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January 28, 2021

Denise Hamilton, Board Secretary  
Planning Board  
Borough of Metuchen  
500 Main Street  
Metuchen, NJ 08840

**RE: Review Memorandum**

Preliminary and Final Major Site Plan and Request for Waiver of Submission Requirements  
Phoenix 410 Main Street, LLC – Applicant / Property Owner  
410 Main Street  
Metuchen, NJ 08840  
Block 121; Lot 9  
B-1 Zoning District  
Amendment #1 to Redevelopment Plan for Rehabilitation / Project Area #1  
Metuchen Application No. 21-1280 E  
LRK Project No. 03.21001.03

Dear Ms. Hamilton,

As requested, this office has reviewed the above-referenced application submitted by Phoenix 410 Main Street, LLC (“Applicant”) to the Metuchen Planning Board (“Board”). The supporting application documents submitted by Applicant are listed in the Appendix for reference. The following summary and comments have been prepared for the Board’s consideration:

**1.0 Summary**

Applicant proposes to maintain the existing one-story commercial building and construct a three- to four-story addition containing 15 rental apartments with parking to be provided off-site (“Project”). The Project substantially conforms to *Amendment #1 to Redevelopment Plan for Rehabilitation in the Borough of Metuchen* (“Redevelopment Plan”). Applicant should be prepared to provide testimony in support of the Project, respond to comments contained herein, and discuss the relationship of the Project and its potential impacts within the context of the Redevelopment Plan, Master Plan and the downtown area.

**2.0 Completeness Review**

By way of background, the Borough is authorized pursuant to the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law, N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-1 et seq. (“LRHL”), to determine whether a delineated area constitutes an area in need of rehabilitation and/or an area in need of redevelopment and may adopt



rehabilitation programs and/or redevelopment plans for such designated areas. Last year, Borough Council adopted a resolution designating the entirety of the Borough as an “Area in Need of Rehabilitation”, subsequently adopted an ordinance adopting a Borough-wide redevelopment plan which incorporated by reference the underlying zoning, and then adopted an ordinance adopting the Redevelopment Plan as an overlay to multiple site-specific properties in the downtown area, including the subject property.

The Borough Council as the “Redevelopment Entity” adopted a resolution designating Applicant as “Redeveloper” and executed a Redevelopment Agreement, setting forth the terms and conditions under which the Redeveloper may implement the Project in accordance with the LRHL. The Redevelopment Plan, under Section 7.3, requires that “no application for development shall be deemed complete unless a copy of a fully executed Redevelopment Agreement with the Borough has been submitted.” This prerequisite has been met.

In accordance with Article 3 of the Metuchen Land Development Ordinance (“Ordinance”), the Office of Planning & Zoning has previously reviewed the documents as referenced herein for the purposes of completeness review and, together with the submission of the fully executed Redevelopment Agreement as noted above, found the application to be complete.

It is noted that in accordance with N.J.A.C. 13:27-7.3, the preparation of a site plan is within the professional scope of a registered architect, with the exception of certain elements, such as drainage facilities for site plans of 10 acres or more, off-tract utility extensions and on-site sanitary sewage facilities. Upon review of the submitted Major Site Plan Checklist, Applicant is requesting a waiver of submission requirements. However, no reasons were given.

Given the nature of the Project, this office believes that sufficient information has been provided for the Board’s review of the application and recommends that the Board formally deem the application complete, provided that Applicant submits the original survey of the property and an addendum listing the reasons for the request for waiver of submission requirements prior to or at the beginning of the hearing.

### **3.0 Existing Property**

As noted in the Redevelopment Plan, the subject property is a mid-block through-lot in the downtown area, located less than 300 feet from the Metuchen train station. The property is located on the east side of Main Street (Middlesex County Road 531) and west side of Station Place, distant approximately 129 feet from Hillside Avenue. The property is irregular in shape, with approximately 30 feet of frontage along Main Street and approximately 49 feet of frontage along Station Place, having a depth of 200 feet, and comprises of approximately 7,931 square feet (0.182 acres) in area. The existing grade is such that the portion of the property along Station Place is several feet above the portion of the property along Main Street.



The property presently contains a one-story commercial building with an articulated front façade that primarily faces and relates to Main Street. At the rear of the building is a non-descript unscreened parking area that encroaches on the Station Place public right-of-way, and is missing multiple sidewalk slabs, street trees, and street furniture.



