

**PLANNING BOARD REPORT TO COUNCIL DATED SEPTEMBER 29, 2023 ON
LACKAWANNA PLAZA REDEVELOPMENT PLAN/AUGUST 2023
CONSISTENCY WITH MONTCLAIR UNIFIED LAND USE + CIRCULATION ELEMENT (“MASTER PLAN”)**

When the Planning Board (the “Board”) reviewed the October 2022 iteration of the *Lackawanna Plaza Redevelopment Plan*, the Board determined that the Plan was substantially inconsistent with the Master Plan. The Board memorialized its position, and conveyed a set of 12 “Findings and Recommendations,” in a Resolution adopted by the Board on January 23, 2023.

The Board now has reviewed the *Lackawanna Plaza Redevelopment Plan/August 2023* (the “Revised Plan”). The process by which the Revised Plan was conveyed to the Board was problematic for several reasons, most importantly including that the Board was not given adequate information or resources to understand the scope and scale of the Revised Plan. The Board is grateful to the Town Planner for attempting to seek answers to the Board’s question, but the team that prepared the Revised Plan rebuffed even the Town Planner’s requests for additional information.

Based on the information provided, it is clear to the Board, and the majority of the Board concluded at its meeting on September 18, 2023, that the Revised Plan, although improved in several respects, remains **substantially inconsistent with the Master Plan**. As before:

1. The size of the development is out of character with the neighborhood.
2. The Board is skeptical that the parking needs generated by the project can be fulfilled on-site.
3. The Board was not convinced that the traffic generated by the project could be mitigated without degradation in the quality of life, health and safety of the surrounding community.
4. The proposed supermarket size, location, visibility and access are problematic.
5. The size and quality of the open space could not be confirmed.

Because the Revised Plan, in the Board’s view, did not satisfactorily address most of the Board’s 12 Findings and Recommendations the Board conveyed in its January 2023 report, the following “*Report to the Montclair Town Council*” repeats those 12 Findings and Recommendations, and addresses in *blue italics* how, in the Board’s view, the Revised Plan should be further changed to respond to the Board’s recommendations.

The *Report to the Montclair Town Council* was prepared in response to the Council’s request for Board review and is presented in the format and timeframe required under 2013 New Jersey Revised Statutes, Title 40A - MUNICIPALITIES AND COUNTIES, Section 40A:12A-7 - Adoption of redevelopment plan.

PART A – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDING 1 – HEIGHT: The buildings as proposed in the Redevelopment Plan significantly exceed Master Plan height restrictions and are out of scale, character and scope with the surrounding neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Current Zoning Heights: In the view of the Board, for the redevelopment plan to conform with the Master Plan's guidance, and to better align this Redevelopment Plan with the existing development along Glenridge and Bloomfield Avenues, the Board recommends that the Redevelopment Plan be amended to require building heights that conform more closely to current zoning. The Board believes the efforts made to set back and step back the development back from the street reduces the impact of building height on the surrounding neighborhood in a positive way and is in keeping with the Master Plan's spirit and letter, but do not go far enough. (For this recommendation, the Board considers setbacks as the distance of a building façade from the sidewalk; stepbacks are the portions of a building above certain heights which are further pushed-in towards the center of the property, as a wedding cake has smaller layers as the height increases.) To keep with the Master Plan's goals, maximum heights should be limited to locations furthest from the street frontage.

- **Glenridge Avenue:** Where building heights and the Master Plan are most in conflict is along the Glenridge Avenue street frontage. The Master Plan categorizes Glenridge Avenue as part of the **C-3 Zone**, which restricts building heights to a maximum 37 feet. To be consistent with the Master Plan, the Board recommends that the new proposed buildings with Glenridge Avenue frontages conform to this 37-foot height restriction for the first 100 feet of depth from Glenridge Avenue. After that first 100 feet of depth, heights may then increase with appropriate setbacks and stepbacks. If the Council follows this recommendation, the height adjustment would harmonize the full length of Glenridge Avenue with a maximum 37 foot building height.
- **Bloomfield Avenue:** The Master Plan categorizes Bloomfield Avenue as part of the **C-1 Zone**, which restricts building heights to a maximum 67 feet. (We note that public discussion of the Bloomfield Avenue-frontage buildings in the Redevelopment Plan has focused on the number of stories the proposed buildings would include, rather than their actual height, but it is the height that matters.) To be consistent with the Master Plan, the Board recommends that proposed buildings with Bloomfield Avenue frontage should conform to the C-1 Zone height restrictions. Unlike the Glenridge Avenue frontage, as to which the Planning Board recommends a 100 foot buffer zone from the street before heights may exceed the current Master Plan maximums, the Board is not providing a specific recommendation as to how far back from Bloomfield Avenue the 67-foot maximum should be maintained before the proposed buildings may exceed that current maximum, if accompanied by appropriate setbacks and stepbacks.

Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation? MINIMALLY ADDRESSED

*Glenridge Avenue – NO. Building heights were not reduced to 37 feet on Glenridge Avenue.
Bloomfield Avenue – PARTIAL RESPONSE. Only one of the three buildings with frontage on Bloomfield Avenue was scaled down. Building E was reduced from 70 to 60 feet.*

Comment - To help visualize building heights, see Table 1 for the building heights of other redevelopment projects in Montclair, and Table 2 for the building heights of buildings in the immediate area of the Lackawanna Plaza. Table 3 illustrates the height comparison from the original October 2022 and revised August 2023 Redevelopment Plans. The Revised Plan reduced the height of two of the five buildings. (Note that, although discussion of the Revised Plan, like discussion of the prior plan, frequently speaks of the number of "stories" in each building, the Board suggests that discussion should be focused instead on the height stated in feet.)

