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Karen Arent Landscape Architect

Memorandum

To: Chairman Fred Reichle and the Town of Montgomery Planning Board

From: Karen Arent, Landscape Architect

Date: January 27, 2025

Subject: RDM NBP Neelytown Business Park Development Site Plans

Consultant: Colliers Engineering

Cc: Ms. Bonnie Franson, Ross Winglovitz, Steven Esposito

COMMENTS:

Site plans revised November 11, 2024 were reviewed. A site visit was performed on January 23, 2025. We have the following comments:

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. No specifications are provided for topsoil on the landscape plans. Given the extensive planting proposed on site and the large berms which are highly relied upon for screening, the quality and depth of topsoil is of utmost importance to establish and maintain effective screening of the site. The EIS defines good topsoil as containing significant amounts of sand or gravel or both, low shrink-swell potential and few cobbles and stones. A more specific recommended specification for soils has been provided at the end of this memo.
2. General planting note C.I.(A) on sheet 40 defines backfill for plantings as consisting of one part each of topsoil, moistened peat moss, and parental material. Peat moss is no longer recommended for use in landscape projects, especially ones of this size, due to the economic feasibility and environmental impacts of the material. It is a limited natural resource which only accumulates at a rate of 0.04 of an inch per year. It would be better, and likely cheaper, to find a local, more

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sustainable alternative to peat moss. Consult with the landscape architect about what to use for backfill which will be determined by what soil amendments may be needed. The parental material should not consist of the soils determined in the EIS's soil as poor for topsoil use or it will provide detrimental to plant growth and wellbeing.

3. Many stone walls characteristic of the area exist on the property. It would be great if the walls could be re-used decoratively elsewhere on site such as at site entrances or at the junction of Beaver Dam and Neelytown Roads.
4. How will parking lot planting islands be installed? Will the area first be leveled and compacted, with the planting islands dug out? The EIS states that topsoil would be completely stripped from the proposed building footprint and 10 feet beyond the building limits and completely stripped in pavement areas receiving less than 5 feet of new fill. What is the plan to install good soils in the planting islands deep enough to grow trees successfully? There should be a detail of the planting islands and there should be at least 24" if not 36" of soil including at least 12" of topsoil.
5. Most evergreen trees will not tolerate the urban conditions and salinity present in parking lot islands. For screening, consider urban tolerant deciduous trees such as Pin Oaks. Oaks keep their leaves long into winter months and will help provide screening. Consider deer resistant large growing shrubs in these islands if they will be tall enough to bolster screening. If there is a concern about the spread of deciduous trees, consider columnar urban-tolerant deciduous trees instead such as columnar Oaks.
6. To avoid large weedy mulch beds or weed whacking around trees in planting islands, consider a groundcover which only needs to be mowed once or twice a year such as tall fescue. Weed whacking so close to the trees is likely to harm them, especially in islands where trees are closely spaced.
7. Many trees and shrubs are proposed on slopes. Provide a slope planting plan which indicates some sort of stone support on the downhill side of the plantings so the plants do not slide down the slope. This office can supply an example detail if so desired.
8. It is highly recommended to install deer rub protection around the trunks of proposed deciduous trees until the diameter of the tree has reached a minimum of 6" as bucks tend to be attracted to smaller trees. Given the extensive number of deciduous trees proposed, both in the general planting plan and in the wetland

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mitigation areas, it would be wise to protect the investment from the millions of possible deer damage.

