

AGENDA

AMBLER BOROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION

I. CALL TO ORDER **November 28, 2023 (7:00 PM)**

II. ROLL CALL

III. REORGANIZATION

IV. APPROVAL OF: October 24, 2023 Minutes

V. OLD BUSINESS:

1. The Borough Engineer has requested the Borough Planning Commission to explore possibly amending the Zoning Ordinance lighting criteria to the current IESNA (Illuminating Engineering Society of North America) standards. The current Zoning Ordinance language reflects the 2008 IESNA standards.
2. Input is requested on updating the 2013 Borough Comprehensive Plan

VI. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Review “The Court at Ambler Station Sketch Plan (10,14-22 N. Main Street & 9 W Butler Avenue) proposing to consolidate three lots and construct a mixed-use building containing commercial space along Butler Avenue, 4 townhouses and 17 apartments. Parking is provided at the rear of the building along Races Street.

VII. ADJOURNMENT



GILMORE & ASSOCIATES, INC.
ENGINEERING & CONSULTING SERVICES

November 20, 2023

File No. 2023-03002

Mary Aversa, Manager
Ambler Borough
131 Rosemary Avenue
Ambler, PA 19002-4476

Reference: Sketch Plan Application Review
The Court at Ambler Station – Ambler Station 1, LLC
10 N Main St, 14-22 N Main St, 9 W Butler
Tax Parcel #: 01-00-02587-00-4, 01-00-02581-00-1, & 01-00-00538-00-1
Block & Unit: 01-046-015, 01-046-003, & 01-046-007

Dear Mary:

As requested, Gilmore & Associates, Inc. has reviewed the information below regarding the sketch plan application referenced above.

- A. HRMM&L cover letter, dated October 26, 2023.
- B. Revised Architectural Rendering (5 pages), prepared by Kramer Marks Architects, dated October 24, 2023
- C. Revised Site Plan Set (2 sheets), prepared by Site Engineering Concepts, LLC, dated February 13, 2023, last revised October 26, 2023.

The applicant, Ambler Station 1, LLC, proposes to redevelop most of the area bounded by West Butler Avenue, North Main Street, West Race Street, and Short Street with retail use on the ground level and multi-family uses and single-family attached uses on the upper floors. This area is within the RO-Redevelopment Overlay District with an underlying zoning of C-Commercial. A portion of the project area is also within the Floodplain Conservation District.

The subject properties, listed above, are proposed to be demolished and redeveloped. The following properties, adjacent to the subject properties, are not included in this application and will remain:

- 1 West Butler Avenue, TP# 01-00-02587-00-4, Harry's Tap Room
- 7 West Butler Avenue, TP# 01-00-00541-00-7, The Paper Dolls Building
- 12 North Main Street, TP# 09-00-02584-00-7, The Wish Property

It is noted that Short Street (aka Short Race Street) appears to be a SEPTA owned parcel (TP#: 01-00-00535-00-4, Block & Unit: 01-046-018) per Montgomery County property records.

The proposed redevelopment includes 5,849 sf of retail space on the ground floor and 17 apartments on the upper floors with frontage on West Butler Avenue. Four townhomes are proposed above the retail uses on North Main Street. The townhomes include 3 bedrooms while the apartment mix is ten 1-bedroom units, and seven 2-bedroom units. Thirty-seven parking spaces, shared among the retail and residential uses, are provided. Access to the parking area is from Short Street.

The maximum height of the proposed buildings is 4 stories or 48 ft – 6 in, not including parapets. The 4th story along West Butler Avenue is stepped back to provide balconies to those units and to reduce the height of the building directly adjacent to the roadway.

The rear portion of the proposed redevelopment area is over an enclosed section of the Tannery Run.

65 East Butler Avenue | Suite 100 | New Britain, PA 18901 | Phone: 215-345-4330 | Fax: 215-345-8606

It is noted that while retail uses are permitted in the C-Commercial District, residential uses are not permitted. Also, the transit-oriented development (TOD) use, that is permitted by conditional use in the RO-Redevelopment Overlay District is not applicable due to the underlying C-Commercial zoning district. We have reviewed the sketch plan application relative to the Borough Zoning Ordinance. Review relative to other Borough codes, such as subdivision and land development, and stormwater management, would be appropriate if a preliminary land development application is submitted and is not included here. Due to the conceptual nature of sketch plans, this review should not be considered a comprehensive zoning review.