It is undeniable that the scale of the Lackawanna Plaza development is out of keeping with its immediate

neighbors. It thus is inconsistent with a goal of the Master Plan which is “...(to) encourage public realm and private development that maintains the scale and character inherent in the diverse and historic neighborhoods of the Township.” (See Master Plan page 6, 1.4 4.) The Master Plan also states on page 109: “...Montclair Center is defined by a mix of buildings that generally range in height from one to four stories. ... In fact, Montclair Center was the first locally designated historic district in the Township, making preservation of the existing character and scale of the area an important objective.” The Master Plan also notes that even “...[t]he current six-story zoning does not reflect the existing character of the district and is not consistent with the vision of the community.” The Revised Plan represents an even more marked departure from the character of the rest of the downtown area, and the majority of the Board believes that the Master Plan does not support this departure.

Table 1: Building Heights of Other Redevelopment Projects

Project	Stories	Height
Lackawanna Building A	6	87 - 89.5
Lackawanna Building B	5-6	76 - 86
Lackawanna Building C	5	75 - 76
Lackawanna Building D	5	67
Lackawanna Building E	5	60
The MC Residences	4	52
The MC Hotel	8	115
Valley & Bloom	6	75
65 Church Street	5	58
The Siena	7	80
1 Seymour Street	7	80
2 South Willow	7	81
The Vestry	5	63.5
Montclarion 2	6	64

Table 2: Building heights of properties in the immediate area of Lackawanna Plaza (info developed from Google Earth tools)

Building	Stories	Approximate Height
Matthew Carter Homes	3	35
55 Grove St. (Apartment at the corner of Grove and Glenridge Ave)	3	44
Union Gardens	4	40
Glen Willow Lofts	5	60
Bankers Building	3	38
Verizon Building	3	49
Greek Taverna	3	43
Manhattan Storage	4	51
Pig and Prince	2	41
One Greenwood	2	41
Montclair Mews	3	35

Table 3: Comparison of Building Heights (in feet) October 2022 Plan (pg. 27) versus August 2023 Plan (pg. 33)

Building A	LP Plan October 2022	LP Plan August 2023	Status
Bloomfield Ave	88.5	88.5	No change
Lackawanna	87	87	No change
Grove St	89.5	89.5	No change
Driveway	N/A	87	No change

Building B	LP Plan October 2022	LP Plan August 2023	Status
Glenridge Ave	87	87	No change
Grove St	86	86	No change
Driveway	N/A	87	No change

Building C	LP Plan October 2022	LP Plan August 2023	Status
Bloomfield Ave	75	75	No change
Grove St	75	N/A	N/A
Main Plaza	N/A	75	N/A

Building D	LP Plan October 2022	LP Plan August 2023	Status
Glenridge Ave	77	67	Minus 10 ft
Grove St	75	67	Minus 8 ft
Toney's Brook	N/A	67	N/A
Montclair Mews	N/A	67	N/A

Building E	LP Plan October 2022	LP Plan August 2023	Status
Bloomfield Ave	70	60	Minus 10
Grove St	75	60	Minus 15
Montclair Mews	74	60	Minus 14

Mechanical Equipment/Water Towers: The current Redevelopment Plan potentially allows mechanical equipment, water towers, etc., to increase building heights further and to allow these unattractive features to be visible from multiple angles. The Planning Board recommends adding to the Redevelopment Plan requirements that the developer must minimize the visual impact of upper stories, including steps to reduce the visibility of mechanical equipment, water towers, and similar features. Ideally, these unattractive rooftop features should not be visible at all from sidewalks of adjoining streets. Further, the Planning Board recommends that the Council take into account the added height of these features when setting maximum heights for the proposed buildings overall.

Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation? YES

Rooftop mechanical height/coverage requirements have been made more restrictive.

Shadows: Although Redevelopment Plan consultants provided some guidance with respect to sightlines, to demonstrate what a passerby would see from certain vantage points once the proposed buildings are built, no information has been provided to determine whether these new buildings, when constructed, would leave current residents in shadows where presently their properties are exposed to the sun. The Planning Board recommends that the Council require the consultants to study the impact of shadows on current residents. If this study demonstrates that the shadow impact of the new buildings would be substantial, the Council should consider requiring further changes to the building design, including enhanced setbacks and stepbacks, and potentially reduced building heights, to lessen this impact.

Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation? YES

A satisfactory Solar Study showing the shadow effect of the proposed buildings was provided.

FINDING 2 - BULK: The proposed buildings are excessively large for the area and threaten to overwhelm the surrounding low-rise neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATION:

If the Council adopts the Board's recommendations with regard to building height, these changes likely would address its related concerns with respect to bulk.

Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation? NO

As discussed above with respect to Finding 1, the majority of the Board believes that the changes made to building height are not sufficient to prevent the project from overwhelming the surrounding low-rise neighborhood.

FINDING 3 - DENSITY: The Redevelopment Plan as currently drafted conforms to the Master Plan's C1 zoning density limit of 55 units per acre. Density should be reevaluated, however, to consider the height and bulk adjustments recommended by the Board.

