

AGENDA

AMBLER BOROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION

I. CALL TO ORDER

May 27, 2025 (7:00 PM)

II. ROLL CALL

III. APPROVAL OF: April 22, 2025 minutes

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Review "220 S. Chestnut Street Sketch Plan" proposing to demolition an existing warehouse / industrial building to construct 16 stacked townhomes Parking is provided in the rear of the buildings with access to Maple Avenue. Recommendation requested from the applicant.

V. OLD BUSINESS:

1. Input is requested on updating the 2013 Borough Comprehensive Plan. Draft section on natural resources and open space to be discussed.
2. Input is requested for ordinance language to require recreation area or open space for all new developments or subdivisions. This would also include provisions for a fee in lieu of in the event recreation area or open space is not feasible that can be put towards existing park improvements.

VI. ADJOURNMENT



Stone Manor Corporate Ctr.
2800 Kelly Road Suite 200
Warrington, PA 18976
Tel (215) 345-7500 Fax (215) 345-7507
www.foxrothschild.com

ANDREW R. STOLL
Direct No: 215.918.3589
Email: astoll@FoxRothschild.com

April 15, 2025

VIA EMAIL ONLY

Kyle B. Detweiler, MBA
Manager for the Borough of Ambler
131 Rosemary Avenue
Ambler, PA 19002
kdetweiler@Borough.Ambler.pa.us

Re: 220 South Chestnut Street, Ambler Borough, Montgomery County, PA, being Tax Parcel No. 25-0054-001 (the "Property")

Mr. Detweiler:

As you know, this office represents Lot 2 Real Estate, LLC ("**Applicant**"), which submitted a sketch for the Property (the "**Sketch Plan**"). The Property is currently improved with a warehouse-like building that is currently used as an indoor sports facility, and related improvements. As per the Sketch Plan, Applicant proposes to demolish the existing building, and construct eight (8) stacked townhouses (comprising sixteen (16) dwelling units) and related improvements at the Property (the "**Proposed Project**"). The proposed stacked townhouses will front on South Chestnut Street.

The Applicant presented the Sketch Plan and Proposed Project to the Ambler Borough Planning Commission (the "**PC**") at the PC's meeting on March 25, 2025 (the "**March PC Meeting**"). The PC provided substantial feedback during that meeting. Additionally, prior to the March PC Meeting, the Applicant received two (2) review letters for the Proposed Project – a review letter from the Montgomery County Planning Commission, dated March 19, 2025, and a review letter from Gilmore & Associates, Inc., the Borough's Engineer, dated March 20, 2025 (collectively, the "**Review Letters**"). A representative of the Montgomery County Planning Commission and the Borough Engineer attended the March PC Meeting and discussed the comments in their respective review letters.

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The Applicant has thoughtfully reviewed the questions and feedback received during the March PC Meeting and provides the following responses.

1. Plan Clarification and Changes

At the March PC Meeting, the PC asked numerous questions about details on the plan submitted with the Sketch Plan Application. The Applicant advised that the plan submitted with the Sketch Plan was very conceptual in nature, and that more details would be included in the plan if the Proposed Project were to move forward. The Applicant advised that a revised plan would also address many of the comments included in the Review Letters.

To that end, enclosed is a revised Sketch Plan, prepared by the Applicant's Engineer, Protract Engineering, Inc. last revised April 14, 2025 (the "**Revised Plan**"). Some key changes and clarifications are outlined below.

a. Clarification of sidewalks off South Chestnut

The plan submitted with the initial Sketch Plan Application did not clearly show that the units will "front" on South Chestnut Street. In this regard, the initial plan did not show walkways from the public sidewalk on South Chestnut Street to the units, or more clearly delineate that the "fronts" of the units will face South Chestnut Street. That is now reflected on the Revised Plan.

b. Stormwater Management

At the March PC Meeting, a comment was made by a member of Borough Council, during the public comment portion of the meeting, regarding stormwater management. Specifically, that they would like to see stormwater management be a point of emphasis for the Proposed Project. The Applicant intends to develop the Proposed Project in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations and believes the Proposed Project will represent an improvement both from an aesthetic and effectiveness standpoint over the current stormwater management systems.

