

**EXAMINATION OF THE
LACKAWANNA PLAZA REDEVELOPMENT PLAN
WITH
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MINOR IMPROVEMENTS**

ISSUED BY THE MONTCLAIR CENTER BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

January 29, 2023

The Montclair Center Business Improvement District is the only organization in Montclair specifically tasked with encouraging economic development and quality of life downtown. The MCBID represents and serves over 150 property owners with approximately 500 million dollars' worth of real estate and more than 500 businesses (shops, restaurants, offices) in Montclair Center. Our twenty years of experience advocating for best practices in our downtown and living with the successes and failures of previous developments gives us a unique perspective on the Lackawanna Plaza Redevelopment Plan.

The Montclair Center Business Improvement District Board of Directors strongly supports the redevelopment of the Lackawanna Plaza site, and specifically supports the Lackawanna Plaza Redevelopment Plan (LPRDP) that is currently in front of the Town Council.

MCBID applauds the Township for remaining consistent with, and integrating several objectives, recommendations, and concepts from the Master Plan such as:

- enact land use regulations that promote sustainable development patterns¹
- utilizing form-based code²
- utilize height bonuses to ensure public benefits²
- implement shared parking³
- encourage new development and a mix of uses to occur at strategic nodes⁴
- encourage a mix of housing types to fit the needs of all households (non-family, senior, low-income, etc.)⁵
- ensure the provision of affordable housing⁵
- expand fresh food access⁶
- facilitate the establishment of “arts districts” as an approach to revitalizing neighborhoods⁷
- use public art to strengthen the “sense of place” and highlight the heritage and character of neighborhoods⁸
- Identify potential office districts including those appropriate for “creative community” uses⁸
- utilizing building step-backs where appropriate including establishing a sky exposure plane⁹

Moreover, the MCBID appreciates the Township for taking into consideration the guidance of the 2017 Planning Board¹⁰ resolution¹¹, which found the previous Lackawanna Redevelopment Plan inconsistent with the Master Plan, and at the time recommended:

- “greater setbacks and step-backs of buildings to enhance open space and create improved public spaces”
- “establish a maximum square-footage for the supermarket under the 50,000-80,000sf then proposed”
- “provide greater historic integration”

- “that the Main Plaza...should remain as open”
- “have storefronts opening onto the Main Plaza”
- “provision(s) be made for affordable housing and that consideration should be given to include work force housing”
- “that the Council should undertake a more comprehensive traffic circulation study.”

Montclair Center received 6.7 million visits last year.¹² Friends meeting for coffee, families out for a meal, folks doing some shopping, or attending a festival. It is an active, prominent NJ downtown with a great vibe – until you get to the giant sea of tarmac that covers most of the site known as the Lackawanna Plaza Redevelopment Area. The Master Plan comments: “The significant setbacks from the street, abundance of street parking, and low-scale one-story buildings are not characteristic of downtown Montclair.”¹³ The supermarket has now been gone for 7 years. The site lies mostly unused except for a few special events, Popeyes, and Pineapple Express. If you make it across this expanse, there are once again small stores to catch your attention. Studio Montclair has their first gallery a few blocks east. But few people cross the emptiness unless they have a reason. It divides Montclair Center in two, and stops visitors cold.

The 8.2 acres of the Lackawanna Redevelopment site represents roughly one eighth of the Montclair Center Business Improvement District both in lot size and in proposed gross leasable space. It lies squarely in the midst of the District,¹⁴ at the intersection of two major county roads. There are significant modern mixed-use additions to our streetscape both east and west of the site. The mix of uses, mass and density, public spaces, access points, parking, and the community that will develop at the Lackawanna Plaza site will all impact the future economic success of our downtown and our community’s quality of life.

It is hard for a plan to be perfect, particularly in a township like Montclair where everyone has an opinion (or two). We do believe there are a few places in this plan that could benefit from a slight change, rewording, or change of perspective. The following highlights what we appreciate, and what we think could make the plan stronger.

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ECONOMIC IMPACT

This is the single most significant OPPORTUNITY for economic development that exists in Montclair. It will provide jobs at all skill levels in both its creation and during its existence. It will invite significant sums of investment into our township by the developer, the supermarket, the businesses that will inhabit it, the residents that will call it home, the artists that will adorn its walls, and the regional community. It will be inhabited by people from all walks of life, bringing the diversity that we pride ourselves in and define ourselves by. These people will become our neighbors and friends and contribute heavily to our local economy. The new ratables built on this site will help stabilize our tax rates, retain our AAA bond rating, and if negotiated correctly, benefit the township from an economic standpoint for decades to come.