RECOMMENDATION:

If the Council adopts the Board's recommendations with regard to building heights, this likely would impact the number of residential units that the site can accommodate because the calculation of office, retail, and residential space is a function of building form. Considering the required street level uses (active retail stores, driveways, lobbies, park entrance, etc.) and minimum office space stated in the Redevelopment Plan, density can only be determined after height and bulk concerns are resolved.

The number of residential units must include a balanced mix of studio, one, two and three bedroom homes to avoid packing the project with smaller units not desired by the community.

Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation? UNCLEAR

The Revised Plan states (presumably because of the reduction in height of some buildings) that the number of residential units would be 300, down from 375. The Revised Plan is silent as to the mix of residential units that will be included. Further, as will be discussed elsewhere in this report, it is difficult to imagine how the site can be developed to include sufficient parking for 300 residential units, even by themselves, without respect to the supermarket, other retail, restaurant, and office uses planned for the site, without significant variances from the requirements of current law.

FINDING 4 - PARKING AND TRAFFIC IMPACTS: During its Redevelopment Plan review, the Board determined that existing Traffic and Parking analysis did not adequately address the Board's concerns about the possible impact on traffic and circulation in the area of Lackawanna Plaza. The traffic study, provided to the Board by the developer's engineer, used 2017 traffic figures as the basis of comparison with March 2022

figures to show a decrease in traffic. The Board is concerned that the March 2022 figures still reflect pandemic-impact driving patterns and that the 2017 figures do not adequately account for recent development both in Montclair and surrounding communities served by the Bloomfield Avenue corridor. Additionally, during the Board's Redevelopment Plan review, the Board determined that existing Traffic and Parking studies are out of date and/or based on out-of-date standards. The assumptions built into the proposed "shared parking" arrangements about, for example, the percentage of apartment dwellers who will drive their cars away from their homes during all weekday business hours are based on a document posted to a New Jersey state website more than 20 years ago and which itself was based on an Australian study conducted at an unknown earlier date. The Planning Board strongly suspects that the car usage assumptions underlying these documents are not in keeping with present work and transportation patterns.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

New Studies Required: Given the high cost of constructing deck parking spaces, and a desire to maximize the amenities of the Lackawanna Plaza development, the Board suggests gathering as much usable data as possible to ensure that we insist on neither too many nor too few parking spots at the site and that an emphasis be placed on collecting local actual use data from all the recent developments in and around the town.

The shared parking assumptions must be reexamined to determine COVID's impact on commuting habits. It should be possible for parking consultants to obtain actual, present-day data from local properties like Valley & Bloom, the Siena, and Seymour St., about the percentage of cars that vacate their spots during each weekday's business hours. Specific work-from-home patterns (such as 3 days in office) which contribute to lower office populations on Fridays and Mondays mean we should not rely solely on single day of the week studies. Without this current data, the Council cannot make reasonable assumptions about the number of parking spaces reserved for residents' evening and weekend needs that may be vacant for use by supermarket customers or patrons of other commercial tenants. Because the minimum office space requirement was intended to support the function of shared parking, it too must be reevaluated (and perhaps not be a requirement of the Redevelopment Plan, but rather a suggestion).

The Board believes that insufficient consideration has been given to where the proposed supermarket will be placed, how customers of the supermarket will enter and exit the site, and whether what are perceived as inconveniences by supermarket patrons will influence the long-term viability of the supermarket. We recommend that the Council receive independent guidance with respect to this concern from appropriate experts before approving the Redevelopment Plan.

Breakpoints: The Redevelopment Plan must establish traffic impact breakpoints to ensure that the proposed Redevelopment Plan does not substantially impede traffic flow on the critical Bloomfield Avenue traffic corridor or overburden the intersections at Bloomfield Avenue/Grove Street/Elm Street and Bloomfield Avenue/Greenwood Avenue/Gates Avenue. The Master Plan seeks to ensure adequate circulation and traffic flow. If service degrades to Level E or worse, we believe the subsequent negative circulation impacts will outweigh the benefits of redevelopment.

Local streets: The Redevelopment Plan must establish that local residential streets will not become alternative traffic conduits to avoid overburdened main traffic roadways. Truck traffic, in particular, must be critically viewed.

Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation? NO

Parking and Traffic Studies were provided by Level G and Bright View Engineering, respectively.

***Parking:** the parking analysis assumes that parking can be shared between residents and commercial ventures, i.e., when a resident is at work that spot can be used by an office worker; when the resident returns home, the office worker will have vacated that spot. Parking requirements are adjusted by this shared parking*

*factor. Given the stated occupancy of the site, with the use of the shared parking adjustment the **required parking is estimated to be: 768 – 840 spots**, depending on the size of the supermarket. (Some of this will be offset under current law with credits for EV stations.) As we consider this project, we will be relying heavily on the accuracy of the shared parking adjustment, and we note that the Township lacks sufficient experience or comparators in the post-pandemic era to predict with confidence the extent to which parking spaces allocated for residential tenants will be vacant during traditional weekday work hours. Without generous shared parking adjustments, and even if the supermarket is smaller than expected at 30,000 square feet, the site would need 930 spaces. If the supermarket is 50,000 square feet, the site would need 1,010 spaces. By way of comparison, the recently constructed Midtown Parking Deck has 310 spaces. Even with a shared parking adjustment, therefore, the Revised Plan either would require building the equivalent of two-and-a-half Midtown Parking Decks, or the granting of very substantial variances. The former seems impossible, and the latter seems undesirable.*

The Board notes, too, that the Bright View Engineering study concluded—as the Board expected—that the Revised Plan, if constructed, would substantially increase both the total volume of traffic on Elm/Grove Streets and the number of cars seeking to make left turns in all directions at the intersection of Bloomfield Avenue and Elm/Grove. To address this issue, Bright View Engineering recommended removing all on-street parking on Grove Street from Bloomfield Avenue to Walnut Street and on Elm Street from Bloomfield Avenue to Union Street. Removal of these spots would have an adverse impact on Grove and Elm Street residents and businesses and also on residents and businesses on abutting residential side streets, where these cars likely will park instead. The Board is concerned that this proposed change has not been widely publicized to the affected residents and businesses.