Notably, the Applicant's Engineer will be attending the next Planning Commission meeting for the Proposed Project (referenced below), and any subsequent meetings for the Sketch Plan so that more technical stormwater management related questions can be answered.

c. Parking spaces due to parking easement

The Property is subject to a shared parking easement with the owner of the adjacent property located at 124 Maple Street (the "**Shared Parking Easement**"). The Shared Parking Easement requires that twenty-two (22) spaces be provided at the Property. The intent of the Shared Parking Easement was to provide additional parking during the daytime for the owner of the adjacent office building, on the Property (at a time when the existing baseball facility was not in use). Similarly, the Shared Parking Easement contemplated that, at nighttime, the baseball facility could use the parking at the adjacent office building (when it was not occupied) for spillover parking, if needed.

Obviously, a change in use at the Property vis-à-vis the Proposed Project would alleviate the need for the Shared Parking Easement. Nevertheless, unfortunately the Property is subject to this restriction. The required number of parking spaces are included on the Revised Plan.

It is worth noting that this additional parking can be a benefit to and from the Proposed Project. Parking is at a premium in the Borough, including along South Chestnut Street (as was mentioned at the March PC Meeting). Thus, having additional parking will ensure that occupants of the units or their guests will not use on-street parking on South Chestnut Street.

2. Locating garages in the “front” of Property, facing South Chestnut Street

The Proposed Project is currently designed such that the dwelling units face South Chestnut Street, with garages in the rear of the units. This provides the ability to exit the Property to the east, and access Maple Street. At the March PC Meeting, it was suggested that the Applicant consider locating the garages off South Chestnut Street so that they can be accessed in that location.

It was determined that locating the garages off South Chestnut Street is not feasible because doing so would cause a loss of on-street parking while also significantly minimizing any potential for additional street trees/landscaping along South Chestnut Street. It has been communicated to the Applicant that preserving on-street parking on South Chestnut Street is a critical component of any development of the Property. This includes a comment made at the March PC Meeting by someone who resides on South Chestnut Street, and directly across the street from the Property, *i.e.* that residents along South Chestnut Street would be *very upset* if on-street parking is removed.

3. Access

Relatedly, at the March PC Meeting, it was suggested that the Applicant explore other options for access to the Property and the units. Unfortunately, the extremely unique configuration of the Property restricts a change to the vehicular access from what exists today, *i.e.* to the east of the Property and through Maple Street.

Moreover, as previously stated, to locate access to the Property off South Chestnut Street would result in a loss of on-street parking on South Chestnut Street. As noted above, this is not a desirable result for the residents along South Chestnut Street. However, each unit will be accessible by walkways connecting to the public sidewalk on South Chestnut Street keeping in line with the residential character of the existing homes on South Chestnut Street.

4. Adding a mix of commercial and residential uses for the proposed units.

It was suggested that the Applicant explore integrating commercial use(s) as part of the Proposed Project. The Applicant has determined that this is not feasible for several reasons.

First, a compatible and sustainable commercial use is not feasible. Simply, the Applicant has been unable to identify a particular use(s) and/or user that would commit to a commercial use at the Property. As such, any commitment for the inclusion of a commercial use would be on complete speculation. Such risk is not practical for the Applicant or any other developer of the Property, especially given the limited scope of the development.

Second, parking would become a significant issue for a commercial use at the Property. The Property has a unique configuration which makes it such that the only true area for development is the portion of the Property along South Chestnut Street. A commercial use will necessitate parking that would be very difficult to integrate into any use or development. Relatedly, if a commercial business were to prosper at the Property (which the Applicant believes is unlikely), there would presumably be additional vehicular traffic to / from the Property and, in turn, additional parking. The Property simply would not be able to accommodate such parking needs, and does not have the area for circulation to accommodate a commercial use, especially not in common with the proposed residential uses. As such, potential customers would presumably park, among other areas, along South Chestnut Street which would mean residents have less on-street parking in that area. As noted above, this is a concern of residents along South Chestnut Street.