Zoning Comments

1. §27-Part 13 – C-Commercial District

- a. §27-1302 – Residential uses are not permitted in the commercial district.
- b. §27-1303.3 – The permitted building height is 40 feet except that 70 feet is permitted by special exception. A building height of 48 ft - 6 in is proposed.

2. §27-Part 19 – Floodplain Conservation District

- a. §27-1914 – Nonconforming Uses or Structures. The rear portion of the development as well as portions of the existing and proposed structures are within the floodplain and floodway areas of the Tannery Run. We defer to the Borough Code Officer regarding nonconforming status and the need for any relief or approval for development in the floodplain. We note permits from PADEP and/or USACOE may be required.

3. §27-2102 – The Parking Summary Table shall be revised to be consistent with the proposed development. The number of townhomes and the gross retail area are not consistent with the architectural renderings.

4. §27-2102 – Required Parking Spaces. Single-family attached dwellings require 2 spaces per unit. Mid-rise apartments require 1.5 spaces per unit. Retail uses require 1 space per 250 sf of gross sales floor area plus 1 space per employee on the largest shift. Based on 4 townhomes, 17 apartments, and 5,849 sf gross sales floor area with 4 employees, 72 spaces are required. Forty-one spaces are required for the residential uses alone. Thirty-seven spaces are proposed.

5. §27-2106 - Off-Street Loading. An off-street loading area is required for the retail uses.

6. §27-Part 27 – Redevelopment Overlay District

- a. §27-2703.E(3) & (4)(a).1 – TOD is permitted as a conditional use in the RO district with an underlying zoning of OC-Office Campus District, RSC-Retail Service and Commercial, or I-Industrial. The underlying zoning of the subject area is C-Commercial.
- b. §27-2703.E(4) – The minimum lot area is 8 acres. The subject area is about 0.53 acres.
- c. §27-2703.E(4)(b) – Density, mix, and bulk requirements.
 - i. The maximum density is either 35 or 50 DU/acres depending on the underlying zoning. Assuming a lot area 0.6 acres, the proposed density is about 40 DU/ac.
 - ii. The maximum building coverage of 50% and maximum impervious coverage of 80% both appear to be exceeded in the existing and proposed conditions with reductions in both in the proposed conditions.
- d. §27-2703.E(4)(h) – Green Space and Recreation Areas are required with TODs. These are not shown on the plans.
- e. §27-2703.E(4)(k) – A traffic impact study should be completed for this development. The study should incorporate a traffic circulation/pattern analysis of the fronting streets along with the typical content of a TIS.

General Comments

7. A structural and condition assessment of the Tannery Run stream enclosure should be conducted. Repair and/or reconstruction may be required to support construction above the stream.
8. The existing conditions plan shows an existing ROW or an easement that extends from Short Street to the rear of the properties on North Main Street. All details, rights, and restrictions regarding this existing accessway shall be provided to the Borough for review.

9. The architectural renderings include angled front in parking along West Race Street. These spaces are not shown on the site plans. It is not clear if these are proposed. The spaces are not included in the parking summary table.
10. We defer to the Borough Solicitor to advise if any action is necessary regarding access through the SEPTA property (Short Street). We note that there is currently access from Short Street to the subject lots that has been in place for many years.
11. The Applicant is responsible for compliance with any and all other applicable Local, County, State, and Federal requirements.

If you have any questions regarding the above, please contact this office.

Sincerely,



James P. Dougherty, P.E.
Senior Project Manager
Gilmore & Associates, Inc.

