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September 12, 2012



Mr. Mark A. Penecale, Planning/Zoning Officer
Abington Township
1176 Old York Road
Abington, Pennsylvania 19001-3713

Re: MCPC #12-0076-003
Amend Zoning Ordinance: Regulating
Motor Vehicle Fueling Center, Signs
Abington Township

Dear Mr. Penecale:

We have reviewed the above referenced zoning text amendment in accordance with Section 609 of Act 247, "The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code," as you requested on August 2, 2012. We forward this letter as a report of our review and recommendations.

Applicant's Proposal

This review is for a proposed zoning text amendment which would amend the Use Regulations chapter of the zoning ordinance to provide for a new use called a Motor Vehicle Fueling Center use, and revise regulations for sign regulations in the zoning ordinance. The proposed amendment would make C-34: Fueling Center a permitted, by-right use in the PB-Planned Business District. The provisions of the ordinance would limit the C-34 use to Old York Road or the Fairway, within 800 feet of the train station. The zoning ordinance was submitted to us with various Concept Images prepared by 3GHC Architects, illustrating how a site might be developed under such zoning. The Concept Images show a Wawa convenience store with fuel pumps, and a drive-through bank at 816-830 Old York Road.

Review Comments

The proposed zoning text amendment would affect locations on Old York Road and the Fairway; the Township's Old York Road Corridor Improvement Plan established a land use vision and policy for this area and should be considered when reviewing any subdivisions or land developments in the Old York Road corridor. Goals of the Plan include promoting a safe and interconnected pedestrian network, promoting active and attractive front building facades, adding wayfinding signage, and limiting the number of commercial signs.

Ideally, a use within 800 feet of the train station would be walkable, transit-oriented, and designed consistent with the recommendations of the Old York Road Corridor Improvement Plan. However, we understand that the Township may have an opportunity to redevelop a vacant or underutilized property and generate positive fiscal impacts, while providing services demanded by the local population;

therefore, flexibility in that regard is also desirable. We commend the Township on its efforts to redevelop an underutilized site along a portion of the Route 611 corridor.

A. Vehicular and Pedestrian Access. The following recommendations would help promote a pedestrian-friendly environment along Old York Road. MCPC prepared two conceptual site redesign sketches of the site for which Concept Images were prepared by 3GHC Architects. These, particularly sketch "B", which limits access points on Hilltop Road, show how access and circulation might be improved (see attached).

1. Vehicular Access Points:

- a. *Maximum Number of Vehicular Access Points.* We recommend the maximum number of vehicular access points be capped at two, rather than three shown in the Concept Images (see attached photo and Hilltop Road entrance on conceptual site redesign "B").
- b. *Distance Between Vehicular Access Points.* We recommend that access points on the same street frontage be separated by a minimum distance of 300 feet, consistent with the County's model General Commercial District (available at www.planning.montcopa.org, by following the "Publications" link). Looking at the Concept Images accompanying the proposed zoning amendment, we suggest that the plan's vehicular circulation might be improved by relocating the northernmost vehicular access point on Old York Road close to the northern tract boundary. This would improve vehicular circulation within the site (see attached conceptual site redesign).

2. Driveways:

- a. *Maximum Width of Vehicular Access Points.* The proposed maximum driveway width of 50 feet is excessively large. The SALDO, however, more appropriately limits driveways to 35 feet in width, which would help create a more attractive design that is safer for a pedestrian trying to walk along the street. We recommend that vehicular access points and driveways have a maximum width of 35 feet or less.
- b. *Minimum Entrance Driveway Length.* The entrance driveway should have a minimum length of 20 feet or more (one car length) that is separated by a curb and green area from cross-driveways and parking spaces (actually, a length, greater than 20 feet would be ideal). This would make vehicular ingress and egress safer and more efficient, as with the Wawa site in West Norriton (see attached photo and conceptual site redesign). An entrance driveway with some depth makes it less likely that cars leaving the site or backing out of parking spaces would block traffic turning into the site at 816-830 Old York Road.

3. Median Cut. The Concept Images attached to the proposed ordinance show a median cut allowing left-turns from northbound Old York Road into the site. Apparently PennDOT supports this concept, so we defer to them.