9. If overhead wires will connect to proposed warehouses, they should be shown on the landscape plans to determine whether placement of proposed trees would conflict with overhead wires.
10. Junipers are shown too far apart in a manner that is artificial, and which will not provide the most effective screening. Red Cedar Juniper should be shown no more than 10 feet on center as they grow in dense masses in the wild and will provide better screening much more quickly. To increase the naturalistic look, Junipers can be placed irregularly in spacing no more than 10-12 feet on center as they do not tend to grow in even intervals in the wild. Use different sizes of Junipers for a very natural look.
11. The hatch for ERNMX 181-01 Mix "B" is applied at too large a scale on the plans and it is difficult to graphically determine whether an area is to be seeded with Mix B or lawn, which does not have a representative hatch.
12. Steep slopes are proposed at the north of the site, most notably on the proposed berms along Beaver Dam Road. A steep slope meadow mix such as ERNMX-181-2 composed of native plants, many of which are grasses, with deep-growing roots should be proposed to prevent erosion on the slopes.
13. According to the landscape plans, it appears that lawn is proposed at the bottoms of most of the stormwater management areas. Clarify what will be planted at the bottoms of proposed stormwater management areas. Details for the bioretention basins show there will be 3" of mulch and 2.5 feet of planting soil at the bottom of the basin. These basins should be planted. The detail provided for detention basins do not specify plantings in or around the basin and the infiltration/detention basin detail shows sandy soils at the bottom of the basin. Can those basins be planted as well?
14. Little Bluestem and Yellow Wild Indigo are proposed at the bottom of stormwater management areas. These plants are not known for tolerating wet soils and would be better suited for the edges of the stormwater management areas where they are less likely to become inundated with water.
15. Large quantities of a small variety of perennials are proposed on this plan which puts a lot of eggs in one basket with regard to plant survival on site. Consider breaking up large groups of perennials into smaller groups with a variety of species which do well in poor, damp soils such as New York Ironweed.

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16. No cultivar for a female Winterberry Holly has been specified in the plant list. To ensure berries which will be both aesthetically pleasing and will provide forage for native fauna, a companion female cultivar should be selected. Southern Gentleman is a late-blooming pollenizer for other late blooming female species such as 'Winter Red', which has a similar mature size.

LANDSCAPE PLAN SOUTH

17. The landscape plan proposes an over 1,000 linear feet uniform band of trees shoved between the property line and the 75-foot setback line along the southern edge of the property. Thriving trees exist in this area which provide an attractive, naturalistic views from the intersection of Beaver Dam and Neelytown roads (see Figure 1). Existing tree stands and individual trees in this area should be more accurately marked out in the field and on the plans so that proposed plantings can complement and build upon existing trees to remain. It is better to work with existing thriving plant material than to try to grow a lot of new trees, especially considering the droughts and floods that have become more common in this region, killing many new plantings. Consider redesigning the proposed landscaping at the southern tip, integrating stone walls removed from elsewhere on site and moving proposed screening plantings further into the site. This will allow views across the open space and create depth to the landscape instead of keeping views confined to a corridor. Naturalistic plantings help provide screening better than a more stylized planting as they blend in with the surrounding environment. Loosen up and more naturalistically arrange the plantings, and keep existing trees, instead of providing hard straight division between groupings of plants. As shown in the viewshed section for vantage point 6, screening close to the road relies on a lot screening with lower branches which is not obtained from deciduous trees nor Pine species, whose lower branches usually die off and fall off or break off after some years. Effective reinforced screening is still possible when proposed trees are moved back from the road edge.
18. There is a beautiful stand of White Birches in the existing vegetation at the southern tip of the site (Figure 2). These should be noted, located, and protected.
19. In line with comment 15 above, clarify where existing wooded areas will remain as the line for woods to remain ends abruptly without closing near the corner of proposed warehouse 2 on the wetland side of the property. This is especially

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important to note so that proposed screen plantings complement rather than replace existing vegetation.

