

October 28, 2021

TO: Planning Commission Members

FROM: Jillian Dierks, Planner, Department of Building and Planning

SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY LAND DEVELOPMENT PLAN – 75 St. James Place & 119, 121, 123, 125 & 127 Coulter Avenue, Suburban Square, LD# 3782, Ward 5.

This application was submitted under the zoning in place in February 2017 and is not subject to any subsequent amendments to the MUST district or the new zoning code requirements.

Proposal

The applicant, Mike Ogden, on behalf of Kimco Realty Corporation, is seeking approval of a Preliminary Land Development Plan, for the following:

- Demolition of five two-story office buildings located at 119, 121, 123, 125 & 127 Coulter Avenue and a retail building (former Urban Outfitters) located at 75 St. James Place;
- Subdivision of 14,113 square feet from 75 St. James Place and consolidation with the existing five properties to create a 73,811-square foot (1.69 acre) property;
- Construction of a new five-story, mixed-use building with a 57,262 square foot footprint containing 19,667 square feet of ground floor retail space and 131 apartments;
- Construction of one level of underground parking and one level of at-grade parking behind the retail space containing a total of 213 parking spaces, which is accessed from an existing interior driveway off Coulter Avenue;
- Installation of an underground stormwater management system in the access driveway to the west of the building; and
- Installation of a green roof on a portion of the building.



The proposal is illustrated on the attached set of plans that includes thirty-one (31) sheets prepared by Langan Engineering, dated May 22, 2020, last revised October 15, 2021.

EXISTING ZONING	EXISTING LAND USE	PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT
MUST District	Commercial/Retail	Five-Story Mixed Use Building

PLAN REVISIONS:

Since the October 4, 2021 Planning Commission review, the plan has been revised in the following ways:

- The area designated for bicycle parking and storage has been identified on the plans
- Two parking spaces have been removed to provide additional space for maneuverability

Since the August 5, 2019 Tentative Sketch Plan approval, the plan has been revised in the following ways:

- Reduction of 21 residential units.
- 275 sq. ft. increase in retail space.
- Reduction of 15 parking spaces and removal of the second level of underground parking.

Process:

Prior Approvals: The applicant received Tentative Sketch Plan approval for the proposal on August 5, 2019.

Preliminary Plan Meeting Schedule:

The tentative schedule for the land development review of the proposal is as follows:

October 4, 2021	Planning Commission	Discussion of the Preliminary Land Development Plan
November 1, 2021	Planning Commission	Review of the Preliminary Land Development Plan
November 10, 2021	Building & Planning Committee	Review of the Preliminary Land Development Plan
November 17, 2021	Board of Commissioners	Action on the Preliminary Land Development Plan

Recent Development Within Suburban Square:

- In 2016 the Board of Commissioners approved the construction of a parking structure and a two-story building along Coulter Avenue with 20,000 sq. ft. footprint.
- In 2017 the Board of Commissioners approved improvements to the upper courtyard.
- In 2020 the Board of Commissioners approved improvements to the lower courtyard.



Property Description

Suburban Square consists of four separate parcels and is bordered by Montgomery Avenue to the north and the SEPTA/Amtrak Paoli-Thorndale line to the south and Anderson Avenue to the west. To the east the center is bordered by Sibley Avenue and residential and office uses. St. James Place and Parking Plaza are private roads that traverse the shopping center. Several buildings on the property are Class II resources on the Historic Resource Inventory.

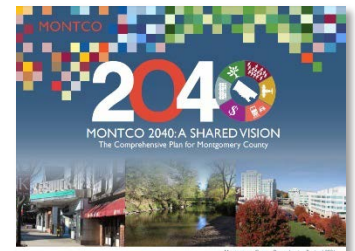
Property History

Suburban Square, believed to be one of America’s first outdoor shopping centers, was initially designed in 1926 by the architectural firm of Dreher and Churchman and was constructed between 1927 and 1931. The center is anchored by the Times Building, a vertically striped high-rise that was home to the Main Line Daily Times and was one of the tallest buildings in suburban Philadelphia at the time of its construction. The center soon contained a Strawbridge and Clothier department store, the first suburban location for that major retailer. Unlike many other retail developments of the time, which typically consisted of one large building housing numerous shops, Suburban Square was modeled after a downtown street. It consists of a series of buildings designed in a cohesive Art Deco style, arranged around outdoor plazas and walkways. Suburban Square was remodeled several times throughout the last 85 years but retains its integrity and remains an attractive and popular suburban shopping destination.