Perspective view from Main Street. Source: Google Maps Street View; screen captured July 27, 2020.



Perspective view from Station Place. Source: Google Maps Street View; screen captured July 27, 2020.

The property is situated in Project Area #1 as defined by the Redevelopment Plan (“Project Area”), a site-specific overlay to the underlying B-1 Central Business District which generally permits uses typically found in a traditional downtown, including retail shops and stores, personal service businesses, restaurants as well as upper floor offices and apartments. The underlying B-1 District extends to the entirety of the block and adjacent blocks that have frontage on Main Street in between Middlesex Avenue (New Jersey State Route 27) and the Northeast Corridor rail line.



Aerial view. Property is outlined in yellow, fronting on Main Street (below) and Station Place (top); North is to the bottom-left of the image. Source: Google Maps; screen captured on July 27, 2020.

**4.0 Applicant’s Proposal**

Applicant has submitted an application seeking approval for Preliminary and Final Major Site Plan for the property designated as Block 121, Lot 9 as shown of the official Tax Map of the Borough of Metuchen and more commonly known as 410 Main Street, in the Borough of Metuchen, County of Middlesex and the State of New Jersey.



More specifically, Applicant proposes to maintain the existing one-story commercial building and its articulated front façade and construct a three- to four-story addition containing a new ground-level commercial space fronting Station Place and 15 rental apartments on the upper floors. The new building footprint will occupy most of the property, with the balance reserved for a concrete walkway and resurfaced asphalt alleyway. There will be no parking provided on-site; instead, Applicant will enter into a Payment in Lieu of Parking (“PILOP”) agreement, provide 15 off-site parking spaces, one for each apartment, and provide bicycle parking on-site. A street tree and a bicycle rack are proposed within the Station Place public right-of-way.

Overall, the mixed-use building will be four (4) stories in height, with the fourth story stepped back from the third-floor façade (28+ feet from Main Street and 25 feet from Station Place) such that the building will generally have the appearance of a 3-story building along both streets and being lower in height than the nearby Metuchen National Bank building and Robins Hall.

On the ground floor, the existing commercial space fronting Main Street will be reduced to 2,560 square feet of floor area, with the balance consolidated with the ground floor of the proposed addition fronting Station Place. The rear portion of the building will be comprised of a new commercial space of approximately 700 square feet of floor area, a small common area leading to four (4) small offices, as well as a lobby and common areas for the upper-story apartments.

On the upper floors, 15 apartments are proposed, with six (6) apartments on the second and third floors, and three (3) apartments and a common roof deck on the fourth floor. The 15 apartments comprise of two (2) affordable (one (1) two-bedroom and one (1) three-bedroom) units and 13 market-rate (nine (9) one-bedroom and four (4) two-bedroom) units. All apartments will contain modern amenities, including ceiling-mounted bicycle rack(s) and a washer and dryer in each unit, and will be accessible only from the lobby and common areas fronting Station Place.

**5.0 Zoning Review**

**5.1 Use Classification.** In accordance with Section 5.1.1 of the Redevelopment Plan, a number of commercial uses and apartments, except located on the ground floor fronting Main Street, are permitted principal uses within the Project Area.

**5.2 Area & Bulk Regulations.** In accordance with Section 5.1.3 of the Redevelopment Plan, the following area and bulk regulations apply:

<b>Regulation</b>	<b>Required</b>	<b>Existing</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
Min. Lot Area	Entire Property	7,931 SF	7,931 SF
Min. Front Yard Setback (Main Street)	Maintain Existing	3.7'	3.7'
Min. Front Yard Setback (Station Place)	0'	39.2'	0'
Min. Side Yard Setback from Lot 8	Maintain Existing	4.71'	4.71'
	4' to Rear Addition	N/A	4.9'



Regulation (con't)	Required	Existing	Proposed
Min. Side Yard Setback from Lot 10	0' for first 100' from Main 6' for remainder to Station	0' N/A	0' 6'
Max. Building Coverage	80%	49%	74%
Max. Impervious Coverage	100%	100%	100%
Max. Height (Main Street)	3 Stories, 40'	1, 21'	3, 37.8'
Additional Height (Main Street)	4 <sup>th</sup> Story, 50' total if set back min. 25' from 3 <sup>rd</sup> floor below	N/A	4, 48.4' set back 28.5'
Max. Height (Station Place)	3 Stories, 35'	N/A	3, 30.7'
Additional Height (Station Place)	4 <sup>th</sup> Story, 45' total if set back min. 25' from 3 <sup>rd</sup> floor below	N/A	4, 41.7' set back 25.0'

In summary, and based on the plans submitted, the application does not require bulk variances. In accordance with the Redevelopment Plan, any such relief shall require a variance pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40:55D-70.c.