That being said, great public space comes at great cost. Built parking comes at great cost. Affordable housing comes at great cost. Historic preservation, and adaptive reuse come at a great cost. If these are of great value to us as a community, if we aspire to have them included in this project, then this redevelopment plan must be grounded in reality, and must be economically feasible and sustainable.

BALANCE OF USE

The mixed use of the assets in the redevelopment plan is excellent. A variety of public spaces, different types of residential apartments at different rates, combined with offices and varied commercial spaces is what makes a community vibrant. The plan balances the ratios of multiple uses appropriately.

SUPERMARKET

We agree that a supermarket is a necessary component of any new plans. Much desired and anticipated by the surrounding community, the 40,000 sq ft. market will alleviate a food desert created when the Pathmark closed in 2015. We tend to agree with the Planning Board in 2017 which thought a 50,000-80,000sf supermarket was too large. **We recommend** keeping in-line with the 40,000sf which has been presented to the community.

We understand that a lease has been signed with a national chain. It is reasonable to conclude that a national chain has done their due diligence and ascertained to their satisfaction that the site and accompanying surroundings will meet their requirements. We are concerned that a major change in the development plan (and therefore the site plan) with items such as the amount and location of parking, loading, and square-footage, may give the supermarket cause to withdraw from the signed lease.

OFFICE AND RETAIL

The Redevelopment Plan calls for a minimum of 75,000 sq. ft. of office space. Office space in downtown is in high demand, and we believe this additional space will be very well received. Office workers will bring economic activity to our district businesses during the day, increasing the vitality of our downtown economy. **We recommend** that the redevelopment plan prohibits offices on any exterior-facing ground floor.¹⁵

20,000 sq. ft. is allocated to retail and restaurant uses beyond the space for the supermarket. We encourage retail and restaurants in the redevelopment plan and are particularly enthusiastic about storefronts along Glenridge Avenue and the Bloomfield corridor. **We recommend** that the Plan specifies that there shall be commercial spaces along those two streets.

RESIDENTIAL

Montclair is not immune to the national housing crisis. The potential of an additional 375 housing units provides the opportunity for growth in our downtown, where higher density development is appropriate.

We welcome **ALL** new residents to our district. Some will work in our businesses. The vast majority will join the community fabric, eat in our restaurants, purchase in our stores, bring energy to our streets, and invigorate our local economy.

We roundly support this first ever in Montclair development to have 30% of its residential component with rental prices below market value. This voluntarily exceeds the 20% affordable housing required by ordinance. An additional 10% has been pledged as workforce housing. Workforce housing has been defined by 80%-120% area median income. Traditionally, the applicant pool for workforce housing focuses on police, firefighters, teachers, and civic workers. **We recommend** that this Redevelopment Plan additionally define workforce housing eligibility to prioritize ALL people who work in Montclair within the pedestrian shed of the development. This will expand the applicant pool to any neighborhood worker who meets the income requirements. It will build community and promote socio-economic diversity. It will also further diminish need for elevated parking minimums.

PUBLIC OPEN PLACES

Montclair Center is a near-wholly built historic downtown, and this may be one of our last opportunities to influence the creation of pedestrian plazas and public places. Especially ones this large. They will play a major role in placemaking downtown, helping to create a sense of vitality and belonging, encourage community and individual wellness, invite creativity and foster joy leading to community pride and attachment. Placemaking is a major component in MCBID's strategic plan, so we are interested in how the public space in this redevelopment plan is articulated. It is through the articulation that a Public Open Space becomes a Public Open Place (POP).

We recommend all future POPs in Montclair Center employ Best Practices. They should be welcoming, accessible, inclusive, clean, well lit, and safe. POPs should blend park and plaza. They should provide greenery and seating, shade and sun, public art, places to eat outside, and family friendly elements.

The redevelopment plan has sufficient area allocated for POPs. We laud Montclair's continued focus on public space within redevelopment projects after the success of the Wellmont Arts Plaza in the Seymour Street project. The master plan encourages us to: "take opportunities to include public open space and greenspace in commercial redevelopment sites."¹⁶ We have a few suggestions to ensure even better outcomes moving forward with respect to the green space allocation in the total of the open space.

