels of service and vehicle queuing, identify transportation impacts, and recommend mitigation measures where necessary. This conditional use application did not include a Transportation Impact Study. Without this analysis, MCPC lacks sufficient information to assess the proposed development's potential impacts on the surrounding transportation network.

CONDITIONAL USE PLAN

A. Site Parking Distribution. The proposed mixed-use development includes a variety of residential, office, retail, and restaurant uses expected to generate parking demand at different times of the day and week. While the parking supply appears distributed throughout the site and located near the various uses, the applicant should demonstrate how the parking arrangement will function as an integrated shared parking system and whether the location and allocation of parking spaces adequately serve the anticipated demand for each use. We suggest that municipal officials consider whether patrons of the retail and restaurant uses, office employees, and apartment residents can conveniently reach their destinations without conflicts, excessive walking distances, or parking spillovers into areas intended for other users. Given the development's mixed-use nature, the township may wish to evaluate whether a shared parking analysis is warranted to confirm that peak demand periods for the various uses occur at different times and that the proposed parking distribution will effectively accommodate the site's long-term operational needs.

B. Proposed Surface Parking/Visual Impacts. The proposed site design places a large surface parking lot between the apartment building and Norristown Road. While we recognize that parking demand must be accommodated, the prominence of this parking area may detract from the development's residential character and limit opportunities to establish a stronger building

presence along the site's frontage. Given the project's mixed-use nature and its location within a larger master-planned development, the applicant should explore ways to reduce the visual dominance of surface parking and create a more pedestrian-oriented frontage. This could include enhanced landscaping, additional pedestrian corridors, parking lot segmentation, green parking strategies, and design elements that strengthen connections among the apartment building, the street, and other components of the master plan.

C. Parking Lot Layout. The parking area located in front of the proposed apartment building includes several long, uninterrupted parking aisles and large expanses of pavement. Given the prominent location of this parking field between the building and Norristown Road, thought should be given to introducing additional cross aisles, landscaped islands, pedestrian connections, or other design features that break the parking area into smaller, more manageable sections. These improvements could enhance internal circulation, improve pedestrian accessibility between parking areas and building entrances, reduce the visual impact of the parking lot, and create a more attractive streetscape presence along the site's frontage. As currently arranged, the parking field appears to function as a single large parking area rather than a series of smaller parking modules integrated with the overall site design.

D. Open Space Amenities. The plan illustrates extensive landscaped areas and trail connections but relatively limited dedicated spaces for larger gatherings or programmed outdoor activities. While the proposal incorporates several passive open space elements, including meadow areas, a pollinator planting area, nature trail connections, and a central apartment courtyard, it appears to provide limited active gathering spaces for a broader range of residents, employees, and visitors. The Master Plan identifies substantial areas devoted to open space and landscape preservation, but opportunities may exist to incorporate more programmed outdoor amenities such as seating plazas, community gathering spaces, event lawns, performance areas, outdoor dining spaces, or similar features that encourage social interaction and activate the site. As part of the conditional use review, the applicant should consider whether additional active recreational and civic spaces could be integrated into the overall development to complement the proposed passive open space network and strengthen the site's role as a mixed-use destination.

E. Historic Barn Preservation Area. The plan identifies a “Historic Barn Preservation Area”; however, the submitted materials do not clarify the proposed preservation measures, whether the barn will be retained, rehabilitated, repurposed, or simply protected from disturbance, or how the feature will function within the overall development. The applicant should provide additional information on the barn's historic significance, the extent of proposed preservation activities, long-term ownership and maintenance responsibilities, public accessibility (if any), and the relationship of the preserved resource to the site's open space and pedestrian network. Greater clarity on the preservation area's purpose and its integration into the mixed-use development would help evaluate how this feature contributes to the project's character, placemaking objectives, and overall site design. The plan shows the preservation area adjacent to the proposed development but does not detail its intended use or management.

F. Proposed Apartment Building Design/Layout. According to the plans, the proposed four-story apartment building is served by a structured parking garage and internal drive aisles, but the plans do not show a clearly defined residential arrival sequence, main entrance plaza, or dedicated passenger drop-off area. The lack of a designated drop-off area may create uncertainty for residents, visitors, ride-share services, deliveries, and accessible transportation providers,

potentially leading to vehicles stopping in travel aisles or parking areas. The applicant should consider providing a clearly delineated apartment building entrance and a short-term passenger loading/drop-off area that is conveniently located, highly visible, and safely connected to the building entry. Such a feature would help establish a recognizable residential front door, improve wayfinding and pedestrian safety, and enhance the overall functionality and resident experience of the proposed development.

G. Noise Impacts from PA Route 309. The proposed mixed-use development is located immediately adjacent to PA Route 309, a high-volume limited-access highway. While the plan includes landscaped buffer areas along the western portion of the site, it is unclear whether the plan evaluated potential traffic noise impacts on future residents, open space areas, trails, and outdoor gathering spaces. The proposed apartment building, courtyard, and associated residential amenities appear to be situated relatively close to the expressway, potentially exposing future residents to traffic noise levels that may be greater than those experienced by existing residential neighborhoods located farther from the highway.

   Given the proximity of these residential uses to this highway, the township should consider requesting a noise impact study prepared by a qualified acoustical consultant to evaluate existing and projected traffic noise conditions and determine whether mitigation measures are warranted. The study should assess potential impacts to residential units, courtyards, pedestrian facilities, trails, and other outdoor amenity areas, and identify appropriate mitigation strategies where needed. Potential measures may include enhanced vegetative buffering, landscaped berms, noise walls or barriers, strategic building placement, and building-envelope improvements such as upgraded glazing and acoustical insulation. The findings should help ensure that the residential component of the development provides a comfortable living environment despite its location adjacent to a major transportation corridor.

H. ADA Parking and Accessible Pedestrian Circulation. Because this submission is conceptual and intended to support a conditional use application, the level of detail on parking and site accessibility may be refined during subsequent land development review. However, the plans do not currently identify ADA-accessible parking spaces, van-accessible spaces, associated access aisles, or accessible pedestrian routes throughout the site. As the design advances, the applicant should demonstrate how the development will accommodate individuals with disabilities by providing appropriately located accessible parking and continuous, safe, and convenient accessible routes connecting parking areas, building entrances, commercial uses, open spaces, and other site amenities. Clarifying these accessibility elements will help ensure that the proposed mixed-use development is welcoming and accessible to all users. The current conceptual plan does not depict these features.

CONCLUSION

We reiterate that MCPC generally supports this application; however, we recommend that municipal officials consider the issues raised in this letter.

Please note that the review comments and recommendations in this report are advisory to the municipality, and final disposition on 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 before 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 (*24-0218-005*) on any plans submitted for final recording.

Sincerely,

Kevin Chavous

Kevin Chavous, ASLA, SITES AP, LEED AP, WELL AP, CNU-A, AICP CUD
Design Planner II
610.278.3731 e-mail kevin.chavous@montgomerycountypa.gov

c: BT 309, LLC, Applicant
Christian Pionzio, Esq., HRMML, Applicant's Representative
Bohler Engineering, Applicant's Engineer
Mimi Gleason, Township Manager
Craig Melograno, Chairman, Township Planning Commission
Neil Stein, Esq., Township Solicitor