**5.3 Development & Design Standards.** In accordance with Section 5.1.4 of the Redevelopment Plan, and based on the plans submitted, the application requires relief from Section 5.1.5.A pertaining to public sidewalk with decorative brick bands. In accordance with the Redevelopment Plan, any such relief shall require an exception pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40:55D-51.

**6.0 Planning Review**

As noted in both the Redevelopment Plan and the Master Plan, future growth will continue to occur primarily through adaptive reuse, occasional infill, and redevelopment of previously developed properties. Recognizing the need to maintain its compact town center, the Borough has adopted policies to address market conditions and promote downtown reinvestment. Given the size and shape of the Project Area, its location in proximity to bus service, mass transit and the Metuchen train station, greater construction costs, and to take advantage of the Borough's location-efficient parking policies, the Redevelopment Plan recommends the development of the Project Area into a mixed-use building appropriately scaled within the context of the Main Street core, with "right-sized" parking requirements located off-site, and improved pedestrian-friendly streetscape environment along all street frontages. *Applicant shall provide testimony regarding how the proposed Project relates to the Redevelopment Plan and the Master Plan.*

**7.0 Plan Review**

*Applicant shall provide testimony and/or revise plans as a condition of approval to address the following comments:*

**7.1 Application for Development.** The Application for Development shall be revised to correct various information contained in Section 5.A as the district requirements do not reflect the requirements of the Redevelopment Plan.



**7.2 Architectural Plans.** The architectural plans should be revised to provide additional information and correct various information to provide for a more complete site plan, including:

- Revise the title sheet and title block on each sheet to include the project name, type of application, and “Borough of Metuchen, Middlesex County, State of New Jersey”;
- Revise the zoning schedule to include additional side yard setback information;
- Replace the signature block to only include:
  - “Approved by the Planning Board” followed by “Preliminary/Final”;
  - Signature and date lines for the Engineer, Chairperson and Secretary;
- Correct scale of referenced property survey, plot plan and site plan;
- Provide additional setback dimensions on the site plan; and,
- Provide details for the proposed street tree, bike rack, fence, light fixtures, etc.

**7.3 Easements.** The referenced property survey refers to a 5’ easement (deed book 4859 page 489) along the southerly lot line of the Project Area, for the purpose of access to the first floor from the rear of the store at 406 Main Street. Additionally, the survey refers a 12’ easement (deed book 1800 page 171) of which 6’ was eliminated (deed book 2120 page 316) along the northerly lot line of the Project Area, for the purpose of permitting pilasters and projections from an adjacent building to remain in place but only for so long as the property remains in its present form and condition (as written in 1955). *Applicant shall clarify the purpose and status of the easements.*

**7.4 Parking Required.** The required number of parking spaces is one (1) per dwelling unit and no parking is required for non-residential uses. In total, 15 parking spaces are to be provided, to be located off-site in a municipal or public parking facility.

The Redevelopment Agreement specifies that the Metuchen Parking Authority adopted a resolution providing Applicant with 15 parking passes in the Station Place lot. Applicant will be required to purchase the passes and issue same to its residential tenants. Additionally, lease agreements will be required to include clauses such that tenants are required to park their vehicles within the Station Place lot and may not park on nearby streets or adjacent private parking lots.

With respect to non-residential parking, it is generally expected that customers will utilize the available public parking pool throughout the downtown area. *Applicant shall clarify how employee parking will be managed. It is recommended that full-time employees in particular are encouraged and/or be required to utilize the discounted employee parking passes and not be permitted to park on nearby streets.*

**7.5 Payment in Lieu of Parking (“PILOP”).** Among the location-efficient policies adopted by the Borough is the provision for a PILOP, which “allows applicants whose application for development has insufficient on-site parking to meet [its] parking requirements” and is paid to the Borough in order to facilitate acquisition, development, expansion or repair of municipal and public parking facilities and circulation-related projects. The PILOP payment is established at \$5,000 per required



parking space for all uses and \$2,500 per required parking space for any affordable housing unit. Given the 13 market-rate apartments and the two (2) affordable apartments, the PILOP fee is calculated to be \$70,000.