Further to this point, as noted above, the Property is subject to a Shared Parking Easement. The Shared Parking Easement would complicate the Property's ability to handle parking requirements for a mix of residential and commercial uses.

Lastly, the Applicant explored different building configurations to allow for the inclusion of a commercial use. However, given that any commercial use would be entirely on speculation (and would likely detract from the residential character of the Proposed Project in relation to the existing neighborhood), it is difficult to configure the Proposed Project to account for a potential, but unknown, commercial use. This obviously impacts the design and feasibility of the Proposed Project.

5. Price Point / Proposal to Provide Affordable Housing

At the March PC Meeting, the Applicant gave a preliminary price point starting in the \$500,000's, but given the preliminary stage of the Proposed Project, it is very difficult for the Applicant to know the exact price point at this time given a variety of uncertain factors.

By way of example, construction for the Proposed Project is not intended to occur in the immediate future, and the price will largely depend on fluctuating costs. There is a current tenant at the Property, a baseball training facility. It is currently the Applicant's intent to not disrupt the tenant's use at the Property. In other words, the Proposed Project is not immediate, but rather a forward-thinking project. Thus, the Applicant fully expects construction costs to fluctuate in the coming years. This is unfortunately even more true given current market conditions.

Moreover, the units may have been different amenities and, accordingly, be offered at different prices. It is difficult to forecast the exact price or range for a future project, especially when the prices could be amenity driven.

Relatedly, comment that the Applicant received at the March PC Meeting is that the Applicant should consider building a "more affordable" unit, *i.e.* lower price, and something akin to affordable housing. The Applicant is proposing what it believes to be market rate units which will fit nicely into the community, be desirable units for purchase, and help increase values of surrounding properties. However, the addition of 16 units to the "for sale" market may help to

alleviate the affordability concern simply by the ripple effect of adding additional inventory to the market.

That said, the Applicant intends for the price point to be commensurate with comparable new product of this type and size in the Ambler area.

6. Density

Similarly, at the March PC Meeting, it was suggested that the Applicant consider a way to include more density for the Proposed Project, presumably to help lower the potential sale price of the units. Unfortunately, this will not work for several reasons.

Additional density / apartments are very challenging given the constraints of the Property. As noted above, the Property is uniquely shaped like a sideways “T” with only one (1) means of vehicular ingress / egress, and only consists of slightly less than one (1) acre of land. Adding additional density with limited areas for parking will present a perhaps insurmountable challenge for a feasible development.

Furthermore, there are 114 apartments (The Crossings at Ambler Station) in close proximity to the Proposed Project with several more proposed larger-scale apartments approved/contemplated in the nearby area. Thus, the Applicant believes there is an oversaturation for apartments in the area, and a smaller apartment development complex on a uniquely shaped and small property (*i.e.* the Property) may hinder the potential success of the Proposed Project.

Moreover, adding more density will effectively change the use proposed for the Proposed Project, which is one of the most attractive aspects of what is proposed by the Applicant. As noted above, the Proposed Project is for stacked townhouses, which unlike apartments, are a medium density for-sale product with a condominium ownership structure. As such, ownership will be vested in sixteen (16) different owners versus one (1) apartment complex owner.

This is what other municipalities have described as the “missing middle” type of use. It is not the typical single-family detached dwelling or twin, nor is it the apartment. Thus, people looking to downsize from a single-family detached dwelling, or first-time homebuyers looking to buy something with more space than a typical apartment would desire this type of product. It is the Applicant’s understanding that Ambler Borough does not have this product. As highlighted at the March PC Meeting, this offering would attract people to the Borough, help residents looking to downsize stay in the Borough, and would add much needed “for sale” inventory to the market helping to alleviate the upward price pressure currently being experienced in the market due to lack of available homes in the Borough.