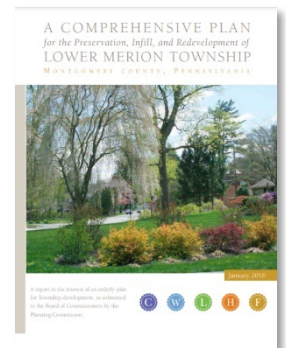
REGIONAL AND TOWNSHIP COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLIANCE

The Ardmore area of Lower Merion Township is identified as a Town Center in the Future Land Use Plan of the Montgomery County Comprehensive Plan, [Montco2040: A Shared Vision](#). Town Centers are traditional downtown areas with a mix of retail, institutional, office, and residential uses. The proposed mixed-use building is consistent with the statement that “residential uses are integral to these districts and are located in mixed use buildings over street level commercial.” The proposed development is generally consistent with the statement that town centers “are pedestrian-oriented, with buildings built close to sidewalks and often attached, side to side.” In addition, the redevelopment of this site is generally consistent with the goal to “encourage development and transformative investment where infrastructure already exists.”



The plan is also consistent with the [Land Use Element of the 2016 Lower Merion Township Comprehensive Plan](#) mission’s statement for commercial land use states:

“Attractive, convenient, and vibrant commercial areas are hallmarks of the finest residential suburbs and are an essential component of good places to live. The Township’s commercial areas are intended to be distinct places, each with their own unique identity, and convenient connections to its surrounding neighborhood. The Township’s commercial areas are civic centers, providing access to public transportation, shopping, employment, and a wide variety of public and private services. The Township’s commercial areas are places for communal gathering, socializing, and their design and operation should be a source of community pride.”



APPLICABLE STUDIES AND REPORTS

- [Comprehensive Plan - Land Use Element - Commercial](#), Lower Merion Township, 2016
- [Ardmore Storefront Design Guidelines](#), Kiku Obata & Company, 2006
- [Ardmore Retail Strategy](#), Economics Research Associates, 2006
- [Ardmore Redevelopment Area Plan Update](#), Hillier Architecture, 2005

ZONING:

Mixed Use Special Transportation (MUST) District: The MUST District was originally adopted in 2006 to help revitalize Ardmore which at the time was an aging downtown main street struggling to compete with newer commercial centers. The

MUST District regulates use, bulk & setback requirements and includes design standards to promote pedestrian-oriented buildings with building entrances that are oriented toward the street, sidewalk and/or public accessway.

After the initial adoption of MUST, there were several amendments aimed at refining the code and incorporating community input. In July 2017, the Board of Commissioners adopted an ordinance (4109) that removed the ability for new buildings to designate public parking spaces to meet parking requirements in MUST. Most recently, on November 20, 2019 the Board of Commissioners adopted an ordinance (4175) that reduced the maximum height limit to 39 feet (three-stories) with the ability to increase the building height to 52 feet subject to meeting additional standards. Staff notes that the current proposal is not subject to either amendment as it was submitted before those ordinances were adopted.

Compatibility with the Intent of the MUST District: The MUST District regulates use, bulk & setback requirements and includes design standards to promote pedestrian-oriented buildings with entrances that are focused toward the street and sidewalk. The subject application meets the following goals of MUST:

- Provides convenient, direct and accessible pedestrian access to and from public sidewalks, transit facilities, and residential and commercial uses;
- Provides a safe, pleasant and enjoyable pedestrian experience by connecting activities between buildings in the MUST District and within a structure to the adjacent sidewalk and/or transit stop; and
- Promotes use of pedestrian and mass transit modes of transportation to access residential and commercial facilities.

The Zoning Compliance Chart can be found on Sheet 6 (CS101) of the attached plan set.

MUST Zoning Requirements- Commercial/Residential Mixed-Use Buildings			
		Required	Proposed
Setback	Front Yard (Coulter Ave.)	0' min.	13'-30'
	Build to Line [1]	8 - 48' max.	13'-30'
	Side Yard (East & West Property Lines)	0' min.	0'
	Rear Yard (North Property Line)	0-15' min.	20'
	Buffer Area (rear)	20' min.	20'
Bulk & Height	Building Height [2]	28' min. -65' max.	63'
	Building Area	100% max.	78.3% (73,811sq. ft.)
	Impervious Surface	100% max. (73,811 sq. ft. permitted)	88.7% (65,470 sq. ft.)
Parking	Vehicular	177 Spaces	213 Spaces [3]
	Bicycle	20 Spaces	20+ Spaces

[1] The front facade of a building in the MUST District shall be setback from the street right-of-way no farther than that of the closest building within 150 feet, facing the same street and in the same zoning district. The build-to line may be extended up to 20 feet further from the street right-of-way if the additional area is used as a public gathering space or for outdoor dining. If the outdoor dining use is discontinued, this outdoor area must be used for public gathering space. The build-to line may extend an additional 20 feet on streets other than primary streets and used as a public gathering space, sidewalk or for outdoor dining.