JPD/sI

cc: Glenn Kucher, Code Enforcement Officer – Ambler Borough
Joe Bresnan, Esq. – Solicitor
Matt Sigel, Station Partners – Applicant
Christen Pionzio, Esquire – HRMM&L, PC

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

KENNETH E. LAWRENCE, JR., CHAIR
JAMILA H. WINDER, VICE CHAIR
JOSEPH C. GALE, COMMISSIONER



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PLANNING COMMISSION**

MONTGOMERY COUNTY COURTHOUSE • PO Box 311
NORRISTOWN, PA 19404-0311
610-278-3722 • FAX: 610-278-3941
WWW.MONTGOMERYCOUNTYPA.GOV
SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

November 22, 2023

Glenn Kucher, Zoning Officer & Planning Coordinator
Ambler Borough
131 Rosemary Avenue
Ambler, PA 19002

Re: MCPC #23-0039-002
Plan Name: The Court at Ambler Station
1 lots comprising 0.53 acres
Situate: Butler Avenue and Main Street
Ambler Borough

Dear Mr. Kucher:

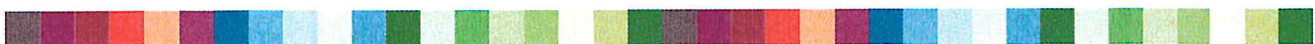
We have reviewed the above-referenced sketch plan as you requested on October 27, 2023. We forward this letter as a report of our review. We previously reviewed a proposal from the same applicant for this site on April 11, 2023.

BACKGROUND

The applicant, Ambler Station 1, LLC, proposes a significant redevelopment of a block bounded by Butler Avenue, North Main Street, Race Street, and Short Race Street. Three structures will be retained; the rest of the block is proposed to be demolished and rebuilt as a mixed use development with 26 residential units, 5,849 square feet of commercial space, and 37 surface parking spaces. Three parcels in this block are proposed to be consolidated into one. The new building is proposed to be four stories tall, but stepped back along Butler Avenue above the third story. The property is located in the C-Commercial District.

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 the borough may wish to consider prior to final plan approval. Our comments are as follows:



REVIEW COMMENTS

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

- A. County Comprehensive Plan. Montgomery County's Adopted Comprehensive Plan, *Montco 2040: A Shared Vision* (2015), designates the area where this project is located as the "Town Center" future land use category. Town Center is described as "downtown areas with a mix of retail, institutional, office, and residential uses. These centers are pedestrian-oriented, with buildings built close to sidewalks and often attached, side to side." Other aims from the land use vision include "uses should be mixed ... preferably within individual buildings." The proposal is generally consistent with the county comprehensive plan Town Center land use.
- B. Borough Comprehensive Plan Update, 2013. Ambler Borough adopted an amendment to their comprehensive plan in 2013. Although this did not include a Future Land Use map, it did include the following vision statement regarding the downtown: "Increase the quality of the downtown's services and enhance the downtown character in order to boost commercial activity while maintaining the traditional 'main street' aesthetic." We feel that this proposal general aligns with the spirit of this vision.
- C. Borough Comprehensive Plan, 2001. Ambler Borough adopted a full comprehensive plan in 2001. The 2013 Plan Update affirmed many of the elements of this 2001 plan, including the future land use map. The area where this development is proposed is shown as "Primary Central Business District," which is described as "a mix of commercial, small offices, and high density residential (mostly upper floor apartments)." It is envisioned as having commercial uses that "enable it to become more of a regional draw." This proposal is generally consistent with this land use description.

ZONING

- A. Current C-Commercial District Zoning. The plan, as proposed, 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 C-Commercial District include retail, office, restaurants, personal services, and parking lots. The applicant proposes 26 residential units, but no residential uses are currently permitted.
 2. Building Height. The current zoning allows a building height of 40 feet, with an allowance of up to 70 feet with a special exception. The applicant would need to seek this special exception for this proposal. The special exception criteria include increasing setbacks, which may be contrary to the borough and the applicant's interests in a downtown development.
 3. Parking. Under the existing zoning, this proposal would require 71 parking spaces. Only 37 are proposed.
- B. Transit Oriented Development Use. In the Borough of Ambler, a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is a use, currently permitted only in the Redevelopment Overlay District (ROD) with only certain underlying zoning and other requirements. Although this site is located in the ROD, the TOD use is not currently applicable to this parcel due to the underlying zoning. The applicant references the TOD use in the sketch plan application, so we have taken a preliminary look at whether this

project would meet the requirements of a TOD, if it were permitted. This is a partial list of potential considerations that would need to be addressed if this parcel were to be a TOD use:

1. Minimum lot area. The current minimum lot for a mixed use TOD is 8 acres. This site is about one-half of one acre.
2. Residential density. The current limit on residential density for a TOD use is between 35 and 50 acres (depending on underlying zoning). This proposal is approximately 49 dwelling units per acre.
3. Impervious coverage. The TOD use permits impervious coverage of up to 80%. This proposal is approximately 96% impervious.
4. Green space. A minimum of 20% of the site is required to be green space. No significant green space is shown.
5. Recreation area. A minimum of 5% of the site is required to be recreation area that is accessible to all residents of the development. It is unclear whether any of the balcony/deck areas are proposed to be shared space for the development.

PARKING LOT CONFIGURATION

- A. Circulation. As the plans develop further, we encourage the applicant to consider how circulation will work in the surface parking lot. There may be additional space needed for cars at the ends of dead-end drive aisles to turn around.
- B. Landscaping. We encourage the applicant to include as much landscaping as possible in the surface parking lot.

BUILDING DESIGN AND STREET FRONTAGES

- A. Butler Avenue Frontage. This is a key site in Ambler's very active commercial district. We encourage the applicant to continue to develop architectural plans that will emphasize this portion of the development.
 1. Gateway. This building has the potential to function as a gateway to the main business district for those entering the borough by train or driving east on Butler Avenue. We encourage the applicant to think creatively about how the southwest corner of the site might be an attractive gateway to the borough.
 2. Architecture. This site will improve the look and feel of this portion of Butler Avenue with a pedestrian oriented commercial first floor. We encourage the applicant to put architectural emphasis on the commercial entrances along Butler Avenue and to develop concepts that will highlight this portion of the building as a key commercial area on Butler. Signage, recessed entrances, decorative architectural features, canopies, and other features may help attract visitors to this portion of Butler Avenue.
- B. Sidewalk and Landscaping. Although this is just a sketch plan, we encourage the applicant to consider including street trees and other landscaping where possible. This site has minimal vegetation as is and we encourage the applicant to attempt to mitigate the urban heat island effect and create shade for pedestrians with green space and planters.

- C. Height and Step-backs. Although the height of some of the buildings exceeds the permitted height in the code, step-backs are provided on the upper stories and we feel that the façade height and design are appropriate for the location. The tallest portion of the building faces the train tracks, which is an appropriate design.

RESIDENTIAL UNITS

- A. Dwelling Types. The applicant states that four of the units proposed on the site are single-family attached (townhome) dwellings. However, two of these are proposed to be above retail uses in a mixed use building. It is possible that these could be considered differently, if the code enforcement officer interprets dwellings above commercial as a different use type. These are still not permitted in the current zoning district, but interpretation of dwelling type should be considered if the borough decides to permit the TOD use on this site.

CONCLUSION

We are pleased to see ongoing interest in redevelopment in downtown Ambler and wish to reiterate that MCPC generally supports the applicant's proposal. However, we believe that our suggested revisions will better achieve Ambler Borough's planning objectives for downtown redevelopment.

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.

Sincerely,



Chloe M. Mohr, AICP, Principal Planner

chloe.mohr@montgomerycountypa.gov - (610) 278-3739

- c: Matt Sigel, Applicant
Christen G. Pionzio, Applicant's Representative
Mary Aversa, Manager, Ambler Borough
James P. Dougherty, P.E., Borough Engineer
Jessica Buck, District Manager, Montgomery County Conservation District
Timothy Konetchy, Senior Community Planner, MCPC

Attachment A: Aerial Image of Site

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

ATTACHMENTS A & B



The Court at Ambler Station
MCPC#220039001

Montgomery
County
Planning
Commission

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania - Planning Commission
1000 Piney Glen Road, Suite 200, Ambler, PA 19002
www.montgomerycountypa.gov/planning
Planning Commission

0 50 100 200 Feet