Adding density to the Proposed Project would effectively change the use from the desirable stacked townhouses to additional apartments. Based on other feedback received to date, and Applicant’s research of current market conditions, the Applicant respectfully believes that additional density could unfortunately not be accomplished without changing the use.

To this point, as was presented at the March PC Meeting and as depicted in the below aerial photograph, the Property is located between high density apartment uses, and a mix of detached and attached single-family homes. Thus, the Proposed Project does not just add a new product

offering to the Borough in general, it provides for a better product offering and transition of uses in the area of the Property.



7. Target Market / Student Population

At the March PC Meeting, the Applicant explained that the Proposed Project is intended to take full advantage of the Property's unique location in close proximity to the Septa rail station and the commercial corridor of Butler Pike (*i.e.* Main Street). The Proposed Project is a perfect candidate for a Transit Oriented Development and given the low maintenance/walkable nature of the Proposed Project will likely target "empty nesters" (including residents of Ambler looking to move out of their single-family detached dwelling, but desiring to stay in the Borough), and first-time homebuyers. Typically, neither of these users would have children occupying the units with them. The "empty nester" would have children that have already moved out. Further, the first-time homebuyer would likely not be purchasing the units if they intend to have children reside there with them. The units do not have the space typically sought by a family with children, nor do they have the amenities parents with children in their home desire, *e.g.* space for outdoor play area. It is for these reasons that the Applicant believes any increase to the student population would likely be minimal, if any.

8. Grading

At the March PC Meeting, a member of the PC asked that we review the grading for the Proposed Project to ensure that it does not severely increase the height. As was discussed at that time, the Proposed Project will be comparable in height to the existing building, and will have less building coverage. However, the height of the Proposed Project will be less than what is currently permitted in the Office Campus District (50').

While the Revised Plan does not indicate any major grading challenges, both the finished grade and finished floor elevation of the stacked townhouses will be carefully evaluated as the Proposed Project enters the engineering phase.

Moreover, the Applicant's Engineer will be attending the next Planning Commission on the Revised Plan to discuss more technical aspects of the grading for the Property and the Proposed Project.

