

Plainsboro Township

Amended Preliminary/Final Major
Site Plan

Application: P24-07

Memo Date: 11/26/2024

Meeting Date: 12/16/2024

Planning Board Review Memo

Name of Applicant: SBLP Princeton Urban Renewal, LLC, Icon Cafe

Property Owner: SBLP Princeton Urban Renewal, LLC

Type of Application: Amended Preliminary/Final Site Plan Major

Name of Project: Icon Residential at Riverwalk

Property Location: Block 1703, Lot 3.03

Zone: Redevelopment Area for the Princeton HealthCare System
/ARC-Adult Retirement Community District

Present Use of Property: Multifamily and Townhouse Residential

Adjacent Land Uses:

North:	Open Space and CHOP Specialty Care Center
South:	Millstone River
East:	Firmenich Inc.
West:	Merwick Rehab Care Center & Millstone River Park

Background

The applicant, SBLP Princeton Urban Renewal, LLC, is applying for amended preliminary and final major site plan approval to allow certain existing amenities to serve the public.

The subject property is part of a redevelopment area governed by a redevelopment plan entitled Amended Redevelopment Plan for the Princeton HealthCare System at Plainsboro Site, adopted on March 13, 2013. The Amended Redevelopment Plan (Plan) identifies eight separate but interrelated districts within the overall redevelopment area, including the Hospital Medical Office Complex (Princeton Medical Center and Medical Arts Pavilion), the Skilled Nursing Facility (Merwick Rehab Care Center), Public Park (Millstone River Park), Pediatric Medical Office (CHOP Specialty Care Center), Day Care Complex (Discovery Years Daycare and Town Square Adult Daycare), Office/Residential Complex (currently in use for temporary parking in association with new parking garage), and the Hospital Auxiliary District

(Crescent/P10 parking lot). The subject property and the adjacent parcel (Block 1703, Lot 3.02), developed for the Riverwalk Townhouses (39 of 45 units under construction or completed) are located in the Adult Retirement Community or ARC District.

In 2017, the Planning Board granted major site plan and subdivision approval for the Riverview project, an independent living adult community containing a total of 305 dwelling units. The development site was subdivided into two sections, one section to contain 260 rental apartments (including 39 affordable) in a four to five-story building and the other section to contain 45 for-sale townhouse units in eight separate townhouse structures. In addition to the dwelling units in the apartment building, the apartment building was to contain ground floor parking along with various amenity functions throughout the building intended to serve the building's residents. Such amenities included a library, lounge, café/bistro, salon, theater, pool, fitness, activities rooms, dining room, game room, card room and outdoor dining. The building was initially known as "Ovation at Riverwalk," but was subsequently renamed "Icon at Riverwalk" as it is currently known.

According to the applicant, the Icon at Riverwalk was completed in 2021, and the final certificate of occupancy for the 260 apartments, including the affordable units, was issued by the Township in October 2021. Unfortunately, the building opened during the COVID-19 pandemic, when seniors and retired individuals in the area were not looking for new living arrangements. According to the applicant, approximately 163 of the 260 rental units are currently occupied and most of the amenities are used by the residents, including the indoor swimming pool, golf simulator, indoor movie theater, pickleball court, art studio, piano lounge, as well as other recreational facilities such as the fitness and yoga studios. Due to unanticipated financial constraints, however, the food and beverage amenities have remained inactive or otherwise underutilized.

Project Description

Recently the applicant has been presented with two unique opportunities to activate the food and beverage amenities in the building through a leasing arrangement with third party vendors. According to the applicant, one third-party vendor would operate a high-quality coffee shop/bistro in the inactive café/bistro space in the building. The applicant believes this would be a welcomed addition to the existing amenities serving the property. The café/ bistro contains approximately 1,702 square feet of space with direct access to the surface parking lot. The contemplated hours of operation for the café/bistro would be 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., seven days per week. The number of individual employees will range from three to four employees on any shift, with some minor fluctuations based on business volume.