4. Sidewalks:

- a. All entry driveways should be required to have sidewalks (including Hilltop Road in the Concept Image).
- b. Sidewalks along Old York Road should be required to have a minimum width of 8 feet, with a minimum verge area of 5 feet, and minimum green area separating the sidewalk from the parking lot of 8 feet (this concept is shown on the Concept Image). This is consistent with

the vision for future zoning along Old York Road, and is also consistent with the adjacent FTD District.

- c. Crosswalks crossing vehicular access points should either continue the paving of the street side sidewalks, or, as is the case with crosswalks linking buildings to the street side sidewalks, be required to be constructed of patterned surface dressing; textured paving; or stone, brick, or concrete pavers.
- d. Unobstructed sidewalks of a minimum 6 feet in width should be required along the full length of the building along any façade with a customer entrance, and along any façade abutting public parking areas. Along facades with building entrances, the required 6-foot sidewalk area should be required to be set back from the façade by a 3-foot area that either contains planting beds or additional sidewalk width.

For Access Design Requirements, see also B.1 and B.4.

5. Parking. Is there enough parking for the Wawa shown on the Concept Images?

B. Design.

1. Building to Street. The Old York Road Plan's vision includes buildings being built to the street for a more attractive, pedestrian-oriented design. The proposed ordinance's requirement for decorative crosswalks to link the buildings to the street-side sidewalk helps to mitigate the buildings' setback from the street (the text should say that the walkways should "directly connect all the street-side sidewalks with and provide direct access to each building occupied by a principal use.") Crosswalks should be required to be constructed of patterned surface dressing; textured paving; or stone, brick, or concrete pavers; they shall be a minimum of 5 feet in width. If buildings will not be built to the street, we recommend requiring a paved area between the street-side sidewalk and principal buildings not be deeper than 60 feet.
2. Front Facades. The front facades of buildings should be required to include doors for the public, windows, decorative architectural treatments, and possibly benches. This affects the attractiveness of the surrounding area and makes clear that buildings are not only automobile-oriented, but pedestrian-oriented as well. Nearby on Route 611, McDonald's constructed a new building with a front façade facing away from Old York Road. However, after hearing feedback, they constructed a door, windows, and decorative façade treatments on the side of the building facing Old York Road. The ordinance should require the front façade to have a working front door and windows; at a minimum, it should require substantial design treatment.
 - a. Front doors. Front doors should be required to have architectural embellishments, such as requiring at least two of the following:
 - 1) Door surround;
 - 2) Arch;
 - 3) Recessed entry;
 - 4) Awning;
 - 5) Canopy;
 - 6) Portico;
 - 7) Overhang;

- 8) Pediment;
 - 9) Transom window;
 - 10) Peaked roof form; or
 - 11) A street planter(s) of minimum 24-inch diameter.
3. Landscaping with shrubs, groundcover or perennials covering a minimum area of 20 square feet.
 4. Roofs should be designed so as to fit in with the adjacent residential district, as well as provide visual appeal. Roofs should be required to be either: (a) pitched on at least 80% of their surface, with a pitch of 5:1 (20%); or (b) have a parapet. However, for roofs near residential districts, we recommend that buildings with less than 15,000 square feet of building area on the ground floor that are located within 100 feet of a single-family residential zoning district be required to have pitched roofs covering at least 80 percent of their surface, with a pitch of 5:1 (20%), to help the building fit better with the nearby residential district.
 5. We recommend requiring storefront landscaping between building foundations and driveway or parking areas (a minimum of 25 percent of the area should be landscaped, with a minimum width of 4 feet.
 6. Gas pumps should be required to be located to the side or rear of the building.
 7. Concept Images. Some attractive features from the Concept Images should be incorporated into the new ordinance, such as the decorative street fence-wall, and a wide sidewalk with a wide verge along the street, and a green area (albeit a wider one) between the sidewalk and parking lot.
 8. HVAC equipment should be required to be screened from view from the street and adjacent properties. Many Wawa's use the roof line or decorative parapet walls to screen HVAC equipment (see photo, attached).
 10. Parking Lot Landscaping. On the Concept Image, the corner of the Wawa show a hatched, yellow marking, at the end of parking rows fronting the store entrances. We recommend that motor vehicle fueling centers require such areas to be green landscaped areas.
 11. We recommend the Motor Vehicle Fueling Center Use's gas pump canopies utilize inset lights, in the interest of aesthetics and reducing glare.
- C. Impervious Coverage: The proposed 80% impervious limit is too high and paves most of the site, allowing only limited green areas. We recommend the zoning text amendment not change existing PB District requirements (50% building coverage and 70% impervious coverage limits).
- D. Signage:
1. The Old York Road Plan calls for limited commercial signage. However, the proposed zoning text amendment would seem to dramatically increase permitted signage area, and to a lesser extent, height. For example, the zoning text amendment proposes to permit freestanding and wall signs 5 feet higher than that permitted; and permits wall signs 150% larger, canopy signs 33% larger, and freestanding signs 30% larger than in the PB District.