FINDING 5 – HOUSING PLAN: The number of affordable and workforce housing units, 20% and 10% respectively, conforms with Master Plan Requirements.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Redevelopment Plan should affirmatively state that affordable and workforce housing preference must be given to Montclair residents.

The Redevelopment Plan should include language ensuring that affordable housing and workforce tenants will not be charged additional fees for parking and amenities.

Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation? YES

FINDING 6 – CONSERVATION PLAN/INFRASTRUCTURE: The Redevelopment Plan appears consistent with the Conservation Plan element of the Master Plan with respect to impervious surfaces, open space, LEED requirements, and transportation. Importantly, however, the Redevelopment Plan does not provide sufficient data to determine whether what it proposes with respect to utility use and stormwater management actually can succeed. Further information is required to determine Master Plan consistency with respect to Traffic, Fiscal Impact, Utility Impact, and Stormwater Management. The Planning Board strongly recommends that the Council obtain impact studies with respect to utility usage and stormwater management prior to approving the Redevelopment Plan. The Council can only consider whether the benefits outweigh the Redevelopment Plan's impacts if it understands whether the proposed redevelopment will have harmful effects on the Township's environment and infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Stormwater/Drainage/etc.: The Redevelopment Plan includes a requirement that the existing culverts that traverse the property be inspected and expanded and/or reinforced, if necessary, to ensure adequate flows. In

addition, the project will require the design of new stormwater facilities that will alleviate stormwater from the property and reduce potential flooding. The Planning Board highly recommends that the Council obtain engineering reports, including the Redevelopment Plan impact on drainage and culverts, prior to Redevelopment Plan approval to ensure that there will be unimpeded drainage flow through the site.

Toney's Brook: The extent to which Toney's Brook impacts the site may significantly hinder stormwater management, cause significant flooding on the site and surrounding area, and/or limit the scale and scope of buildings that the site can support. This potential impact needs to be addressed in an engineering study.

Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation? YES

FINDING 7 – FORM AND CHARACTER: The Master Plan states as a Township Goal “Encourage public realm and private development that maintains the scale and character inherent in the diverse and historic neighborhoods of the Township.” The buildings as proposed in the Redevelopment Plan are out of scale and scope with respect to the surrounding area. The buildings not only impact, but change the character of the neighborhood, turning a traditionally low-rise commercial district into a major metropolitan center.

It is notable that the Redevelopment Plan consultants stated to the Planning Board that this development would create a “new neighborhood.” Indeed, the plan design appears to cut out and form a barrier to the adjacent neighborhoods; this is not limited to just the outsized scale and mass of the proposed structures. The surrounding neighborhoods are low to moderate income. The Master Plan's goal of a diverse range of housing options is addressed via the projects incorporation of 20% affordable and 10% workforce housing. This alone will not ensure the continued sustainability of the current economic diversity of the neighborhood; conforming to the Master Plan will require continued vigorous efforts to protect the affordable housing options in the neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATION:

Reducing the height and bulk, as recommended in this report's Findings, will help integrate the project into the surrounding residential neighborhoods and commercial center. On page 68 of the Master Plan, Community Identified Issue 8 states that, “[g]rowth in Montclair Center could be beneficial, but this must be done without adversely affecting the characteristics of place that are important to the community.”

The historic train station is inherently connected and is, in fact, the defining feature of the Bloomfield Avenue Downtown Historic District. The proposed Redevelopment Plan must respect that new construction should integrate, highlight, and complement existing character, not overwhelm its storied history to the point that the site becomes unrecognizable.

Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation? NO.

FINDING 8 - OPEN SPACE: Twenty Percent (20%) open space may not be an adequate tradeoff for increased height, bulk, and density.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Master Plan contemplates height, bulk, and density credits where a developer provides public benefits. In exchange for building heights far in excess of current Zoning restrictions, additional public space should be required in the Redevelopment Plan. Proposed heights on two of the buildings, even before considering rooftop equipment, exceed zoning restrictions by nearly 20 feet.

The Redevelopment Plan purportedly contains 20% open space, but the Plan does not expressly state how that percentage is determined. The Plan, for example, should not credit the open space afforded by the following elements:

1. **The Arts Park** between Grove Street and Buildings D and E is apparently the result of an Essex County easement. The developer should not receive credit for providing open space when the developer literally has no choice but to leave particular space “open.” Further, the Council should obtain confirmation from Essex County that there are no restrictions to the development as described in the Redevelopment Plan.
2. **The Station Plaza** displays reclaimed elements of the historic train station that may be relocated but are required by the Redevelopment Plan to be placed on the site. This Station Plaza would, in effect, receive credit for providing unencumbered open space, when in reality, this Plaza fulfills the developer’s separate obligation to protect historic resources. The developer should not receive two forms of credit for the same benefit.
3. **The horseshoe driveway/parking area** in the Main Plaza compromises the open plaza and reduces its accessibility for public use. Though the driveway does not provide access to any parking garage, visitors may mistake this driveway for a Bloomfield Avenue entrance to the supermarket, potentially generating a steady traffic flow mistakenly entering and then exiting the horseshoe driveway.