In addition to the currently inactive café/bistro, the second floor of the building contains a spacious (10,000± sq. ft.) state-of-the-art kitchen that was originally designed to serve daily meals to the residents of the building. According to the applicant, the main kitchen facility is not utilized on a routine basis. The applicant is requesting that such kitchen facility be leased to an experienced third-party operator for the preparation of reduced-cost meals primarily intended for lower-income elderly and cost-conscience seniors. The applicant believes that such use of the underutilized kitchen is a worthwhile opportunity to provide a fully operational food amenity to residents, by offering convenient affordable meals, especially for those occupying the thirty-nine affordable units in the building.

The applicant states that the kitchen will operate from early morning to late afternoon, five days per week (Monday through Friday), and that based on their current projections, the kitchen operator will have approximately five employees in the kitchen and another three to five drivers for deliveries.

Visitors to the café/bistro will utilize the existing 28 surface parking spaces closest to the café/bistro and along the side of the apartment building. Staff noticed existing signs reading "Model Parking" in the parking area closest to the café/bistro. The applicant stated that these signs will be removed so that these spaces will be available to patrons of the café/bistro.

Employees and staff for both third-party vendors will park in available spaces in the garage. Apart from Icon residents, the only visitors to the kitchen will be those individuals who prepare or deliver the meals. The vans that will be delivering to one or more non-profit organizations will arrive at a scheduled time each weekday and use the separate access lane and loading docks located on the east side of the Icon building.

While both the café/bistro and the building's main kitchen facility are recognized as accessory uses to this residential apartment building, according to the applicant, neither the café/bistro nor the main kitchen facility can operate and be financially viable without the ability to service the public beyond the residents in the building.

According to the proposed amendments to the current Redevelopment Plan, although permitted accessory uses on the property are generally limited to the use and benefit of the residents, staff and guests of the ARC (Icon and the Townhouse units):

"The Planning Board on a case-by-case basis and for good cause shown is expressly authorized to allow the building's food amenities to serve the public, upon such terms and conditions as the Board in its discretion may deem reasonably necessary to address any impacts of the expanded use of the facility or facilities in question."

In response to this amendment to the Redevelopment Plan, the applicant is now requesting a minor change to the March 2017 site plan approval (P16-12) for the ARC project, whereby the café/bistro and the main kitchen facility would be allowed to be operated to serve the public as well as the residents of the ARC.

The applicant believes the existing improvements on the property can readily accommodate the proposed expanded use of the café/bistro and the main kitchen facility without creating any adverse conditions or negative impacts on the surrounding community. In fact, no development or construction is proposed in connection with this application, as both third-party vendors will utilize the existing café/bistro and main kitchen facility in the Icon building.

The applicant states that it is expected that most of the "public" patrons of the café/bistro will be employees and guests of the other districts within the Redevelopment Area, who will visit the property from the various walking paths throughout the Redevelopment Area.

The third-party operator of the main kitchen facility will prepare meals for residents in the Icon building and contract with one or more non-profit organizations who provide meals for lower-income elderly throughout the community.

With respect to parking and traffic concerns, there are 390 garage parking spaces and 28 surface parking spaces for a total of 418 constructed parking spaces on the Icon property. The Board also approved another 34 banked spaces, bringing the total number of possible spaces to 452 approved parking spaces. Approximately 165 of the 390 garage parking spaces are currently used by residents, guests, and staff. Based on the occupancy rates and corresponding anticipated employee needs, 272 parking spaces will be necessary for the Icon residents, guests, and staff at full occupancy of the apartment building. The applicant notes that the remaining constructed parking spaces (146) are more than sufficient to address the calculated parking demands involving the public and outside entities visiting the property.

The applicant wishes to emphasize that there is no new development proposed or variances sought by this application. Both uses proposed by the applicant will adhere to the intent of the recently amended Redevelopment Plan and comply with the zoning requirements and bulk standards applicable to the Adult Retirement Community District.

See applicant's project narrative for additional details on the project.