**7.6 Bicycle Parking.** The required number of bicycle parking is one (1) per dwelling unit. Applicant should be commended for exceeding this requirement by providing one (1) per bedroom as well as an exterior bicycle rack along the Station Place. *Applicant should provide a detail of the ceiling-mounted bicycle rack and shall clarify the location and provide a detail of the exterior bicycle rack. It is recommended that an inverted-U bicycle rack be provided within the “furnishing zone” within the Station Place public right-of-way, oriented parallel with and located 18 to 30 inches away from the curb, and located a minimum of 24 inches from other objects.*

**7.7 Public Sidewalk.** The plans depict a street tree and a bike rack to be provided within the Station Place public right-of-way. *Applicant shall clarify if the public sidewalk will be replaced. It is recommended that the public sidewalk be replaced with decorative brick bands, and in locations where the public sidewalk extends beyond the public right-of-way up to the building face on private property, a public access easement be provided.*

**7.8 Concrete Walkway.** The plans depict a six-foot-wide concrete walkway to be provided (on the right side of the building as viewed from Station Place) to provide access to a meter/sprinkler room, office common area and to the Main Street commercial space. It is noted that meters are provided on the side wall, which will protrude into the walkway. *Applicant shall clarify the horizontal clearances with respect to the meters. It is recommended that an alcove be provided for the meters, such that they would no longer protrude into the concrete walkway, and bollards be provided along the concrete walkway and adjacent parking area.*

**7.9 Asphalt Alleyway.** The plans depict the existing five-foot-wide asphalt alleyway (on the left side of the building as viewed from Station Place) to be resurfaced. *Applicant shall clarify which portions of the asphalt alleyway will be accessible (for building and/or pedestrian users) and which portions will be closed altogether. It is recommended that open areas be replaced with a concrete walkway and gates be provided to demarcate any closed areas.*

**7.10 Solid Waste & Recycling.** The plans are not clear as to how users of the building will access the solid waste and recycling receptacles. *Applicant shall clarify if interior doors and/or gates will be provided for user access, how collection/removal will be handled, and provide details of the proposed fence/gates and lighting. It is recommended that the fence/gates have the similar colors, finishes and details consistent with the design of the building.*

**7.11 Landscaping.** The plans are not clear as to what landscaping, other than the proposed street tree within the Station Place right-of-way, is proposed. This office offers the following:

- Details of the proposed street tree should be provided;



- In addition to bollards indicated above, planters and other landscape features should be provided along the public sidewalk and concrete walkways wherever possible;
- A green screen should be provided to screen the meters from view; vines or other climbing plants may also be considered along the side walls closer to Station Place; and,
- Final landscaping design should be subject to the review and approval of this office with input from the Shade Tree Commission.

**7.12 Lighting.** The plans depict a series of wall-mounted light fixtures to be provided along the perimeter of the building; however, no details have been provided. This office offers the following:

- Details of the proposed light fixtures should be provided;
- Additional pedestrian-scale lighting should be considered along the concrete walkways;
- Additional lighting should be considered within individual balconies;
- Fixtures shall be LED, full cut-off and shall not exceed a color temperature of 3,300K; and,
- Final lighting should be subject to the review and approval of this office.

**7.13 Mechanical Equipment.** The plans indicate that each apartment will be provided with a Magic-Pak. *Applicant shall clarify how the non-residential uses will be heated and cooled, and if there will be any other ground or roof-mounted mechanical equipment (including generators and transformers).*

**7.14 Stormwater Management.** The Redevelopment Plan specifically requires that stormwater be managed in order to protect ground surfaces and prevent ponding, icing and tripping hazards within the alleyway. The plans depict a 6" diameter pipe collecting roof runoff to discharge through a curb penetration within Main Street; however, such would not be possible within a 6" curb. Additionally, it is not clear if Middlesex County would permit such a curb penetration or even a direct connection into the stormwater sewer pipe. *Applicant shall clarify if coordination with Middlesex County has occurred; if not, it is recommended that Applicant prepare and present an alternative plan at the time of the hearing in the case that a connection to Main Street is not feasible.*