2. The location shown on the Concept Images would be a suitable place for a Gateway Sign facing south, welcoming people to Abington Township. The Old York Road Plan recommends such a sign be constructed at the corner of Old York Road and Hilltop Road.
3. We recommend that at least one freestanding sign advertise all businesses on-site.

E. Landscaping:

1. The buffer proposed on *p.2, b. Buffers*, is too site-specific. Although site constraints may mean the verbiage is appropriate for one site, it may not be appropriate for another (i.e., buffers may be more feasible depending upon the location). The PB District requires a 25-foot buffer along residential property lines. As a compromise, lots with a depth below a certain threshold might be permitted to have a residential buffer of perhaps 10 feet, provided a buffer with an opaque wall and generous plantings are utilized.
2. We recommend that green areas used to separate the street side sidewalk from the parking lot/driveways be required to include a specified quantity of decorative trees and shrubs.
3. Large retaining walls visible from the street can be a dominant visual element. Therefore, they should be required to incorporate design elements and planters to improve a development's appearance.

F. Lighting. The proposed ordinance would prevent lighting standards in Abington's zoning from applying to the Motor Vehicle Fueling Center use. We recommend against doing that. We further recommend that:

1. Lighting standards be required to be set back a minimum of 20 feet from residential property lines.
2. Lighting standards located closer to a side or rear lot line than the side or rear yard setback be no more than 10 feet high and direct light away from the property line.

G. Other:

1. Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). It seems odd that this use would only be permitted within 800 feet of a train station, since the use is, in fact, is not transit-oriented. We recommend this idea be revisited.
2. We recommend the Motor Vehicle Fueling Center Use borrow appropriate regulatory text from the existing C-28: Service Station Use (canopies shall meet the setback requirements of principal buildings).
3. We recommend the Motor Vehicle Fueling Center Use restrict site-operated radios from being broadcast outdoors between the hours of 10:00 pm and 6:00 am.
3. The ordinance eliminates the requirement to get a special exception for extensive grading. We feel the special exception provision is worthwhile.
4. Elimination of Zoning Standards. In addition to lighting, the proposed Motor Vehicle Fueling Center Use would eliminate the applicability of numerous zoning sections (landscaping, grading, mechanical equipment standards). We recommend keeping these provisions.

Recommendation

The Montgomery County Planning Commission recommends withholding approval of the proposed zoning text amendment until access and other key issues identified in this letter have been resolved. We recommend the Township and developer work with MCPC on the text of the proposed ordinance amendment (and any development plans) to ensure access and circulation issues are adequately resolved.

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.

Should the governing body adopt this proposed zoning ordinance text amendment, Section 609 of the Municipalities Planning Code requires that we be sent an official copy within 30 days.

