

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

for:

The Easton at Rutgers Plaza

Block: 385

Lot: 2.07

Township of Franklin

Somerset County, New Jersey

Prepared By:

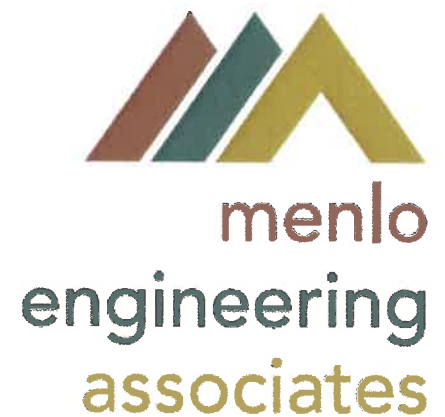
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1.0 INTRODUCTION & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following Environmental Assessment has been prepared by Menlo Engineering Associates, Inc. as required with any Site Plan Application, for Block 385, Lot 2.07 (Tax Map Sheet No. 83). This report has been prepared as a result of an investigation of the site features and a review of available published data. The report is intended to be reviewed in conjunction with the Plans prepared by Menlo Engineering Associates, Inc. submitted to the Franklin Township Board of Adjustment, dated October 26, 2023.

The applicant anticipates redeveloping a portion of this 27.418 acres, located at the intersection of Easton Avenue and John F. Kennedy Boulevard in Franklin Township, Somerset County. This existing retail development is anchored by the high traffic volume Stop and Shop, various other retail and 2 restaurants. The proposal is to demolish the vacant 107,600 square foot Kmart department store and replace it with a four story, 200 unit apartment building, in the southwest corner of the site. In addition, there are circulation and parking changes as well as utilities, storm water management design and landscaping proposed in the vicinity of the proposed apartment building. Replacing this large scale abandoned retail building with residential apartments will enhance the viability of this retail property and is a benefit to the community and the region at large. The majority of this established retail development and parking areas will remain unchanged for this proposal. A previously approved fast food restaurant redevelopment on the northeast corner of this site is anticipated.

The site is in the GB (General Business Zone) and therefore the application requires a Use Variance, height and floor area ratio variance, and impervious coverage variance. This proposal for mixed use to integrate an apartment building with outdoor amenities into an existing retail center is based on reinvigorating the property, forming connections and adjacencies to the retail uses that are the foundation of strong mixed-use communities. The project redesign results in a reduction of overall building coverage and impervious coverage. The proposed building coverage is 19%, reduced from 23%, and the proposed impervious coverage will be reduced to 73.2% from 78.6%.

The development proposal would result in the removal of some existing trees. The Landscape Plan indicates planting and tree replacement increasing the overall amount of planted area. The Plan depicts the landscape consisting of 181 deciduous, evergreen and flowering trees, 830 shrubs, and thousands of groundcover and perennial plants, which mitigate the unavoidable impact resulting from this development project. Existing mature landscape which is in good condition remains for the most part.

Menlo Engineering Associates, Inc. established and evaluated the potential impacts of the proposed development on the existing baseline environmental conditions. These baseline conditions were compiled from site inspections, local published information, and various federal, state, and municipal documents. Potential impacts were evaluated for the period during construction activities and upon occupation of the apartment building.

2.0 PROJECT LOCATION & DESCRIPTION

The applicant, Levin Properties, proposes the redevelopment of a portion of this 27.41 acre parcel known as Block 385, Lot 2.07 within Franklin Township, Somerset County, New Jersey. The site is located at the Easton Avenue / John F. Kennedy intersection. Easton Avenue, a well-traveled connector, acts as the site's northern boundary, with the Raritan River further to the north. John F. Kennedy Boulevard is to the west, the Park apartment complex is to the south, and Seeley's Brook is to the East of the property.

The development of a portion of this site with a 200-unit, multi-family development is contained in a 4 story building. There is a total of 123 two bedroom apartments, 69 one bedroom apartments and 8 three bedroom apartments in the proposal. The total available parking spaces for the redevelopment is proposed to be 1,105. The plan meets the parking standards as required in the Residential Site Improvement Standards (RSIS) for the Apartment building and meets the retail parking requirements as well.

All utilities including the storm drainage system are expected to be extended or connected to existing mains. Seeley's Brook traverses the eastern boundary of the site, well away from the proposed development. This is the only regulated surface water feature on site, which feeds into the Raritan River.