Full-time Public Space: All public space in the Redevelopment Plan shall be considered full-time public space. The council should establish clear guidelines allowing for public usage and ensure rules and regulations are liberally interpreted in favor of public access.

Recreational/Playground Area: Open space between Buildings D and E should incorporate recreational area, including a playground, for public use.

Connection to Crane Park: Page 75 of Master Plan states that "Crane Park, located at the corner of Glenridge Avenue and Lackawanna Plaza, provides an attractive gathering space and focal point for this area." The Redevelopment Plan should include green space that connects Crane Park to the historic railway station and capitalize on the opportunity to encourage pedestrian activity between Bloomfield Avenue and Glenridge Avenue.

Community Center: The former supermarket and mall acted as an indoor community center for people in the neighborhood. Consideration should be given to the creation of indoor community space as a public benefit.

Public Restroom: A public restroom should be provided in the public open space area with clear and enforceable hours of operation.

Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation? NO.

The Revised Plan now provides for twenty percent (20%) open space, but the calculation to document this feature still has not been provided so the placement and quality of this open space is unknown. Even if the calculation is accurate, 20% itself may not be an adequate tradeoff for increased height, bulk and density of the project. This is especially true if the designated “open space” is not usable by the public. As an example, if the “open space” will be used as a loading zone, or otherwise becomes an amenity for the convenience of the developer and for tenants of Lackawanna Plaza only, it is not really “open.” The quality of the open space becomes a key consideration in making the determination of the adequacy of the tradeoff in question.

Comment - *A question for consideration is: when town, county and utility easements exist that prohibit the developer from building over such easements, should the developer get full credit for this open space since it has to remain undeveloped for access purposes.*

FINDING 9 - HISTORIC PRESERVATION: The Redevelopment Plan does not provide sufficient protection for Historic Resources that have defined the Lackawanna Plaza for over a century. Historic Resource protections contemplated by the Redevelopment Plan fail to conform with the Master Plan. The Planning Board urges the Council to carefully consider the recommendations in the report it receives from the Historic Preservation Commission. The Planning Board makes the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Plan contemplates the demolition of historic elements and view shed of a site that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the NJ Register of Historic sites, and is a locally designated landmark. The Planning Board recommends that the Council obtain a legal opinion as to whether an application has to be filed with the NJ Historic Preservation Office (“SHPO”) to determine if a Redevelopment Plan may allow for the demolition of a property or part of a property on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places without state authorization.

Historic elements SHALL be protected: The Redevelopment Plan must state that historic elements SHALL be preserved, NOT that historic elements SHOULD be preserved.

Clause V.A.1: Clause V.A.1 appears to allow the developer leeway to demolish elements not specified in the Redevelopment Plan if deemed dilapidated, deteriorated, etc. Any such demo proposed for historic resources must require Historic Preservation Commission oversight.

Stanchions: The Redevelopment Plan proposes moving several stanchions but has not yet defined which stanchions will be moved and for what purpose. All reasonable efforts must be made to keep stanchions in their original location to avoid losing the context of the historical sheds that defined the track waiting areas.

Building A: Renderings of Building A seem to show that it dwarfs the train station and appears to require the demolition of the Head of the Tracks structure, an original historical element of the waiting room that must be protected by the Redevelopment Plan. Building A also appears to directly abut the northern front of the Historic Waiting Area. This is problematic for at least two reasons – waiting room sightlines should remain unobstructed on all sides, and such construction threatens to damage a key historic resource.

The Redevelopment Plan states that the Historic Waiting Area will act as a lobby for Building A. The owner of Pineapple Express believes their business will go on unimpeded by construction, has the business been informed of this proposed use?

The use as an office lobby is inappropriate as it completely subordinates the historic resource, the defining structure of the site, to what appears to be generic new construction. The historic resource should be a centerpiece of this design, not swallowed whole and utterly diminished by this project.

The Building A section that abuts the Historic Waiting Room also appears to be a completely utilitarian parking garage, and no efforts have been made to diminish Building A’s impact on the historic resource. The Planning Board’s view is that the design must be reconsidered to maintain consistency with the historic preservation element of the Master Plan.

***Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation?** The Historic Preservation Commission will issue a separate report to the Council on this issue.*

FINDING 10 – SUPERMARKET: Long-term viability of a supermarket is paramount to the success of the Redevelopment Plan. The Redevelopment Plan does not provide sufficient information to determine the long-term viability of a supermarket. (Note, the Planning Board received Certification from BDP Holding’s attorney that there is an executed lease between BDP and a supermarket which the Council may wish to review.)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Definition: For purposes of this Redevelopment Plan, we assume that by “State-of-the-Art Supermarket,” the Council intended to ensure construction of a large, self-service retail establishment selling a wide variety of food products, including fresh meats, fresh produce, and name brand prepackaged items, as well as other convenience and household goods. We note, however, that the Redevelopment Plan does not actually define what kind of market the Council expects to be built; such a definition should be added to the Redevelopment

Plan. During Planning Board deliberations, we noted the difference between a “grocery store,” which Planning Board members unanimously considered not to be sufficient for the site, and a true “supermarket.”