Sincerely,

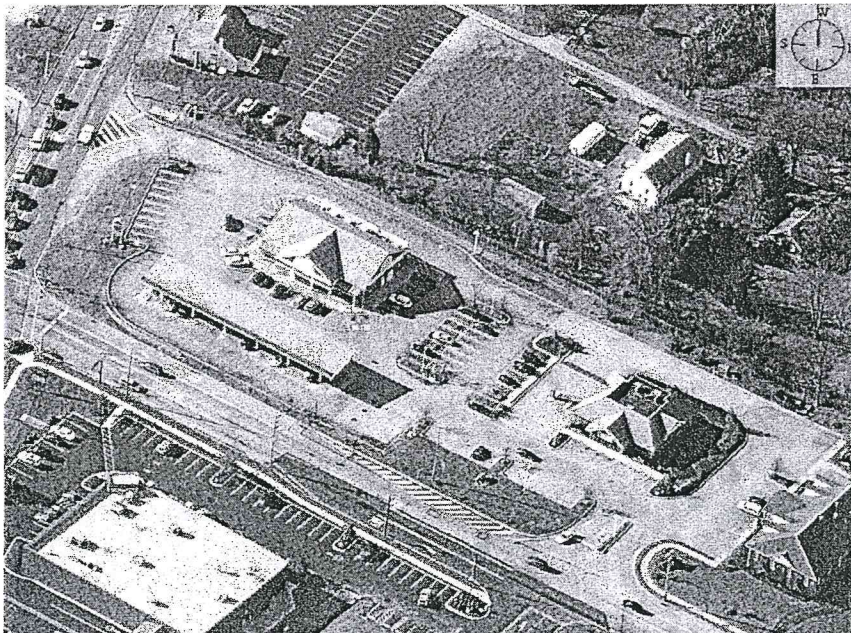


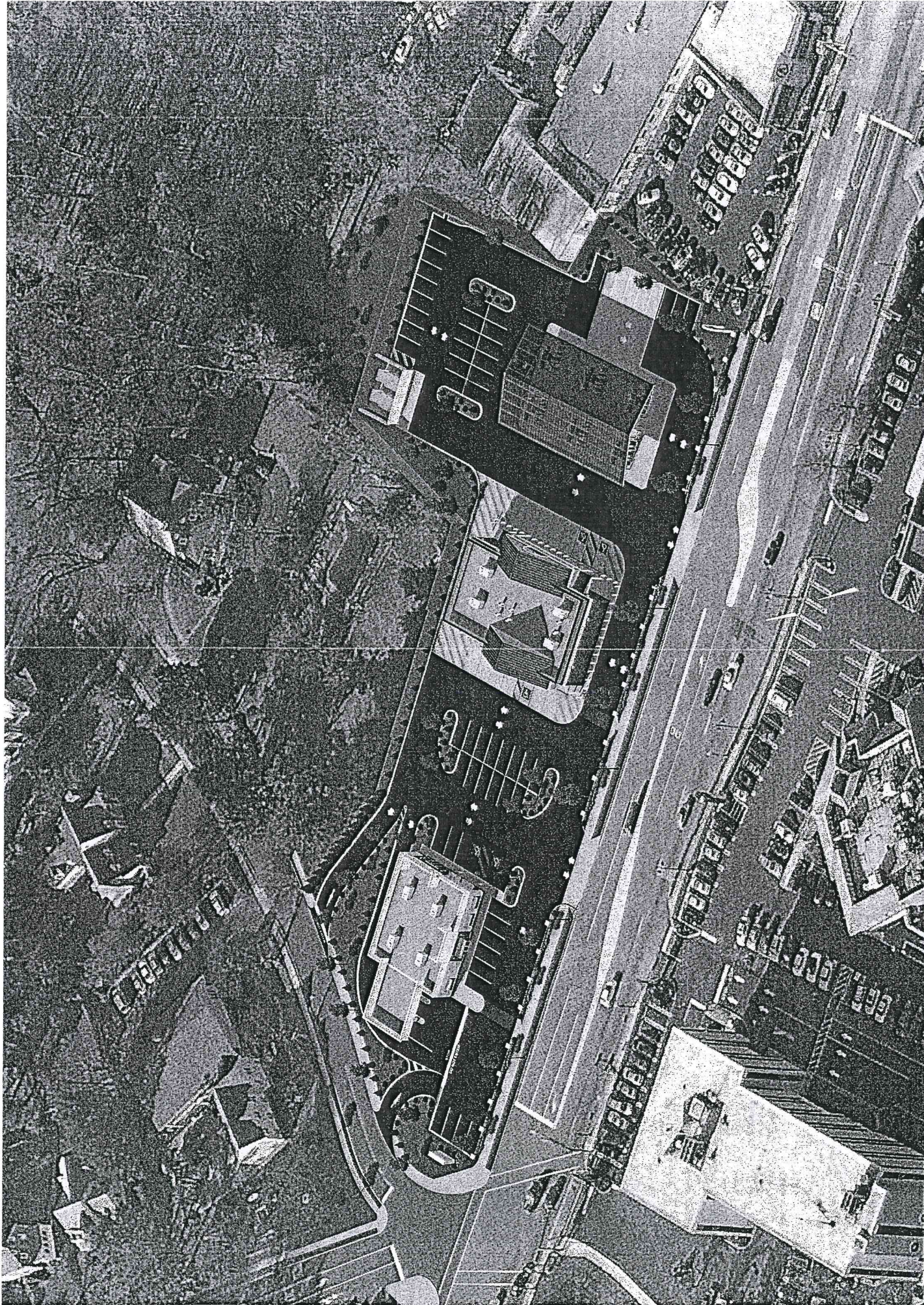
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All Township Planning Commission Members
Lawrence T. Matteo Jr., Dir., Township Planning and Code Enforcement
Michael E. Powers, P.E., Township Engineer
R. Rex Herder Jr., Esq., Township Solicitor