[2] The MUST District has three sub-districts with different height regulations based upon the distance from the train station. The subject property straddles the six-hundred-fifty-foot and one-thousand-foot MUST rings. Mixed use buildings within this ring are permitted to be between 52 feet-65 feet, depending upon lot size. The applicant proposes to utilize incentives in the MUST to construct a building that is 63 feet tall. To achieve this height, the applicant proposes adding 24 feet to a 39-foot-tall building by utilizing Zoning Code Section 155-87.22F.6a.2 which states: The developer shall contribute a sum of money equal to 5% of the construction costs of the building. This fund shall be controlled by the Township and be dedicated to use for moderate-income housing units as described in § 155-87.24A. The method of payment of this contribution shall be established during the land development approval process. The building height is calculated by determining the mean grade of the structure.

[3] In their review the County noted that there are tandem spaces located in the below grade parking area. These spaces are not counted toward the required parking and would be limited to residential tenant parking.



ADDITIONAL REVIEWS

- Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) Review: The MCPC review of the Preliminary Plan included recommendations about the bicycle facilities, parking configuration, transit facilities and building design. These recommendations have either been incorporated into the below issues, addressed with plan revisions, or included as recommended conditions of approval.
- Township Engineer’s Review: (Attached) the Township Engineer’s review comments are included, but were not limited to, stormwater and traffic.
- Environmental Advisory Council (EAC): The EAC reviewed the plans at a subcommittee meeting on September 23rd and October 27th. The EAC discussed the environmental impacts of the development, stormwater interventions, pedestrian access, and utilities.

Challenges & Opportunities:

Issues

1. Multimodal Access

A stated goal of the MUST District is to promote the use of pedestrian and mass transit modes of transportation to access residential and commercial facilities. The proposal represents an opportunity to enhance multi-modal access to and through the site. A condition of Tentative Sketch Plan approval required the applicant to work with staff and community members to “maximize pedestrian and bicycle access to the site to enhance neighborhood connectivity with the center and existing transit facilities”. Staff’s recommendations for bus, pedestrian, and bicycle improvements also align with the Township’s [Transportation Demand Management policy](#) goals of expanding bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and promoting multi-modal transportation.

Bus: As discussed at the October 4th Planning Commission meeting, the site is located adjacent to SEPTA bus routes 44, 103 and 105. The project includes the planned relocation of the SEPTA bus stop. A condition of approval has been included requiring the applicant to work with staff to expand the bus shelter to provide additional seating, landscaping, and lighting to create a comfortable commuter experience.

Pedestrian: The development incorporates pedestrian improvements at the intersection of Coulter & Sibley Avenues and at the intersection of the access drive with Coulter Avenue. The applicant has agreed to provide a contribution toward the installation of pedestrian ADA ramps at the intersection of Llanfair Road and Coulter Avenue and missing sections of sidewalk along Llanfair Road. This will ensure that residents of the



development will be able to safely access adjacent community amenities and allow residents of Wynnewood and Ardmore to safely walk to the proposed development.

Bicycle: Under the MUST standards, the proposal generates a requirement for 20 bicycle parking spaces. Staff notes that if submitted under current standards this proposal would generate 65 long term and 85 short term bicycle parking spaces. Staff has included a condition of approval requiring the applicant to investigate providing more than the 20 required spaces and to work with staff on the location of the bicycle parking.

2. Streetscape

The proposal includes an enhanced streetscape along Coulter Avenue, improved with outdoor dining and seating and gathering opportunities. At the October 4th review of the proposal the Planning Commission recommended that the applicant explore extending the outdoor amenity space along the eastern elevation of the building. Staff has included a condition of approval requiring the applicant to explore increasing the setback along the eastern elevation to provide additional outdoor space within in the transitional space in the setback.

3. Site Circulation

The building extends approximately 400 feet along Coulter Avenue. While there is a 7-foot wide internal building walkway that connects the rear surface parking lot through the retail spaces to Coulter Avenue, the building length presents a circulation impediment. Staff recommends that the applicant work with staff to explore ways to enhance the circulation through the site, including increasing the width and openness of the proposed internal walkway or providing access along the eastern property line.

Staff has reviewed the proposed development with the Fire Department and has included a condition of approval requiring the applicant, the adjacent property owner at 102 E. Montgomery Avenue (Bijou Bridal), and staff work together to ensure that adequate access is provided to the rear of the building for emergency services to the satisfaction of the Fire Marshal.