CONCLUSION

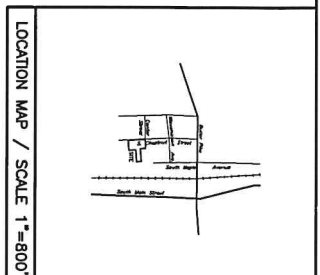
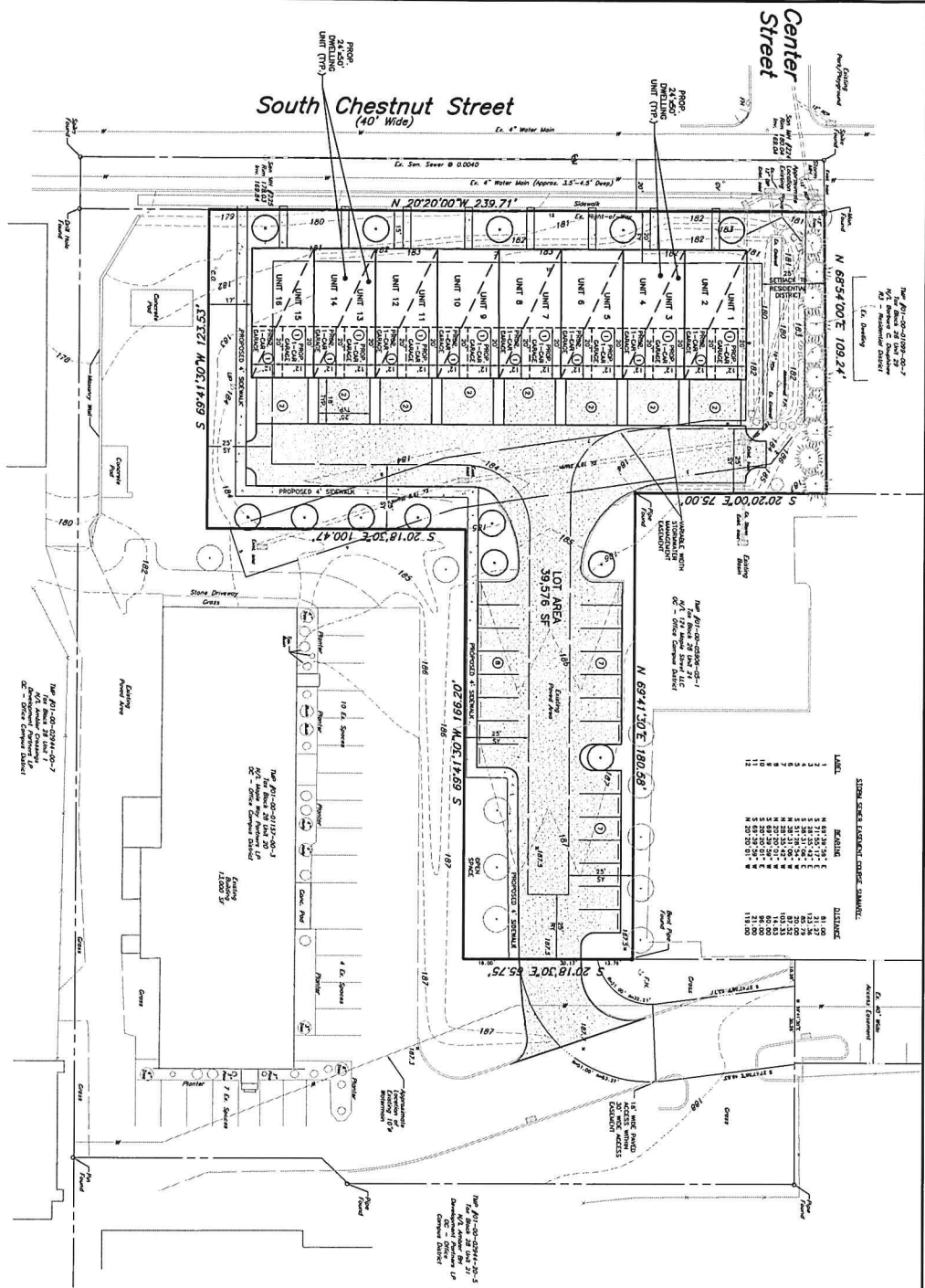
The Applicant believes this adequately addresses the primary comments and questions raised during the March PC Meeting. The Applicant respectfully requests the Revised Plan be included on the April 22, 2025 Planning Commission meeting agenda, both for further discussion, including to discuss the above-points, and for the PC to make a recommendation that Borough Council review and take action to authorize the next procedural steps so that the Proposed Project can move forward.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AS', is positioned above the printed name.

Andrew R. Stoll

Enclosure



1. THE PROJECT IS A MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL BUILDING WITH 15 UNITS AND 15 PRIVATE PARKING SPACES.
2. THE PROJECT IS SITUATED ON A LOT BOUNDARY BY SOUTH CHESTNUT STREET TO THE NORTH, CENTER STREET TO THE EAST, AND A PROPOSED 4' SIDEWALK TO THE SOUTH.
3. THE PROJECT IS A 2-STOREY BUILDING WITH A TOTAL FLOOR AREA OF 1,111.11 SQ. FT.
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MULTI-FAMILY SKETCH PLAN
PREPARED FOR
220 S. CHESTNUT STREET
ProTract
Engineering, Inc.
64 East Maryland Avenue, P.O. Box 58
Bellevue, Pennsylvania 15005
Phone (412)482-9330
Fax (412)482-9336

Sheet Number	1
Project Number	1230
Base DWG	BASE.DWG
Author	AMBLER
Check	MONTEGOMERY
Date	4-1-25
Scale	1"=20'
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