Best Practices in Pervious & Greenspace Coverage for Placemaking in Open Spaces ¹⁷
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• impervious surfaces < 70%• planting areas > 30% of the surfaces• no continuous planting area < 75 sq. ft.• Planters, including hanging planters, or planting beds containing live plant materials such as seasonal flowers, shrubs, ivy, or other plants should occupy a total area > 150 sq. ft. for each 1,000 sq. ft. of primary space.• The area occupied by an individual planter that is permanent in nature, or a planting bed, should be at least 30 sq. ft. with a depth of soil of at least 2 ft.• Set minimum grass or other ground cover areas, such as a total of 150 sq. ft. of grass or other ground cover for each 1,000 sq. ft. of primary space, would achieve an impression of park-like grounds.• Hanging planters could be exempt from these minimum size and location provisions.

Additionally, the integration of historical elements within the public, commercial, and residential areas, adaptively reused along with the addition of the historic train-car, is highly effective in fostering a sense of place and connection to the history of Montclair. It will also be potent in promoting heritage tourism.

We recommend that these components are included to create a signature POP for the development and our downtown. **We also strongly recommend** that the square footage of the Signature Open Space in the plan NOT be reduced.

HEIGHT, SCALE AND MASS

The height of the buildings seems to be the cause of the most dismay amongst opponents of the current plan. While we recognize that height is a major consideration for most developments downtown, the size of this site provides a unique opportunity to layout and design buildings in such a way as to minimize the perception of height. In return, we see more pedestrian amenities, placemaking amenities, and sheer public space in this design than in all previous developments downtown combined.

We do not find the height of any of the buildings to be of concern. The redevelopment site is directly in the heart of downtown Montclair Center, not nestled in a residential neighborhood as some would imply. The site is zone C-1, which allows boundary to boundary construction to the height of 67'.¹⁸ The proposed setbacks and step backs in the Redevelopment Plan would create a far more harmonious pedestrian experience. They limit the impression of height from the surrounding streets and utilize the Master Plan concept of a "sky exposure plane" to great effect. It is architectural design, materiality, finishes, fenestration, and lighting that give buildings their charm, or lack of it. The human experience of buildings is highly focused on the street level. The setbacks as expressed give a sense of expansive opening toward the sky which, although we cannot touch, we can feel. The Montclair Historic Preservation Commission, charged with preserving the historic fabric of our downtown and maintaining its charming appearance, also had no qualms with the proposed height of the buildings...before they did.¹⁹ Indeed, the Commission initially encouraged increasing the heights in return for an increase in public space.²⁰

The scale of these buildings is in keeping with other recent development projects in Montclair Center.²¹ to the buildings proposed in this redevelopment plan shows that this is actually one of the least dense development projects to be proposed in the last 20 years, nor would the buildings be the tallest in town. The new Seymour Street Development, which includes a 7-story component (similar to the proposed heights of the two, 87', 6-story buildings at Lackawanna) uses the setbacks, step-backs and public open place (Wellmont Plaza) well to create a positive impression. Church Street is regularly pointed out for its charm; we all enjoy walking by the six-story, 90-unit apartment complex at 39-51 Church. This is because of the detail of the doors, windows, and brickwork as well as the planters that create an inviting entry. These are quite different from Valley and Bloom, The Siena, and worst of all, the new Midtown Parking Deck. The latter, rising straight up from the sidewalk at the property line, provides no relief from the imposing walls.

In keeping with the HPC's initial recommendation,²⁰ we would also **recommend** taller buildings in return for more of the gracious amounts of public open space, deep setbacks, pedestrian amenities, and sightlines provided in this plan.

PARKING AND MOBILITY

To quote the master plan, "The parking ratios currently used by the Township are generally used for suburban areas with minimal transit services and heavily segregated land uses, two conditions not found in many areas of Montclair."²² Though the redevelopment plan does employ a shared parking strategy as recommended in the MP, it could go farther in achieving a proper parking minimum in that it uses our current parking requirements as a factor in the total sum without fully taking advantage of the fact that the site lies in the heart of the Transit Village. Though we do not believe the development should be under-parked, the negative consequences of being overparked far outweigh the latter, which is now well understood within the planning community nationwide. "Even the National Parking Association, the

industry's trade group of parking operators, now supports reducing or eliminating parking minimums and instead favors allowing communities and developers to make market-based decisions on parking supply and demand."²³ Considering that much of the scale of the development is due to built parking, **we recommend** that if any aspect of this plan is to be reduced, parking should be amongst the first things considered.