REDEVELOPMENT PLAN SUPPLEMENTAL PLANS AND INFORMATION

Pursuant to Section 9.2.1 of the Redevelopment Plan, in addition to submitting plans and information required under the site plan regulations, applications for new development in the Redevelopment Area are also required to provide specific supplemental plans and information; including plans and information that fall under the following categories:

- A. General Land Use Plan
- B. Circulation Plan and Traffic Impact Analysis
- C. Open Space Plan
- D. Utility Plan
- E. Stormwater Management Plan
- F. Environmental Inventory
- G. Community Facility Plan
- H. Housing Plan
- I. Local Service Plan
- J. Fiscal Impact
- K. Phasing Plan

It is the DRC and staff opinion that the applicant's response fulfills the submission requirement for such information pursuant to the requirement for same in the Redevelopment Plan.

For further information on the applicant's response to this requirement, see the applicant's discussion on this requirement located after their site plan check list waiver comments.

WAIVER OF SITE PLAN CHECK LIST SUBMISSION ITEMS

The applicant has submitted the required site plan review checklist (Form 14). A total of thirty-three submission site plan checklist waivers have been requested, with a brief description and justification provided for each. The DRC and staff have considered these requests and are of the opinion that such waivers are reasonable and support their being granted.

SITE PLAN COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Consistency with Amended Redevelopment Plan:

The applicant has documented how the proposed development complies with all relevant provisions in the Redevelopment Plan.

The applicant's consistency review of the Redevelopment Plan includes compliance with the following areas of the Plan:

- Goals and Objectives
- Land Use Plan, including permitted uses and bulk standards
- Circulation
- Open Space
- Design Guidelines and Standards, including general design standards related to the ARC district; building design and materials; parking, including required parking ratios and surface and structured parking design; outdoor storage and mechanical equipment screening; green design, including buildings and lighting; signage; landscaping; and utilities, stormwater, solid waste/recycling, and infrastructure standards.
- Plan Phasing

It is the DRC and staff opinion that the applicant's response demonstrates that the proposed application is substantially consistent with the applicable provisions in the amended Redevelopment Plan.

For further information on the applicant's response to the issue of consistency of the proposed application with the Redevelopment Plan, see the applicant's comments located after their project narrative.

B. Parking and Traffic Issues:

1. The apartment building requires 390 parking spaces based upon the amended redevelopment plan ratio of 1.5 spaces for each of the 260 units. Staff note that 418 parking spaces were constructed at the site for the proposed apartment building which include 390 structured parking spaces and 28 surface parking

spaces. The parking study submitted with this application projects that the public use of the café/bistro will generate a peak parking need of 24 spaces for a total parking requirement of 414 spaces, which results in a surplus of 4 spaces at the site. It should also be noted that the approved plans for this project contain an additional 34 landbanked parking spaces that could be constructed if deemed necessary.

2. According to the applicant, employee parking will be assigned within the existing apartment building garage utilizing the existing parking spaces that have not been assigned to a resident and in locations that are convenient for the respective employees of each operation.
3. With regard to traffic, the Applicant's Engineer projects a peak trip generation for the café/bistro of 16 vehicles in the AM peak hour and 15 vehicles in the PM peak hour based upon the rates in the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) Trip Generation Manual, 11th Edition; and opines that these figures are conservative as they do not take credit for the amount of pedestrian visitors that are expected to visit the site from adjacent developments. The Applicant's Engineer also notes that these figures would not impact the adjacent roadway system and would not warrant additional roadway improvements or traffic signal improvements. Staff take no exception to these conclusions and we note that further warrants analyses for traffic signalization at the entrance to the site are required at 75% and 100% occupancy per the original approval.

C. Landscape/Screening Issues:

In December 2021, the site engineer for the applicant (Andrew French of French & Parrello Assoc.), indicated that the applicant wished to have the Township consider a minor change to approved landscape screening of the cooling tower on the east side of the building that included Red Cedar evergreen plantings. Instead of such plantings, the applicant proposed to install a ten-foot-high board-on-board fence painted grey to match the building façade. This change to the plan has been implemented except for the painting of the new screen fence to match the color of the Icon building west of the fence. Staff recommend the fence not be painted, but instead stained an opaque gray colored stain matching or closely matching the color of the Icon building. The applicant has agreed to this recommendation.