Viability: The site design must contribute to the viability of the supermarket, taking into account, among other considerations, visibility, ease of access, variety of offerings, and cost of parking. The Planning Board is deeply concerned that the currently contemplated location for the supermarket within the Lackawanna Plaza Redevelopment Plan could hinder or even prove fatal to its long-term viability. We believe the supermarket must not only be clearly visible from Bloomfield Avenue, but also accessible from Bloomfield Avenue. In the currently contemplated design, the supermarket is not accessible from Bloomfield Avenue and its visibility from Bloomfield Avenue is in doubt. The Council’s pending ordinance approving the 2022 Redevelopment Plan states that a lack of visibility from Bloomfield Avenue contributed to the failure of the 1980s era development. The Redevelopment Plan, in its current iteration, has not resolved that issue.

Size: The Redevelopment Plan is silent on the proposed size of the supermarket. During its review, some Planning Board members suggested a minimum of 50K s.f. others supported a range between 40K s.f. to 50 s.f. The consensus of the Planning Board is that the Redevelopment Plan should state that the supermarket size should be no less than the average size of supermarkets in New Jersey as determined by industry data.

Alternate Site: In the view of the Planning Board, the current location of the TD Bank would be preferable as the supermarket site. This location would provide superior visibility and access, as well as hybrid ground floor surface parking and the first floor of any parking deck. (Note, this property was not owned by the developer when the Planning Board reviewed the 2017 Redevelopment Plan.) Relocating the supermarket to the East lot would also provide unobstructed sightlines from a commercial street (Bloomfield Avenue) and would ensure that the store was not hidden away or partially blocked by Building C.

Parking Deck/Escalators: As currently designed, the supermarket would rely on a parking deck and escalators, rather than easy first-floor access by those who drive to the supermarket. The currently anonymous lessor of the supermarket space may well possess information about local consumers’ willingness to shop in a supermarket with these features, but no such evidence has been presented publicly. The Planning Board is concerned that a supermarket relying on a parking deck and escalators—beyond the problems that might be caused by mechanical failures—will hinder its long-term viability.

First Building Built: The Plan must affirmatively state that the supermarket will be the first building constructed and that the developer will facilitate the earliest practicable opening of the supermarket, even while other features of the Lackawanna Plaza redevelopment continue to be constructed.

Traffic Impacts: The Planning Board reiterates its belief that how traffic impacts are addressed and mitigated weighs heavily on whether this project will adversely affect the community. The Planning Board is not expressing an opinion as to the size of the supermarket and the services it should provide, but the Board notes that when the time comes to conduct a site plan review, the size and occupancy of the site will impact traffic flow and parking requirements. The Council should bear this in mind when deciding whether to include minimum/maximum square footage requirements for the supermarket.

Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation? NO.

The Master Plan on page 114 specifically notes that “...Key to the (Redevelopment) plan is balancing preservation of the historic Lackawanna train station with providing a new state-of-the-art supermarket.” The Board reiterates that although the Revised Plan (as required by the Master Plan) incorporates a supermarket, the Board has substantial concerns about the supermarket’s long-term viability if it is not appropriately placed within the overall plan, visible to passersby, with easy ingress and egress, and convenient parking appropriate to the use.

A positive revision in the Revised Plan was that a supermarket will be defined in the Plan as : “A large, self-service retail establishment selling a wide variety of food as well as other convenience and household goods which may include, but is not limited to, prepared foods for on- and off-site consumption; flowers; gifts; pharmaceutical goods; cosmetics; pet supplies; pharmacies and eating areas.”

Viability: *The developer’s planning team asserts that “The proposed supermarket will directly front on the Main Plaza with its front door and interior activity visible from Bloomfield Avenue.” The Board is concerned that this may create confusion if the public assumes that the main entrance to the supermarket is via the horseshoe drive aisles on Bloomfield Avenue. If supermarket customers drive in/out of this horseshoe, this will create additional traffic issues on Bloomfield Avenue and potentially render the Main Plaza unsafe for pedestrians. Indeed, because the horseshoe has a large drive aisle, its use as public space is likely to be diminished and unpleasant in any event; and the alleged “open space” threatens to become little more than driveway and parking lot.*

Size: *The Revised Plan will require that the supermarket range between 30,000 and 50,000 square feet in gross floor area. Some members of the Board stressed that because the new supermarket will be replacing the former Pathmark, which was about 40,000 square feet, the Revised Plan should require a supermarket not less than that size. Ultimately, the majority of the Board did not wish to express an opinion as to the minimum size of a supermarket at the site. The Board fully endorses the Revised Plan’s promise that the supermarket should have both a wide range of food items and household goods, as well as other amenities, but the Board recognizes that retail dynamics and supply chains are undergoing rapid change, meaning that how a supermarket operator may wish to deliver those services at the time this supermarket opens (and in the more distant future) may be different from, and require a different footprint, than in the past.*

Alternate Site: *The Board expressed in its prior report, and continues to believe, that the current location of the TD Bank may be preferable as the supermarket site. The response from the developer’s planning team describes this location as being ‘problematic.’ There is no perfect site for a supermarket within Lackawanna Plaza, and we believe that any “problems” posed by the TD Bank site could be addressed. Moving the supermarket to this location would also enable the architects to solve some of the issues previously noted, i.e., the inadequacy of the Main Plaza as public space, the dominance of the parking deck vs. the historic train station; the traffic issues posed by the horseshoe driveway, the lack of visibility of the supermarket, etc.*

FINDING 11 – OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE AND SAFETY: The Master Plan states that “Quality of life in quiet residential neighborhoods is an amenity that defines the character of our Township.” The Redevelopment Plan may negatively impact surrounding neighborhood quality of life and safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Heights: The construction of 5 towers ranging in height from 75 to 89 feet in a commercial zone surrounded by several residential neighborhoods will significantly impact the quality of life for neighborhood residents.