We also have a few other recommendations from the MP that we believe could be employed for a more robust universal access, parking, and mobility ecosystem for the redevelopment plan. First, **we recommend** that coupled with bike parking²⁴, a bike-share program²⁵ should be required. Second, **we recommend** that to further promote public transit use, the redevelopment should require contributions to public transit improvements²⁶ i.e., the bus shed that will be replaced should be "enhanced."²⁷ Third, **we recommend** that car share parking²⁸ should be utilized within the development, and furthermore the provision of courtesy loaner vehicles in lieu of parking²⁹ should be considered.

TRAFFIC

It is reasonable to assume there will be an uptick in car movement at the site at the beginning and end of the day from businesses and residents. It is important to note that the Lackawanna Plaza site is within the Transit Village³⁰ designated area. The site is a six-minute walk to and from the Bay Street Station, reducing the need for residents and visitors alike to regularly drive, park, or need a car at all. With so many other amenities easily accessible within the pedestrian shed, it is reasonable to assume that some percentage of residents and workers won't be coming or going by car on a regular basis.

The biggest cause of traffic to and from the development will be from the supermarket. It is essential that entrance/exit to the supermarket parking areas be carefully managed to mitigate traffic issues on surrounding streets, and that proper and significant signage be introduced to properly navigate traffic flow. As we are aware a comprehensive traffic study was conducted, **we recommend** an independent traffic engineer should be retained to interpret the data in said study to recommend lane locations, sizes, markings, and signage, and assure proper loading logistics for the supermarket, businesses, and residents.

COMMUNICATION

We strongly recommend that a Communication Plan be a mandatory addition to any site plan application. Communication between developer, contractor, Essex County, Township of Montclair, MPD, MFD, MAU, BID, etc., has been sorely lacking in prior development projects. When roads must be closed due to emergency, or when problems arise of any nature, communication is crucial to prevent a minor annoyance from becoming a perceived crisis. **We recommend** such a requirement of all developments going forward.

CONSTRUCTION

There are concerns about the disruption construction will cause to the surrounding neighborhood and businesses. **We recommend** adding a clause to the redevelopment plan that requires contractors working on the project to contain all equipment on site to the extent possible.

We also recommend that a Rodent Mitigation Plan be a mandatory addition to any site plan application which shall cover the duration of construction. In instances where ongoing water retention and water management is a necessary concern, the Rodent Mitigation Plan must also apply to post-construction

INFRASTRUCTURE

If a site plan is eventually approved by Montclair’s Planning Board, the MCBID fully expects the infrastructure that is to be installed on the 8-acre site will comport with all state and local building codes, as it will be overseen by our Township Building Department. We understand that progress will be stalled at a site plan review, and approvals will not be granted, if the developer is unable to provide power, sewer, domestic water supply, etc.

We are aware that this site has special water considerations. **We recommend** that the plan will ensure appropriate engineering solutions, and that the development will adhere to all FEMA, NJDEP and local standards. **We also recommend** that our local DCS (Stormwater Management) Director, Sewer and Water Director, Environmental & Sustainability Officer, and other necessary professionals be consulted on behalf of the township to recommend necessary upgrades to the stormwater management system that currently exists on the site. These recommendations should be included in the redevelopment plan before passing it so any developer is well aware of the costs associated of redeveloping this site, and the public is assured that the future of the development is sustainable.

We also recommend seeing language that requires the same or better lighting equipment, bricks, and paving, etc. be used on public thoroughways as exist on neighboring streets.

ENVIRONMENT

We support an environmentally conscious and energy efficient project. We commend the redevelopment plan for its strong efforts in these areas. We are confident that the Environmental Commission will bring to light any pressing additional points.

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We believe the LPRDP under consideration will connect and strengthen all of Montclair Center, enhance our community fabric, build the local economy, and support municipal ratables. We find that the merits of the plan far outweigh the challenges. We strongly encourage the Town Council to embrace the full scope of the vision described in the proposed Lackawanna Plaza Redevelopment Plan. We would be proud of a development at the Lackawanna Plaza site in keeping with this Plan.

Thank you for taking this into consideration.

Vote taken at February 2, 2022 meeting of the Board of Directors.