Attachments: Aerial Photo, Wawa on Germantown Pike, East Norriton Township
Concept Image from 3GHC Architects
Conceptual Site Redesigns A and B (by MCPC)

Wawa with HVAC screened from road, limited curb cuts, and defined entrance driveways, East Norriton, below



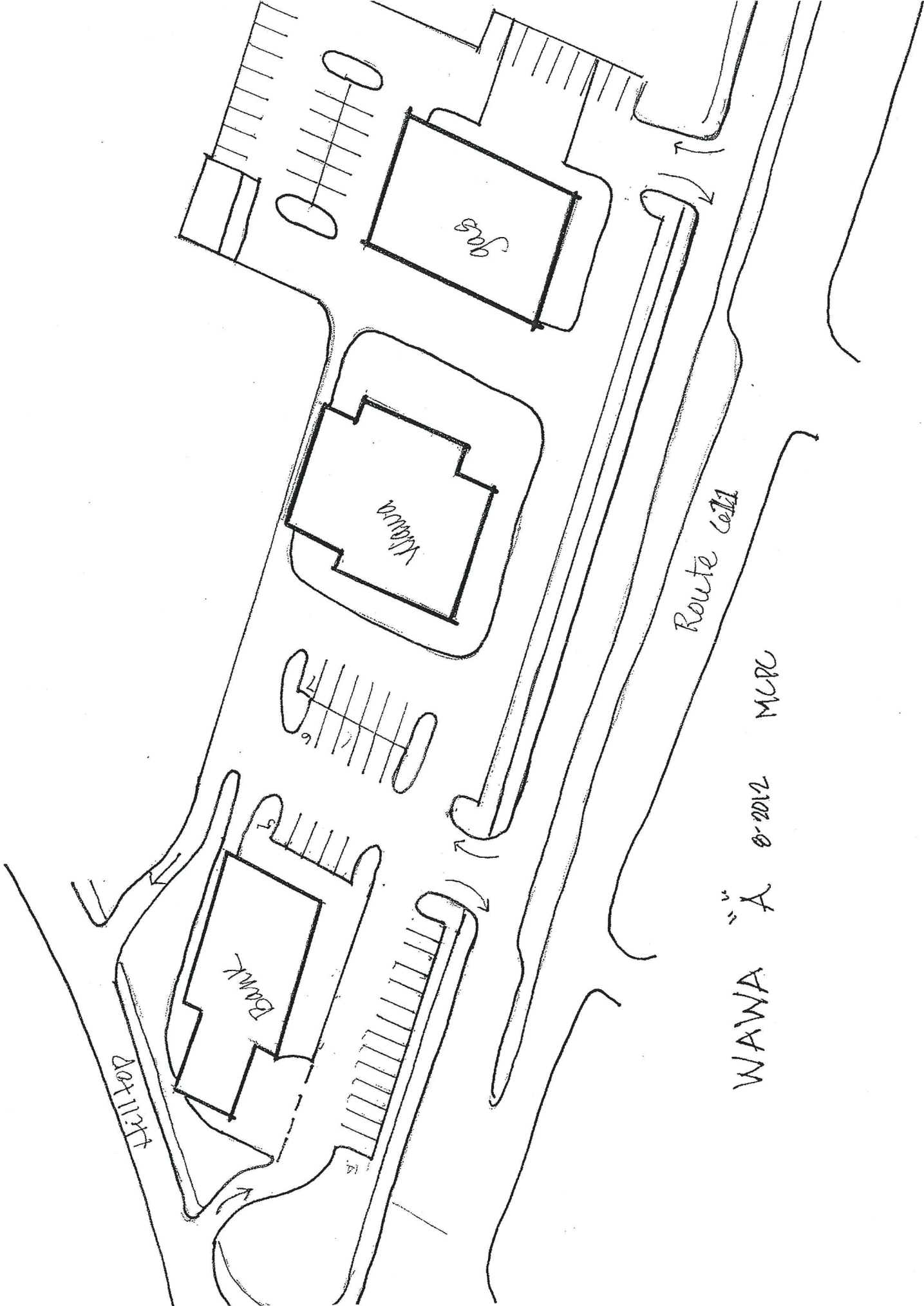