3.0 SITE INVENTORY

3.1 Natural Resources

Natural resources generally include geologic formations, soil formations and types, topography, surface and subsurface hydrologic features, vegetation, and wildlife.

3.1.1 Geology

The geology of the site is consistent with that of Franklin Township and southern Somerset County. The site is found in the Triassic Lowland comprised of the Passaic formation. The region's surface formation is generally reddish-brown Brunswick shale or siltstone and mudstone, which are mildly folded and faulted. Generally, the solid shale bedrock is found to be at a depth greater than 3½ feet.

3.1.2 Soils

Most of the Soils mapped on-site within the Soil Survey of Somerset County, New Jersey include Klinesville loam. The following table demonstrates the limitations of the on-site soils for development:

	Klinesville
Capability grouping	IVe-66
Depth to bedrock	1.0'-1.5'
Seasonal High Water Table	> 4.0'
Permeability	0.6-2"/hr
pH	4.5-6.0
Foundations/with basements	Moderate
Roads & Streets	Severe
Lawns/landscaping	Severe

The Soil Survey of Somerset County indicates Klinesville soils are shallow soils on narrow divides. Runoff can be rapid, and erosion hazard can be severe.

It should be noted that some soils within Somerset County are described as extremely acidic (i.e., a pH factor of less than 4.0, as defined by the Soil Conservation Service), with only moderate to low fertility in their natural state. These soils require rapid re-seeding and considerable amounts of lime and fertilizer to create fertility for quick re-establishment of vegetative cover. Exposing these soils for an extended period may be detrimental to surrounding areas. Therefore, an efficient construction sequence and the provision of a temporary liming program with an expeditious re-seeding program must be implemented to minimize the project impacts.

3.1.3 Topography

Topography on-site typically slopes gently to moderately to a slight toward the northern boundary of the site. The highest elevations (71 above sea level) occur along the southwest corner of the site sloping to approximately elevation (40) in the area to be

redeveloped. The lowest elevations found within the limits of the property are found to the north as the site slopes down to Easton Avenue, outside of the limits of disturbance. Generally, the topography is gradual with the inclusion of slopes exceeding 5% at the entrance drive along Easton Avenue, outside of the limits of disturbance. Within the limits of disturbance, the slope poses no constraints for construction.

3.1.4 Surface Hydrology

The site does not contain any areas of regulated wetlands. In addition, the Site in the area to be redeveloped, does not contain any regulated riparian zones or flood hazard areas. The flood hazard area associated with Seeley's Brook is well outside of the area of redevelopment.

3.1.5 Subsurface Hydrology

As previously stated, the majority of the site is impervious surface. As indicated in the Soils Survey of Somerset County, depth to the seasonal high water table is shallow (less than 3 feet) for parcels mapped with Klinsville soils. The soils, because of their high clay-content and depth to bedrock, are not a high aquifer recharge area.

3.1.6 Vegetation

Some of the trees existing in the parking lot (zelkova and honey locust, e.g.) are in decline and warrant the replacement that is proposed. The vegetation is typical of a shopping center and no unusual or unique specimens were observed across the project site. The perimeter trees will be preserved for the most part, providing a buffer to the project.

3.1.7 Wildlife

This developed site does not constitute habitat for wildlife.

A review of the NJDEP GIS iMap also indicates that the site is not mapped as containing any threatened or endangered species.

3.2 Man-Made Resources

Man-made resources include existing on-site land use, adjacent land use, access and transportation patterns, zoning, Master Plan delineations, and community facilities.

Easton Avenue is the main artery leading from a well-traveled route, connecting New Brunswick to the south, with the Interstate 287 Piscataway/Somerset corporate centers in the site's vicinity. The site is at the intersection with John F. Kennedy Boulevard which terminates at Easton Avenue.

The project anticipates utilizing the existing driveway locations along both Easton Avenue and JFK Boulevard. The traffic report submitted by Langan Associates states the 1,105 parking spaces proposed are adequate for the uses, and the proposed use is less intense than the prior Kmart retail business.

The site is located in the G-B (General Business) zone. A Use Variance will be required for the proposed Apartment Building.

The parcel falls within the sewer service area and water service area. Community facilities in and around the site include various utilities, emergency response services, and schools. Underground utilities include a water main, gas main and sewer main identified in JFK Boulevard and Easton Avenue. Above ground utilities include electric, telephone, and cable services.

