

Planning & Real Estate Consultants

February 11, 2021

Planning Board
Township of Berkeley Heights
29 Park Avenue
Berkeley Heights, NJ 07922

**Re: Planning Review #2
Application #SP-10-20
Preliminary and Final Site Plan
Block 502, Lots 1, 2 (inc. former Lots 4&5) and 3
Berkeley Crossing Urban Renewal, LLC
Berkeley Crossing Redevelopment Area ("Florist Site")**

Dear Chairman Johnson and Members of the Board:

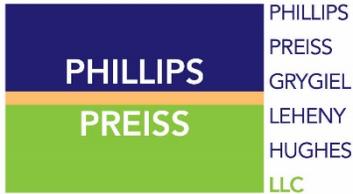
We are in receipt of the above referenced application, including the following documents submitted by the applicant:

- Application for Site Plan Approval, including attachment entitled "Design Standards & Guidelines Compliance Report," dated November 16, 2020.
- Architectural Plans for Berkeley Crossing prepared by John Saracco Architect LLC, dated December 16, 2020.
- Site Plans for Berkeley Crossing prepared by Titus Surveying & Engineering, P.C., dated June 24, 2020, last revised January 28, 2020.

We additionally referenced the following documents relevant to this application:

- Amended and Restated Berkeley Crossing Redevelopment Plan, prepared by Phillips Preiss Grygiel Leheny Hughes, LLC, dated June 2020 ("Redevelopment Plan").
- Amended and Restated Redevelopment Agreement By and Between the Township of Berkeley Heights and Berkeley Crossing Urban Renewal, LLC For Block 502, Lots 1-5 in the Township of Berkeley Heights, Union County, NJ, dated October 2020 ("Redevelopment Agreement").

This application proposes a mixed-use development with 53 multifamily units and 4,800 square feet of commercial space pursuant to the Amended and Restated Berkeley Crossing Redevelopment Plan, which additionally encompassed Block 502, Lot 3. As the Board is aware, the applicant previously received site plan approval for a mixed-use development consisting of 45 multifamily units and 4,300 square feet of ground floor



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commercial space on Block 502, Lots 1 & 2 (including former Lots 4 & 5). That application was approved by Planning Board Resolution adopted on August 14, 2019.

In the following sections, original comments in our Planning Review #1 dated February 2, 2021 are presented in standard font; new comments or changes to the original text are presented in *italics*. Unless noted otherwise, the existing comments from Planning Review #1 continue to stand.

Site and Location

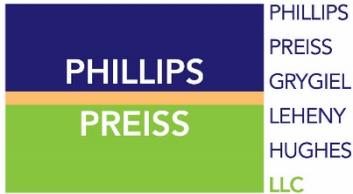
The amended Berkeley Crossing Redevelopment Area consists of Block 502, Lots 1, 2 (including former Lots 4 & 5), and 3 at 663 Springfield Avenue, 88 River Road, and 123 Passaic Avenue. Combined, the property has 213 feet of frontage along Springfield Avenue, 298 feet of frontage along Passaic Avenue, and 154 feet of frontage along River Road. The northerly perimeter of the property, spanning 378.4 feet total, additionally abuts the Washington Street extension, which is currently a paper street. Lots 1 and 3 are currently developed with single-family homes and associated improvements, while Lot 2 is largely vacant with a few utility structures, a masonry block wall, and a portion of a blacktop drive.

The property is located at the western edge of downtown Berkeley Heights. There is a mix of uses nearby, including a single family property on Block 502 Lot 6 that is directly adjacent, additional residential homes to the north across Lincoln Street, the River View Banquet Center across River Road to the west, and several retail establishments, doctor’s offices, restaurants, and office buildings along both sides of Springfield Avenue.

Proposed Development

The Applicant proposes a mixed-use development with 4,800 square feet of ground-floor retail space along Springfield Avenue and 53 multifamily rental units on two upper stories, including 10 units (18%) set-aside as affordable for very low, low-, and moderate-income households. The ground floor of the building will additionally contain an enclosed garage with 68 spaces, a bicycle storage area with 13 racks, trash room, residential lobby, and mechanical room. The two upper stories will have 26 and 27 dwelling units, respectively, and consist of 10 one-bedroom units (1 affordable), 40 two-bedroom units (6 affordable), and 3 three-bedroom units (all affordable). The upper stories will also provide tenant storage rooms, gym, and amenity rooms. There will also be a private outdoor patio area with a pergola and barbeque facilities near the Passaic Avenue frontage.

In addition to the enclosed garage, the applicant will construct 10 covered parking spaces underneath the building overhang and a surface parking lot with 18 parking spaces and 2 truck delivery spaces to be shared between the retail and residential uses.



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The applicant also proposes 30 banked parking spaces on the Lot 1 portion to be maintained as a lawn. Vehicular access will be provided via River Road and an extension of Washington Street that leads into the covered parking area.