**7.15 Building Design.** The proposed building preserves the articulated front façade and provides an addition similar in design to the nearby 3-story building on Station Place. Applicant has worked with the Borough to ensure that the proposed building does not compete with the nearby historic buildings and generally complements adjacent buildings in the downtown area. This office offers the following recommendations:

- The ground floor along Station Place appears to be squat; additional height (e.g., six (6) to 12 inches) may be considered, provided that the overall building height remains in compliance;
- The third-floor columns and cornice along Main Street may not be compatible with the existing front façade (conflicting architectural styles); a simplified design treatment similar to the existing parapet may be more appropriate;
- The fourth-floor parapet should be further articulated to be more compatible with the detail, depth and shadow of the existing parapet and nearby historic buildings;





- The brick material should extend further along the side walls up to the step-back portion of the fourth floor; the remaining portion should utilize horizontal bands and/or a two-tone material/color scheme so as to de-emphasize the appearance of the fourth floor;
- The side-entry door providing access to the office common area should be provided with a double-door or simple storefront system, with an awning or canopy above;
- Fenestration (including recessed balconies) should be provided with traditional header and sill details; and may be beige in color to match the existing parapet; fenestration should have consistent head heights on each floor and be vertically aligned on all floors; and,
- Final building design should be subject to the review and approval of this office.

**7.16 Sustainable Design.** In recognition of comments raised by Borough Council and the public during the adoption of the Redevelopment Plan, Applicant is encouraged to reduce the Project's carbon footprint and eliminate as many negative environmental impacts as possible, by considering roof-mounted solar panels and/or a green roof, low VOC paints and finishes, low Formaldehyde content materials, direct ventilation, highly-rated MERV filters, electric (as opposed to natural gas) and ENERGY STAR rated appliances, programmable and ENERGY STAR rated interior light fixtures, low-flow water fixtures, and high-efficiency toilets.

This office defers to the Affordable Housing Planner regarding affordable housing obligations, and to the Board Engineer regarding grading, drainage, access, and utilities.

This office reserves the opportunity for further review and comment in response to any testimony and exhibits presented at the hearing. Please feel free to contact me should there be any questions regarding the above.

Sincerely,

Chris S. Cosenza, AICP, PP, LEED AP

**LRK**

- pc: Eric H. Berger, Esq., Applicant (via email)  
Mark Marcille, RA, Applicant's Architect (via email)  
Patricia Kaulfers, Zoning Official (via email)  
Robert Renaud, Board Attorney (via email)  
Robert M. Mannix III, PE, PP, CME, Board Engineer (via email)  
Jim Constantine, PP, Borough Planner (via email)

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## **Appendix**

The relevant documents submitted by Applicant are listed below:

1. Application for Development, last dated January 22, 2020 originally received and deemed complete by the Office of Planning & Zoning on December 18, 2020 and January 15, 2021, respectively, and consisting of six (6) pages;
2. Narrative, undated and consisting of one (1) page;
3. Major Site Plan Checklist, December 15, 2020 and consisting of eight (8) pages;
4. Additional documentation including: a) Aerial - Main Street; b) Aerial - Station Place; c) Armstrong HVAC; d) California Closet design; e) Disclosure by Partnership; f) Easements; g) Escrow Agreement; h) Freehold Soil Conservation District Application; i) Freehold Soil Conservation District Exemption Letter; j) Parking Authority resolution; k) Photograph depicting building heights; l) Proof of Payment of Taxes; m) Redevelopment Agreement; n) Redevelopment Plan; o) W-9 Form; p) Zoning Permit;
5. Plans entitled "Phoenix 410 Main Street LLC; 410 Main Street; Metuchen, NJ 08840", prepared by Marcille Architecture, under seal of Mark P. Marcille, NJRA License No. 16478, dated December 14, 2020 and consisting of eight (8) sheets (S-1 through S-3, A-1 through A-5); and,
6. Plan entitled "Phoenix 410 Main Street LLC; 410 Main Street; Metuchen, NJ 08840", prepared by Marcille Architecture, under seal of Mark P. Marcille, NJRA License No. 16478, dated December 14, 2020 and consisting of one (1) sheet (S-4).