3.3 Pollution Problems

This new development would not utilize private well water or a septic system; therefore, pollution potential or exposure is limited. Stormwater is to be conveyed to an existing storm sewer found along JFK Boulevard. The use of two water quality structures ensures that with a Removal TSS rate of 50%, the stormwater runoff quality standards are met. Almost 80% of the site is currently impervious surface. Though the impervious coverage will be reduced by 1.46 acres. As a course of construction, the project will implement all the required aspects of a standard Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Plan reviewed and approved through the local Soil Conservation District. Air quality is consistent with central New Jersey and, since no new industrial use is proposed, will not be a factor in the development of the site.

4.0 REQUIRED APPROVALS

The following municipal and agency approvals are required for this project:

- Franklin Township Zoning Board – Preliminary & Final Site Plan with Use Variance
 - a. Franklin Township Engineering
 - b. Franklin Township Planning
 - c. Franklin Township Environmental Commission
 - d. Franklin Township Fire Prevention
 - e. Franklin Township Public Safety
 - f. Franklin Township Public Works
 - g. Franklin Township Shade Tree Commission
- Somerset County Planning Board Site Plan – Preliminary & Final Site Plan
- Somerset-Union Soil Conservation District
- NJDEP Division of Water Quality - RFA
- Franklin Township Sewerage Authority – Approval Required Before NJDEP Submission
- NJDEP Treatment Works – Sanitary Sewer
- Franklin Township Water – Approval Required Before NJDEP Submission
- NJDEP Water Main Extension
- Delaware & Raritan Canal Commission

5.0 IMPACTS & MITIGATION MEASURES

Any potential impacts from this project are expected to be minimal.

5.1 Water Quality

The use of public water and sanitary sewer utilities will ensure that there will be no impacts to downstream water quality. Storm water connections and water quality structures are to NJDEP standards and outlet into the existing drainage system along John F. Kennedy Boulevard.

5.2 Traffic and Air Quality

Traffic impacts were addressed with a separate report; prepared and submitted as part of the Use Variance/Site Plan application.

With respect to air quality, since the proposed development is residential, there will be no discharge to the atmosphere with the exception of heat/hot water furnace exhaust. In addition, since the level of proposed automobile traffic is low, there is no indication that this project will adversely impact air quality.

5.3 Noise

During construction, the use of equipment will result in a temporary increase in ambient noise levels on-site. However, the traffic-related noise on Easton Avenue, as well as the existing noise from nearby commercial uses provides higher ambient noise levels than noise produced from the proposed residential development.

5.4 Undesirable Land Use Patterns

The parcel is surrounded by commercial and residential development. The property fronts on a thoroughfare that has direct access to public transportation and is near commercial facilities. The property does not contain any significant environmental constraints, making it ideally suited for this type of development. The higher density residential land use results in a positive land use pattern as a transitional land use when considering a separation of the single family residential properties to the south and west from the more intense commercial facilities to the north and east of the property.

5.5 Tree Removal

Minor tree removal will be necessary to accommodate the proposed residential development. Retaining the perimeter tree lines and the added landscaping plan will help to mitigate tree removal.

Furthermore, if the proposed plantings incorporate a high percentage of trees that are native to the area, the plantings will partially restore shelter and habitat for generalist wildlife species. Tree removal is an unavoidable impact associated with many developments and an effort has been made when considering the grading of the project to retain as many existing trees as feasible.

5.6 Wildlife Displacement

The displacement of wildlife is unavoidable, as with any development. Since the amount and quality of habitat on this tract is very limited, the species found on-site are typically generalists (i.e., can survive in a variety of disturbances and habitats). No impact on wildlife is anticipated.

5.7 Aesthetic Values

Aesthetic values which are used to visually rank a scene or view are by their subjective nature, not easily measured. With the conversion of the site from an abandoned retail to multi-family, residential development, the aesthetic value will be altered for the better. The implementation of the landscaping schedule and retaining tree lines along the project's perimeters, the project's visual impact is compatible with and comparable to the impacts resulting from the surrounding built environment. The combination of retaining trees wherever feasible and providing new plantings should create an aesthetically pleasing community blending into the surrounding built landscape fabric.

5.8 Displacement of People and Businesses

The construction of new housing partially addresses the need for housing within the metropolitan region. The previous retail use was abandoned; therefore, the project will not displace any businesses.

5.9 Displacement of Viable Farms

This site is not viable for farming and there will be no impact on nearby farms as a result of this project. Infill multifamily projects, such as this project, constitute a more efficient land use and reduce the pressure within the Township and region to convert additional farming operations to residential developments.