Along the main Springfield Avenue frontage, the building will predominantly feature red brick veneer with precast veneer and aluminum storefront entries for the ground floor commercial façade. Wall signs and exterior lighting are proposed on top of the storefront doors. Facades along other streets will also feature brick veneer at the base and additionally incorporate hardboard and baton and one other type of siding (material not indicated). Front façade panes along Springfield Avenue will feature a mix of flat roofs with azak cornice and copper standing seam roofs. The central portions of the building to the rear of Springfield Avenue will have a slightly pitched roof (3:12) with asphalt shingles. The building will feature vinyl clad single hung windows, and some units will have a balcony recessed into the façade plane enclosed by aluminum railing. Wall mounted HVAC units will be screened via louvres.

Other site improvements include a public plaza area along the Springfield Avenue retail frontage with brick pavers and benches, as well as landscaping along the entire building façade. *There will be a monument sign at the corner between Washington Street and River Road with a brick base and a 24 square foot sign face.* The Applicant will also perform several off-site improvements along its frontages, including new sidewalks and streetscape installations along Springfield Avenue, reconstruction of River Road, new timber guide rails along Passaic Avenue, and construction of a driveway *and new street lights* along the Washington Street extension.

Compliance

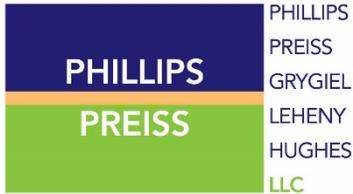
The proposed development is subject to the standards set forth in the Berkeley Crossing Redevelopment Plan. On November 9, 2020, the Township Council determined by resolution that the proposed redevelopment project was consistent with the Redevelopment Plan and Redevelopment Agreement. As described in detail in the Consistency Review Report prepared by our office dated October 20, 2020 and referenced in the Resolution, the proposed project was found in substantial compliance with planning objectives and development standards of the Redevelopment Plan. The report noted two deviations and requested certain site and building design specifications for further review, as follows:

- Section 3.4.1.d requires a minimum of 1 electric vehicle charging station on the site. No such facility is currently proposed on the plans. The applicant shall submit revised plans indicating the location of a charging station or request relief for this deviation.

- Section 3.4.2.e requires pedestrian sidewalks at a minimum width of 6 feet in the front yard and near the rear surface parking area to allow pedestrian access to the building. The proposed paver sidewalks are 5 feet wide, resulting in a deficiency of 1 foot.
- Section 3.5.b(2) requires balconies to have a minimum depth of 4 feet. No measurement is provided on the architectural plan. While the balconies appear to be compliant based on the scaling of the plan, the applicant shall provide the depth of the balconies to confirm compliance.
- Section 3.5.c(2) requires windows/window openings and doors to occupy at least 25% of the first-story façade area along Springfield Avenue. No measurement is provided on the architectural plan – the applicant shall provide the percentage to demonstrate compliance.
- Section 3.6 provides that all signs must conform to applicable provisions in Part 5 and Section 19.5.6 of the Municipal Land Use Procedures Ordinance. While wall-mounted signs for the retail storefronts are shown on the architectural plans, no details have been provided. The applicant shall provide details regarding all proposed signage, including a conceptual graphic, size and dimensions, proposed materials, color scheme, illumination, and construction details. For any detail that is noncompliant with Part 5 or Section 19.5.6, the applicant request relief.

The newly proposed monument sign is compliant with height and size requirements in Part 5. The brick veneer base is also permitted. However, the material for the sign face has not been provided. The applicant should also indicate if any illumination is proposed, which shall comply with Section 19.5.6 (gooseneck or halo lit pin-mounted letters in soft white only). The applicant shall provide similar details for the proposed wall signs to demonstrate compliance.

- Section 3.8 requires streetscape improvements to be provided along the entire property frontages on Springfield Avenue, Passaic Avenue, and Washington Street and conform with Section 19.5.5 of the Municipal Land Use Procedures Ordinance where applicable. Along Springfield Avenue, 19.5.5.C.2 require street furniture with designated specifications. The submitted landscaping plan indicates the provision of conforming brick pavers, benches, and street lights along Springfield Avenue. Additional details are requested regarding required planters, trash receptacles, and bike racks along Springfield Avenue per Section 19.5.5. The applicant shall seek relief in the alternative.



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Planning Comments

1. The applicant shall provide additional details as requested in the “Compliance” section of this letter. If any deviations from Chapter 3 of the Redevelopment Plan as specified above are identified, the applicant shall seek relief from the Board in accordance with Section 6.2.3 of the plan.