D. Barrier Free Access:

The barrier free accessibility requirements, including the required number of handicapped parking spaces and the distribution of the parking spaces within the parking deck, shall be as determined by the Township Construction Official. Any sign details for barrier free parking spaces associated with the proposed café/bistro use shall be consistent with the current sign design details applicable to the Princeton Forrestal Center.

E. Signage Issues:

The current submission for staff review does not include any signage for the proposed café/bistro. All site signage shall be consistent with the guidance provided by Section 5.5 (Signage) of the current Amended Redevelopment Plan. As noted in the Plan, signage design shall be driven by the need for simplicity and clarity in communications. Exterior signage shall be primarily for wayfinding purposes rather than advertising. Building mounted signage may be tailored to meet the individual needs of future users; however, except for the hospital, such signage shall be designed to be visible primarily to on-site visitors. All signage shall be of high quality and shall complement the overall design character of the redevelopment area. All signage shall be subject to the review and approval of the Planning Board staff.

F. Solid Waste Disposal Issues:

Under the original March 2017 site plan approval, there was testimony that solid waste disposal would be handled by a private company and that the solid waste would be stored within the apartment building in the trash room. The applicant has confirmed that this will remain the case for the proposed uses involving the café/bistro and the main kitchen facility.

G. Miscellaneous Issues:

1. The applicant states that the kitchen will operate from early morning to late afternoon, five days per week (Monday through Friday). Staff asked the applicant to explain how the kitchen will provide meals to the building's residents and what arrangements are being considered for meals on weekends? In response, the applicant stating that –

“Residents will pre-select their meals and desired days in advance. Specifically, menus will be provided to residents approximately 30 days in advance and follow the nutritional guidelines of the Older Americans Act. These guidelines are designed to promote better health and well-being for older individuals through improved nutrition. Meals will be prepared in the commercial kitchen each weekday morning for the residents to pick up at locations designated by ICON Riverwalk management. While the commercial kitchen will not operate on weekends, residents may order pre-made meals for Saturday or Sunday, or both, that will be ready for pick up on Friday afternoons.”

2. The proposed use of the café/bistro and the main kitchen facility shall be as set forth in this application (see project description above). Any change from the terms of such use shall be subject to review by Planning Board staff, which may result in the need to return to the Planning Board to consider an amendment to the terms of this application.

AGENCY APPROVALS AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS

- A. Unless determined otherwise, the applicant shall obtain the following approvals or amended approvals by relevant outside agencies, including:
1. Middlesex County Planning Board
 2. Middlesex County Health Dept
 3. All other agencies having jurisdiction
- B. Copies of applications and approvals, certifications, permits or letters of no interest, waivers or exemptions, as may be required, shall be provided as a condition of final approval and prior to release of the approved site plan and site disturbance.
- C. Township offices and staff that may have review jurisdiction involving this application or improvements related thereto, include:

- Planning and Zoning Department: Ron Yake,
Planner and Zoning Officer
609-799-0909, ext. 1503
- Planning Board Engineer's Office: Louis Ploskonka
CME Associates
732-727-8000
- Code Enforcement/Building Division: Brian Miller, Construction Official
609-799-0909, ext. 1203; and
Bill Gorka, Fire Official
609-799-0909, ext. 1208
- County Health Department: County Health Inspector
609-799-0909, ext. 1219

Any approval shall be conditioned upon: A) the submission of revised plans in accordance with the above comments, as well as additional detailed comments to be provided based upon a review of the various reports and plans prior to final site plan approval; B) proof of approval, waiver or exemption from all agencies having jurisdiction; C) the construction of off-site improvements if deemed necessary by the Township Committee; D) the payment of any outstanding escrow fees and property taxes; and E) the applicant's engineer providing the Township with an estimate for the cost of improvements in order that the performance guarantee and inspection fee can be calculated.

MLUL Clock:

Application Completeness:	December 2, 2024
Planning Board Action:	March 7, 2025