5.10 Employment and Property Taxes

This project will provide limited employment opportunities in its construction phase and will generate property taxes for the Township.

5.11 Destruction of Man-made Resources

This project will not result in the destruction of any significant man-made resources. The abandoned Kmart being replaced is a positive development for this property.

5.12 Desirable Community and Regional Growth

The parcel falls within the sewer service area and water service area and lies adjacent to a road network. The parcel does not contain any significant environmental constraints or features. Therefore, this parcel is suited for a higher intensity residential development.

5.13 Public Health and Safety

This project will result in negligible impacts to traffic, air quality, noise, and public utilities. The multi-family residential use does not create a potentially dangerous site and it is highly unlikely that this project poses any risk to public health or safety.

5.14 Soil Erosion and Sediment Control

Any activity exposing soil results in a potential increase of sedimentation and erosion due to surface runoff. The site's gentle topography aids in reducing the erosion potential of the site's soils. A Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Plan will be developed for this application and submitted to the Somerset-Union Soil Conservation District for review and approval. The plan incorporates several methods for mitigating soil erosion and off-site sediment transportation during construction, including silt fence, inlet protection, construction entrance, and temporary and permanent seeding. If temporary stockpiles are created on-site, they will have silt fence perimeters to prevent erosion and sedimentation during the re-grading of the site. Furthermore, the installation of a construction entrance stabilizes soil tracking off the subject site by trucks.

6.0 UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS

The proposed residential development can be designed to minimize the impact of the project on the environment. However, with development, some environmental impacts are unavoidable. Significant landscaping and the removal of impervious coverage are a net positive for the environment with this proposal.

An increase in traffic will ultimately have a minimal impact on the regional air quality along the adjacent roadway network. The traffic report indicates that on balance the residential development will produce less traffic than the prior Kmart department store. The countervailing trend of improved air quality and increased population based traffic volumes results from the more stringent emission control systems required on newer automobiles.

Furthermore, the impervious surface will decrease, and water infiltration increase to underlying aquifers; however, this is negligible due to the soils, clay content, and the depth to the underlying bedrock. NJDEP implemented new Stormwater Management Rules that require all developments to demonstrate no net loss for groundwater infiltration rates. These rules, coupled with the minimized percentage of land coverage the project represents, ensure that any potential decrease caused by the project is negligible.

The project's layout is designed to achieve the applicant's program with the minimum environmental impact as practical. Any negative effect of this development stems from the cumulative effects of many developments within the surrounding region.

7.0 MITIGATION POTENTIAL

Environmental impacts potentially caused by the construction of this residential development have been analyzed at the request of the applicant in a format consistent with the Township's Environmental Assessment Ordinance. The applicant's development plan expects to reduce and/or mitigate the project's potential impact on several components of the environment:

1. Proposed landscaping and retaining the landscaped perimeter along JFK Boulevard as a buffer will provide visual integration of the project with the surrounding environment.
2. Sediment and soil erosion controls will mitigate soil loss and runoff pollution.
3. Road access and site circulation are contemplated with an effort to minimally affect traffic circulation.
4. Energy and water conservation devices may be incorporated into the design of the buildings and other aspects of the project, reducing demand of service.
5. Runoff quality will be improved through the use of the proposed stormwater connections and water quality structures. The project must meet the NJDEP Stormwater Management Rules.

The impacts have been assessed and, where possible, will be mitigated to the maximum extent practical. These mitigation measures have been incorporated into the site development plans. Therefore, the proposed development will not represent a substantial detriment to the surrounding environment or the public welfare.

8.0 PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

Possible alternatives to this project include:

No-build Option: This option would reject a project that is generally consistent with smart growth principles, State Plan policies, and the Township's Master Plan goals and objectives for sustainably efficient redevelopment of underused property. The property is currently surrounded by development and is suitable for this beneficial housing use. The no-build option prevents a landowner from utilizing a property to its potential and would eliminate a viable housing opportunity.

Alternative Layout: Additional layouts were reviewed during the conceptual planning stages of this project. The proposed layout is believed to be the most consistent with the Township's development regulations, as well as the most practical approach to achieving an appropriate land use consistent with the existing land uses while limiting environmental impacts.

A multifamily development on this property constitutes a compatible land use acting as a transitional use between the single family developments south and west and the higher intensity commercial and industrial uses to the east and north.

8.0 REFERENCES

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APPENDIX