CONCEPT IMAGE

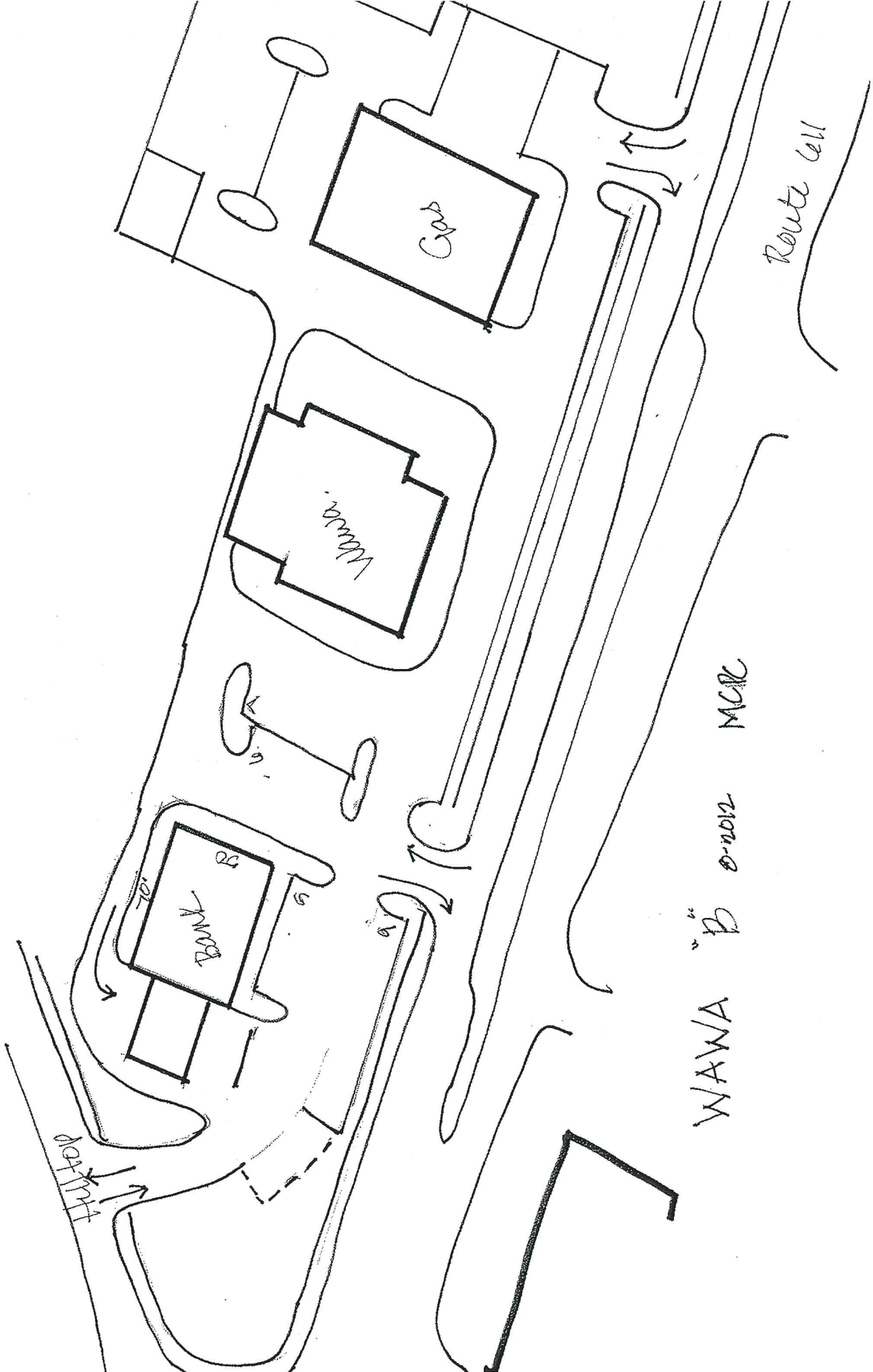
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SK080112-01

prepared by:
3GHC ARCHITECTS, LLC
SWARTHMORE, PENNSYLVANIA



WAWA "A" 8-2012 MCRP



Route Cell

WAWA "B" 0-2012 MCR

Full Tap

Bank B

Wawa

Cops

