

Comments on Updated Typologies Prepared by SOM

Community Design Commission 3/11/24

GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT

The updated Typologies Document was sent to the CDC on March 6. The report analyzes different development types from more than 22 cities throughout the United States. The major additions to the document were explanatory statements from pages 4-8 which outline how the Typologies Document is intended to be used.

Specifically the Typologies Document will serve as a Reference that is intended to inform Design Standards or Guidelines that will be incorporated into the Updated Land Use Management Ordinance (LUMO).

In addition it will provide a “Best Practices” resource for Development Review that will be outside of the LUMO’s administrative parameter. For example the LUMO Update will define which developments will be “As Of Right” and subject only to Staff’s review of the project’s conformance with Zoning Regulations. We believe this As Of Right provision warrants further discussion.

Although many projects will still be subject to the Planning Commission and Town Council’s approval, the Typologies Document implies that it will serve as the Resource. We believe that it is more the role of the LUMO and the Design Standards which will have been incorporated therein.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT

Many of our comments are amplifications of elements listed in the Document while still others are new and are all listed and described below.

- 1) Only two of the 22 Cities could be considered “College Towns”. SOM should explore developments in similar sized communities which are also College Towns in fast growth, technology driven economies.

- 2) Although the report does look at various parking structures, more is required to demonstrate that any exposed parking deck is unacceptable and must be adequately screened.
- 3) In addition, since surface parking is typical for strip retail and garden apartments and although the document discusses them, more detail is needed with an emphasis on mature planting especially shade trees. SOM's proposal to have at least 25% of on-site parking lots covered with photovoltaic panels is strongly supported by the CDC and note that it is most supportable in office and apartment developments.
- 4) Although the document does touch on office developments, we believe that more examples are needed. The market for office space in general has cooled but not so for Life Sciences. 306 Franklin and the UNC proposed Life Sciences on Rosemary are good examples of projects where the Town could have used comparisons for guidance.
- 5) The provision of On-Site and Off-site Open Space is of particular importance for place making and meaningful community engagement. The report states the need to encourage public use by providing seating, landscaping and surface treatments but more is needed including sculptures, statues, fountains and most importantly, shade either from trees or other means. The document does show some photos of people resting in these spaces. Perhaps some photos or sketches showing the importance of human scale in how people can interact with fountains, water features, and memorials would be helpful.
- 6) The report calls for articulation at Ground Floors including retail displays, art-work and landscaping. We would add planters, pergolas, arcades and awnings showing their relationship to pedestrians. Also, active private outdoor uses, such as restaurants need clear separation from the public sidewalks.
- 7) The report addresses Service Areas and Utilities by stating that they should be shielded from primary pedestrian entrances and that attaching exposed utilities should be avoided.

We believe that all utilities, including transformers, condensers, meter boxes and the like should not be seen from the street, sidewalk or parking lots and all these elements must be screened.

- 8) We understand that The Public Works Department is in the process of preparing a streetscape design for Franklin Street. Perhaps SOM ought to provide input especially as to creating nodes of public meeting spaces.
- 9) Regarding especially large residential buildings we recommend the following be added:
 - Limit frontages along sidewalks to 350',
 - Any building must have set back and height variation,
 - Buildings should step down to the street,
 - Abrupt changes in color and materials should be avoided.
- 10) As a separate undertaking we recommend that the Town create a Typology Analysis for major streets in Chapel Hill using a similar approach as the SOM effort. This analysis would look at medians, Street Furniture, Tree species and other landscape elements as appropriate.