Traffic: While the Board was not provided a traffic study from the Board’s traffic engineering professional, common sense advises that the amount of traffic generated by this site will be substantial. Thus, pedestrian safety, the safety of nearby school children, the noise and air pollution, general area congestion, parking and driving spillover on neighborhood streets, and other considerations could all adversely affect the quality of life in the adjoining neighborhoods as well as neighborhoods radiating further out from the site.

Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation? NO.

The Board did not have a Traffic Study nor Parking Report when we conducted our prior review of the Redevelopment Plan presented in October 2022. We have since learned from the Traffic Study and Parking Study that the estimated amount of traffic generated by this site will be substantial. Thus, pedestrian safety, the safety of nearby school children, the noise and air pollution, general area congestion, parking and driving spillover onto neighborhood streets, truck routes, and other considerations will adversely affect the quality of life in the adjoining neighborhoods as well as neighborhoods that radiate out further from the site. These effects are contrary to the vision of the Master Plan. The Master Plan states that “Quality of life in quiet residential neighborhoods is an amenity that defines the character of our Township.” The Redevelopment Plan may negatively impact surrounding neighborhood quality of life and safety.

FINDING 12 – OVERALL ECONOMIC IMPACT: Both positive and negative impacts of the project must be studied. More information is required to determine the Redevelopment Plan’s overall economic impact and its compliance with the Master Plan’s guidance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Additional data is required to understand the benefits and/or negative effects of abandoning the current zoning for changes permitted in the Redevelopment Plan, including the impact to municipal services, schools, surrounding businesses, and other relevant economic data. Page 3 of The Master Plan states that Zoning Code modifications should be accompanied by “appropriate economic, infrastructure and other similar research to delineate the impacts of the specific code modifications under consideration in order to better inform and improve data-based decision-making concerning such modifications and their anticipated benefits.” Page 54 of the Master Plan states that “The economic impacts of new development include the costs of municipal services, educating additional schoolchildren and the cost of improving and maintaining aging infrastructure.”

This Redevelopment Plan will negate the current zoning therefore to adequately address the project’s impacts and compliance with the Master Plan, appropriate economic, infrastructure and other similar research should be undertaken by the Council.

Schools: The Master Plan warns on page 55, referencing a multifamily home study that found such developments presented minimal impact on the Montclair schools, that “[t]he Township . . . should not rely only on this analysis and should continue to revisit these statistics on a periodic basis to evaluate how changes both inside and outside the Township may impact these numbers. Larger development projects should be required to submit an economic impact analysis so that the impacts of development can be evaluated as conditions change.” Considering recent development across the Bloomfield Avenue corridor, including the Valley & Bloom, Seymour Street, the Siena, and other projects, additional impact studies with respect to schools are appropriate and warranted.

Does the Revised Plan respond to this recommendation? NO.

The Town Planner advised the Board that an “Economic Impact Report” is being drafted, but the Board did not have the benefit of that report at the time of preparing these recommendations. Without it, the Board cannot weigh (on the positive or negative side) the Revised Plan’s overall economic impact and its compliance with the Master Plan’s guidance on this topic. Additional data is required to understand the benefits and/or negative effects of abandoning the current zoning for changes permitted in the Revised Plan, including the impact to municipal services, schools, surrounding businesses, PILOT program, and other relevant economic data. Page 3 of the Master Plan states that Zoning Code modifications should be accompanied by “appropriate economic, infrastructure and other similar research to delineate the impacts of the specific code modifications under consideration in order to better inform and improve data-based decision-making concerning such modifications and their anticipated benefits.” Page 54 of the Master Plan states that “The economic impacts of new development include the costs of municipal services, educating additional schoolchildren and the cost of improving and maintaining aging infrastructure.”

PART B - OTHER COMMENTS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Short-Term Rentals clarifications: *ADDRESSED*

The Planning Board recognizes the value that having a limited number of short-term rentals may provide. The Redevelopment Plan, however, is silent about certain aspects of the proposal for short-term rentals that we think could benefit from greater clarity. Specifically, is it the Council’s intention that these units operate like an extended-stay hotel or an Airbnb? Is it the Council’s intention to require certain amenities for short-term tenants (*i.e.*, the use of “shall” with respect to amenities on page 21 of the Redevelopment Plan)? Does the Council see the inequity in allowing an Airbnb in a corporate venture but prohibiting small property owners from this use of their homes as our ordinances currently?

2. Bicycles: [ADDRESSED](#)

The Redevelopment Plan should designate abundant, secure parking areas for bicycles, make efforts to maximize available rack space, and provide protected bike lanes.