Present: Jaji Packard, Ashley Cyrus, Liz Rich, Matt Horrigan, Ernst Goldman, Matt Silverman, Rachel Grochowski, Kristen Zachares, Natalie Haddad, Daniel Garcia-Pedrosa, Emer Featherstone, Ray Ketchum, Robert Squires, Jill Montague

Absent: David Cummings, Lori Price Abrams, David Placek, Jacob Nieman, Celestina Ando, David Harrison, Julian Payne

Motion: Jaji Packard - Second: Matt Horrigan - Passes Unanimously



Jarmila Packard, President

Citations & Endnotes

- ¹ [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 2.2 Land Use + Parking, p. 28 *Most important section in all of the Master Plan with relation to this development.
- ² [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 2.2 Land Use + Parking, p. 31
- ³ [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 2.2 Land Use + Parking, p. 34
- ⁴ [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 2.3 Neighborhood Character, p. 41
- ⁵ [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 2.4 Flexible, Affordable Lifestyles, p. 46
- ⁶ [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 2.4 Flexible, Affordable Lifestyles, p. 47
- ⁷ [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 2.5 Economic Development + the Arts, p. 53
- ⁸ [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 2.5 Economic Development + the Arts, p. 54
- ⁹ [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 3.1 Montclair Center + Bay St. Station, p. 86
- ¹⁰ The makeup of the 2017 Planning Board was **John Wynn**, **Keith Brodock**, Craig Brandon, Timothy Barr, **Tony Ianuale**, **Carmel Loughman**, Stephen Rooney, **Robin Schlager**, Martin Schwartz, **Carole Willis**. Members in bold are currently serving the board.
- ¹¹ [Resolution Memorializing Review and Recommendations To Township Council Regarding An Ordinance of the Township of Montclair Finding That The “Draft Lackawanna Plaza Redevelopment Plan” Dated June 1, 2017 Be Rejected As *Inconsistent With the Master Plan*](#)
- ¹² [Placer.ai](#) (paid software), aggregated cell phone data capture on foot traffic counts Jan 1, 2022 to Dec 31, 2022.
- ¹³ [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 3.1 Montclair Center + Bay St. Station, p. 75
- ¹⁴ Map of Montclair Center Business Improvement District
Lackawanna Plaza Redevelopment site highlighted in purple



¹⁵ [Township of Montclair Ordinance 347-80 B. \(3\)](#)

¹⁶ [2016 Master Plan Reexamination Report, Economic Development and the Arts](#), p. 20

¹⁷ [Design Requirements for, Plazas, Residential Plazas and Urban Plazas – Planning.nyc.gov](#), [Providing for Usable Open Space for Multifamily Developments – mrsc.org](#), [Flexible Development Standards for Mixed-Use Development – auburn.municipal.codes](#), [Open Space & Plaza Requirements – Boynton Beach, FL](#)

¹⁸ [Township of Montclair Zoning Viewer](#)



¹⁹ [Amended Historic Preservation Committee Report on Lackawanna Plaza Redevelopment - January 27, 2023](#)

²⁰ [Initial Historic Preservation Committee Report on Lackawanna Plaza Redevelopment - January 19, 2023](#)

²¹ **Redevelopment Projects in Montclair Center**

	Lackawanna (Proposed)	Valley & Bloom	Siena	Seymour St.	Church St.	MC Hotel	Vestry
Stories	6	6	7	7	5	8	5
Total Height	89.5'	75'	80'	80'	58'	115'	63.25'
# Units	375	262	101	200	74	N/A	46
Density (units/acre)	46.8	187	77.7	134	89.1	N/A	86
Open Space %	19.5%	0%	0%	10.8%	0%	0%	0%

²² [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 2.2 Land Use + Parking, p. 28

²³ [Jeff Spivak, American Planning Association, Planning Spring 2022, June 01, 2022](#)

²⁴ [Lackawanna Plaza Redevelopment Plan](#), October 2022, Section III.D.7, p.29

²⁵ [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 2.2 Land Use + Parking, p. 29

²⁶ [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 2.1 Transportation + Mobility, p.19, 29 & 3.1h Montclair Center + Bay St. Station, p. 91

²⁷ [Lackawanna Plaza Redevelopment Plan](#), October 2022, Section III.J.3, p.40

²⁸ [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 2.2 Land Use + Parking, p. 33

²⁹ [Unified Land Use and Circulation Plan](#), revised June 2021, 2.2 Land Use + Parking, p. 31, 37

³⁰ <https://www.state.nj.us/transportation/community/village/>