20. The plans do not make it clear at what point in the project the houses at the southern tip of the site will be removed, nor does there appear there a plan for protecting existing thriving trees to remain on these properties. As in comment 1, locate these trees on the plans and provide tree protection fencing at the dripline to protect the trees from construction damage. Furthermore, clarify what groundcovers will be planted on top of soils disturbed from demolition.
21. Add a north arrow to sheet 21, Landscape Plan South

LANDSCAPE PLAN EAST

22. Seven trees are proposed at the top of the retaining wall at the southeast corner of proposed warehouse 1. The wall is nearly 15 feet tall and likely requires geogrid. Generally geogrid does not allow for sufficient soil depths to support trees, much less a tree with a taproot such as Nyssa sylvatica. Is there a way to support both?
23. If not requested to be built by the tenant, how will screening be bolstered along the area designated to be land banked in the future? Will that area still be cleared even if a tenant has not asked for the parking to be built?
24. Proposed screening between the possible land banked parking area and Neelytown Road should consist of a double row of plantings rather than a single line. Additional plantings are needed to soften the 15 foot high noise and screening fence.

LANDSCAPE PLANS WEST AND NORTH

25. A massive berm of up to 100 feet in height is proposed between proposed warehouse 2 and Beaver Dam Road. Singular lines of proposed plantings are shown on the berm which will highlight its artificial nature. Mix the proposed plantings together more to avoid large swaths of any one species of tree as large lines of one species of tree in a row at the same grade do not occur readily in nature. Proposed plantings should be more loosely organized along the slopes and should not consist of singular bands at one grade.
26. Populus tremuloides and Populus deltoides (Quaking Aspen and Cottonwood, respectively), would be excellent additions to the trees proposed on the berms, particularly as a replacement for Thornless Honeylocust. These trees, along with American Sycamore, are known to quickly and readily proliferate in poor disturbed soils as will be present on site. Quaking Aspen are an early successional

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pioneer species that will eventually give way to intermediate species such as Red Maples.

27. Consider using smaller size trees and in larger quantities along the slopes of the berms along with the many larger sized trees proposed. Smaller sized trees must be large enough to be above the browse line of deer.
28. How will the large berms be constructed? Most of the screening in this portion of the site relies upon the large proposed berms. They should be built in a way that will reduce erosion but will also provide good, deep, uncompacted topsoil over the entire mound in which proposed plantings will be able to grow and thrive. Compacted soils are a large threat to the well-being of plantings, existing or proposed. The berms will be largely made of soil excavated from the site, most of which, according to the EIS, is poor for use as topsoil. The neighboring FedEx site had issues with trees surviving on their much smaller constructed berms which was only improved by amending their berm soils. It is best to prevent issues beforehand rather than to deal with massive die-off.
29. What will be planted or built in the area designated to be land banked in the future until a tenant requests it or if no tenant requests it? Will that area still be cleared even if a tenant has not asked for the parking to be built?

Recommended Soil Notes

Soil: There must be a minimum of 6" topsoil compost mix in lawn areas and a minimum of 24” in areas with shrubs, trees, and groundcovers. Scarify or dig all proposed planting areas to a depth of 12"-24”+ or as determined by Landscape Architect. Topsoil-compost mix shall consist of 85%-90% stockpiled topsoil (if available) and 10%-15% well-rotted compost. Topsoil shall be natural, friable, fertile soil, characteristic of productive soil in the vicinity, reasonably free from stones, clay lumps, roots and other foreign matter, with an acidity level between 5.5 and 7 pH. If stockpiled topsoil is not available, use purchased topsoil in sufficient quantity to complete the requirements as specified. Site soil shall meet the following particle size distributions: less than or equal to 15% of gravel (particle size greater than 2.00 mm), 40%-60% of sand (0.05-2 mm), 30%-40% of silt (0.002-0.05 mm), and 10%-20% clay (<0.002mm) and 10-15% well-rotted compost with an acidity level between 5.5 and 7.0 pH. Percentages are by weight. Topsoil and purchased soil shall be subject to approval by Landscape Architect.

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Figure 1. View into the existing site from Beaver Dam Road near the corner of Beaver Dam and Neelytown Roads

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Figure 2. A stand of thriving White Birches at the south of the site which would otherwise be blocked out by uniform, unnatural screen planting along the road.

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