This section provides two basis for granting relief: 1) by reason of exception narrowness, shallowness or shape of a specific piece of property or by reason of exceptional topographic conditions or physical features uniquely affecting the specific piece of property, the strict application of the regulation would result in peculiar difficulties to, or exceptional and undue hardship upon the Redeveloper; 2) the purposes of this Redevelopment Plan would be advanced by a deviation from the strict requirements of this plan and the benefits of the deviation would outweigh any detriments. Additionally, the Redeveloper must demonstrate that the deviation can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good or to the intent and purpose of the Redevelopment Plan.

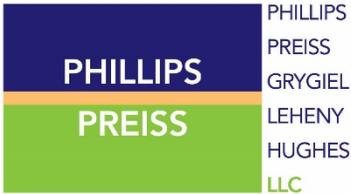
2. The applicant proposes a surface parking lot with 18 parking spaces, including 2 ADA spaces, to be shared between retail and residential uses. Pursuant to Section 3.4.1.b, shared parking is allowed subject to the Board’s approval of a shared parking analysis prepared by a licensed professional traffic engineer. The applicant shall provide testimony regarding the shared parking arrangement, including estimated peak demand for each use, space allocation, management and enforcement, and other relevant matters. The Board should note that the development is compliant with minimum parking requirements. We defer to the Board engineer for additional comments on this topic.
3. Section 3.4.1.c gives the Board discretion to allow a maximum of 30 banked parking spaces on Block 502, Lot 1. The applicant shall provide testimony regarding the proposed banked parking area and explain its need, maintenance, timing of conversion, etc. We defer to the Board engineer for additional comments on this topic.
4. The applicant should provide testimony regarding traffic and circulation, including personal vehicles, move-in/move-out vans, emergency vehicles, and fire and garbage collection trucks. We defer to the Township engineer for further comments regarding this issue.

5. The architectural design of the building is generally compliant with the Redevelopment Plan and Part 19 Design Standards of the Municipal Land Use Procedures Ordinance. However, it is not clear what type of siding is proposed above the brick veneer for the east, west, and north elevations. We also recommend the applicant present colored elevations, 3D renderings, and material samples to assist the Board in considering the merits of the design.
6. Section 3.7 requires a landscaped buffer area along the northern property line and where the project area adjoins Block 502, Lot 6. The section specifically required the buffer to be at least 5 feet wide, at least 6 feet in height at time of planting, and have at least 50% native, non-invasive species.

- a. The proposed landscaped areas and plantings along the boundary lines with Lot 6 appear compliant. However, in the event that the banked parking lot is built, the lot would encroach upon the landscaped buffer. The applicant should provide testimony addressing this conflict and consider an alternative layout that would preserve a compliant buffer area, or seek relief from the Board in the alternative.

Revised site plans indicate that the banked parking area will be setback a minimum of 6 feet from the property line. As such, there will be enough room to preserve the 5-foot buffer area. This comment has been satisfied.

- b. Sheet 2 “General Site Plan” seems to designate the entire Washington Street yard area as a “Landscaped Area” but Sheet 10 “Landscaping Plan” only shows plantings in small portions of this area. We note that Mixed Conifers are also proposed along the unimproved portion of Washington Street. The applicant should provide testimony to clarify what is being envisioned in this area and how the landscaped buffer requirements will be met.
- c. Along the boundary lines with Lot 6, the landscaped buffer is proposed to consist of 4 red bud trees and 1 dogwood tree along one side and a mix of 15 conifers (white pines, Norway spruce, or blue spruce) on another side. Along the northern property line, there will be 5 black gum trees and 5 sugar maple trees along the Washington Street extension, 12 skip laurels along the building façade by the garage entrance, and 10 additional mixed conifers along the unimproved portions of Washington Street. The applicant should discuss, preferably with renderings, and the Board should consider the efficacy of the



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landscaping in reducing visual impacts to neighboring residential properties and rights-of-way.

7. We note that the proposed affordable housing unit mix of 1 one-bedroom unit, 6 two-bedroom units, and 3 three-bedroom units is compliant with bedroom distribution requirements of the Uniform Housing Affordability Controls. Pursuant to the Fair Housing Act and UHAC, 13% of all units must be set-aside as affordable to very low-income households, and 50% of all units must be set-aside for low-income households. The applicant should indicate the income split of the proposed affordable units. The applicant should also stipulate to working with the Township's affordable housing administrator and conforming with all other relevant requirements, such as deed restriction and affirmative marketing to ensure crediting of the units.
8. The applicant should provide testimony regarding green technologies and other sustainable practices incorporated into the design and construction of the building and site, which are strongly encouraged by the Redevelopment Plan.
9. We additionally defer to the Township engineer regarding the adequacy of grading, paving, erosion and sediment control, drainage and stormwater management, lighting, utilities, and improvements to Washington Street and Passaic Avenue proposed.

We trust that the above information is responsive to your needs.

Respectfully submitted,

Keenan Hughes, AICP, PP