- a. **Bicycle Parking for Tenants:** The Plan should include more bicycle parking for tenants. The requirement of 1 bicycle parking space for every 10 units is not enough and should be increased. There should be a minimum ratio of bicycle parking for the office use (p. 29).
- b. **Bicycle Parking for Service Workers:** Among the largest users of bikes in Montclair are service workers at our shops and restaurants. Accordingly, bike parking should be strategically located near high traffic areas that are convenient to these establishments in the Plaza.
- c. **Essex-Hudson Greenway:** Not only will additional bicycle racks benefit Redevelopment Plan residents, but approval of the Essex-Hudson Greenway will generate new bicycle traffic to the downtown. Additional bicycle racks, especially in the open space areas, will provide parking for a potential influx of patrons to our local businesses.
- d. **Glenridge Avenue Bike Lane:** Clarify that the bike lane along Glenridge Ave shall be a protected bike lane (possibly adding a reference to a definition of protected bike lane). The Plan should require the installation of removable bollards to prevent drivers from parking in the bike lane and protect cyclists.
- e. **Additional non-car access:** The Master Plan repeatedly calls for increasing access to our major transit stops and community resources such as the downtown business district, by those who seek to travel by foot or bike. Accommodations should be made to provide protected bicycle parking to those who take the bus at Lackawanna Plaza. We should also build protected bike lanes on Grove Street, and Lackawanna Plaza to ensure individuals have a safe route to their transit station. All streetscape changes should be in compliance with the Township's adopted SAFE Streets plan.
- f. **Bike Lane to Bay Street:** Consideration should be given to ensuring the bike lanes as built will easily incorporate into a broader network of micro mobility corridors.

Transit Access: [ADDRESSED](#)

The Redevelopment plan's lack of serious consideration of the needs, and desires of the users of the bus stop on the plaza is disappointing and it should be amended.

The redevelopment plan should require the bus stop be refurbished and include lighting, protection from the elements, and a heating mechanism for use in the winter.

4. Master Plan, page 3, "Big Ideas";

a. "Direct future growth and development to transit-oriented, mixed-use nodes within the Township". In the 8 years since this Master Plan was finalized, these four large projects have been completed Valley and Bloom (2016), Montclarion II (2017), The Vestry (2020), Seymour Street (2021), and Baldwin Street Glen Ridge (2021) adding a total of **658** units to the Bay Street transit node. Additional development in the area, approved but not yet completed, are 10 Elm St., Roseaire on Glenridge Ave., 6 Gates Avenue, Diva Lounge building, South Willow/Glenridge Ave. Have we reached the saturation point with respect to large scale development in the Bay Street Station area? Should any future growth and development be directed to the other 5 train stations in town? These questions need to be addressed.

COMMENT - The Master Plan is essentially from 2015. An updated Master Plan that reflects both all the development that has taken place since 2015 and the current vision of the community is needed.

b. "Maximize mobility assets to make it easier for residents and visitors to walk, bike, park, and ride transit throughout the Township." The Plan does seem to enable pedestrians to easily walk through all areas of the site. We have no information yet that supports ease of parking or even whether there will be adequate parking on-site. The potential exists for overflow parking to impact the neighboring streets. We don't see any enhancements to public transport contemplated. A bike lane on Glenridge Avenue that doesn't currently connect to any other lanes seems money not well spent. In addition, the placement of this bike lane could be at the most trafficked part of the plan – at the

convergence of where trucks will be entering the loading area, cars using the parking deck will enter, folks parking at the post office, retail storefronts, etc. We can support bike lanes in town but wouldn't a lane on a cross town street that would get one from a significant point A to a significant point B be more practical?

COMMENT – The bike lane has no valid connections to other parts of town. This should not be considered an amenity that compensates the community for the overwhelming scale of this development and the problems it will cause with traffic/parking/congestion/pollution, etc.

4. The placement of Building C should be reconsidered to allow for better sight lines to the supermarket, located in Building A, and to prevent obstructing the views of the stanchions in context with the historic waiting room.

COMMENT – Even with the revisions to placement and setbacks Building C will still dominate this corner and block site lines to the historic train station.

5. Setbacks/stepbacks must be increased along the eastern side of Grove Street to accommodate the Linear Arts Plaza and setbacks/stepbacks should be included for the east side of Building D.

COMMENT – addressed in Plan revisions.

6. While trash and recycling rooms along a façade should include glazing, the trash and recycling should not be visible to passersby (p. 33).

COMMENT – addressed in Plan revisions.

7. A mail room should not be considered an active use for a frontage (p. 34).

COMMENT – not addressed in Plan revisions.

8. The Waiting Room will be the lobby for Building A. As this is a public benefit, the Plan should stipulate when and how the lobby will be open to the public. The Plan should also stipulate that both the interior and exterior walls of the Waiting Room should be preserved since the Waiting Room is an important historic feature.

COMMENT – addressed in Plan revisions.

9. Do we need “one residence per building for a maintenance or supervisory employee” as a permitted accessory use (p. 22)? A residence in a residential building would already be covered as a permitted use. Further, why would we put a residence into commercial buildings?

COMMENT – addressed in Plan revisions.

10. The Redevelopment Plan should affirmatively state that valet parking plans shall be prohibited from using public streets.

COMMENT – addressed in Plan revisions.

11. The Redevelopment plan should include a requirement that the parking decks be designed with higher floor plates and flat levels so that they can be easily converted to a non-parking use in the future.

COMMENT – not feasible as the Plan is currently defined.

12. Does the Fire Department have sufficient equipment to service buildings at the proposed heights? Will municipal trash collection be impacted?

COMMENT – addressed with the Fire Department and not an issue.

13. What additional amenities should we request in exchange for height/bulk/density credits?

COMMENT - the amenities provided in the Plan include affordable housing, workforce housing, public open space, use of the Historic Waiting Room for special events and construction of a protected bike lane. These amenities seem totally inadequate given the additional heights/density/bulk and

deterioration of quality of life for the neighborhood as weighed against the considerable investment return to the developer for years to come. This is not an equitable exchange.