4. Stormwater Management

The proposed redevelopment provides improvements to stormwater quantity, stormwater quality, and groundwater recharge. The proposed stormwater management system consists of the following:

- A subsurface infiltration basin located beneath the access driveway connecting Montgomery Avenue and Coulter Avenue. The system is designed to provide detention measures, and a subsurface detention basin, both consisting of interconnected precast concrete vault structures.
- A green roof.
- A subsurface conveyance system consisting of inlets, manholes, and pipes to convey stormwater runoff from the 25-year design storm event.
- Manufactured treatment devices to provide stormwater quality measures.

5. Landscape Plan

Staff has included a condition requiring a maintenance and operations plan for the proposed landscaping, street furniture and other amenities. While Suburban Square has a great record of maintaining and updating the site landscaping on a regular basis, staff would like to ensure that this continues should the property change ownership in the future.

Staff has also included a condition requiring the applicant to work with staff to provide native or non-invasive adapted plant species on the landscape plan.

6. Architecture

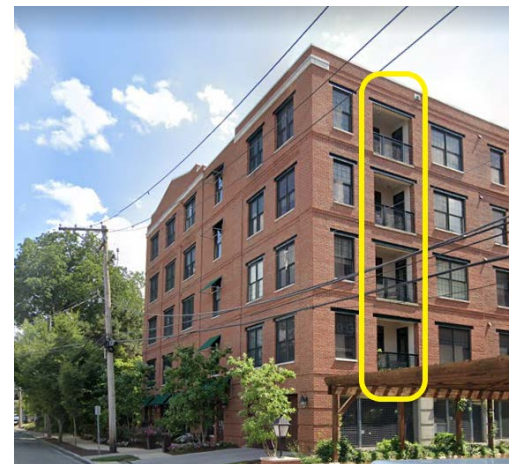
The proposal is subject to the MUST architectural design standards. The applicant has stated that the design is intended to reflect and complement the art deco style found through Suburban Square, which aligns with the MUST requirement for new buildings to be “either traditional in their architectural character or be a contemporary expression of traditional styles and forms”.

At the October 4th Planning Commission meeting comments were made on the following design elements:

- Easternmost Portion of the South Elevation & East Elevation: Staff and the County both commented on architectural treatment of the easternmost portion of the South elevation. The revised elevations include additional glazing. As noted above staff feels that the eastern property boundary presents an opportunity to allow for more outdoor space. An increased setback will also allow for fenestration along this elevation. Staff has included a condition requiring the applicant to work with staff on the building massing along the east elevation.
- Rear Building Detailing: The Planning Commission commented on the detailing of the rear elevation. The rear elevation has been further refined and staff has included a condition of approval requiring the applicant to investigate incorporating architectural elements such as recessed or protruding balconies along the rear elevation to add visual interest.
- Use of Grey Coloring: Following the Planning Commission meeting staff spoke with the applicant about the brick selection and the applicant began exploring alternatives to the grey brick proposed. Staff has included a condition of approval requiring the applicant to continue to work with staff to utilize a brick color that is complementary to the surrounding neighborhood.



Easternmost Portion of the South Elevation



Example of a Recessed Balcony

7. Sustainability

The Tentative Sketch Plan approval incorporated several conditions focused on sustainability, many of which are being carried through the Preliminary Plan approval to ensure compliance for building permitting. The applicant’s proposal incorporates the use of a green roof and the applicant has stated that they are exploring various green building techniques. Staff is recommending that the applicant incorporate electric vehicle (EV) parking and make the parking garage EV ready, construct the roof so that it is solar capable, divert demolition material, as well as pursue LEED or equivalent certification.

8. Landscape Plan

The proposal requires a partial waiver of the Natural Features Code Section 101-9, to allow some of the required trees to be substituted with other types of plantings and some to be provided off-site. The MUST district permits a maximum of 100% impervious coverage, which creates a conflict with the minimum planting standards, in particular providing for evergreen and deciduous trees. Staff notes that there are opportunities to provide additional plantings within the Suburban Square site, notably along the property boundary with the railroad. Considering the quality of the streetscape design and the quantity of landscaping proposed on-site, and opportunities for site-wide planting, staff is supportive of the required relief.

Action

The Planning Commission must take the following actions with respect to this application:

- A. A recommendation on the requested Preliminary Land Development Plan.
- B. Partial waiver of Natural Features Code Section 101-9, to meet the minimum required planting by providing a contribution for an equivalent number of trees at the time of the building permit application or planting elsewhere on Suburban Square site.