

06-09-2021 Town Council Meeting Responses to Council Questions

ITEM #15: Consider an Application for Special Use Permit Modification for University Place, 201 S. Estes Drive

Council Question:

Pursuant to the Staff Technical Report, will the applicant commit to working with staff to develop a drop off/pickup zones or areas for the Senior Shuttle and EZ Rider vehicles, along with some wayfinding signage to help users locate these vehicles and the main bus stop?

Applicant Response:

Yes.

Council Question:

Pursuant to the Staff Technical Report, will the applicant commit to reserving space/right of way for a BRT station and pull-off along the property frontage on Fordham Blvd between the current exit on Fordham and the Estes intersection?

Applicant Response:

Yes.

Council Question:

Have the Farmers Market and the applicant come to an agreement? If not, when do they anticipate reaching one?

Applicant Response:

We received feedback from the market's board members last week after providing them with the updated location and concept and they were "thrilled with the direction this is heading". There has been no expectation from either party that a new agreement would be signed and one of the follow up questions/comments from them was "Any possibility for a longer term lease once all this is complete? This is a detail that can be worked out later but just something to think about" which further demonstrates this. We're committed to keeping them on site and providing a space that meets their needs and allows for future growth/expansion.

Council Question:

Pursuant to the Staff Technical Report, does the applicant agree to the stipulation on bicycle parking monitoring?

Applicant Response:

Yes.

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Council Question:

Of the 250 new trees the applicant is proposing, how many are canopy, how many understory?

Applicant Response:

About 2/3 of the trees being added are proposed to be canopy trees with the other 1/3 being understory.

Council Question:

If the Council agrees to a modification of tree canopy standards on site, can we obtain a payment in lieu for the rest of the required canopy?

Staff Response:

The applicant has requested a reduction to the tree canopy coverage to 20 percent. Previously, the Town did have a payment-in-lieu for tree canopy mitigation fee of \$500 per tree. It is possible to work with the applicant regarding a payment-in-lieu.

Council Question:

Council requested that the CDC review and comment on the design guidelines; has this happened yet? Right now, p. 179 says "Following action by the Council, the Design Standards would be reviewed by the Community Design Commission." (Stipulation 7 on p. 201 refers to this also.) I think the interest was in having the standards reviewed by the CDC before a Council decision on the application.

Staff Response:

The Community Design Commission recommended approval of the block plan proposed for UPlace with the expectation that the Design Standards would return to the CDC for additional review. Due to the time constraints, it was not possible for the CDC to fully review the Design Standards prior to Council possible action.

Council Question:

Is it correct that the design guidelines for UPlace are not town guidelines, but the developer's own proposed standards?

Staff Response:

That is correct, the design guidelines were drafted by the developer.

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Council Question:

In their recent letter, the applicant refers frequently to the town's urban designer approving their various proposals, but very few details are given. Will we have a chance to hear Mr. Peterson's specific opinions and ask him questions at the Council meeting?

Staff Response:

The comments from the Town's Urban Designer, Brian Peterson, are attached.

Council Question:

Has the townwide traffic model identified any additional impacts of the UPlace development (mainly at Franklin and Estes) that will need to be mitigated by this project?

Staff Response:

As part of the Traffic Impact Analysis, Synchro and TransModeler were used to assess the traffic impacts associated with the site redevelopment. The addition of a southbound right-turn lane along Franklin Street at Estes Drive has been identified as a long-term improvement at the intersection to help address current and projected operational deficiencies at that location. This right-turn lane is not a specific requirement of the applicant as it is an existing deficiency at the intersection. Townwide Traffic Model also predicted the same results.

Council Question:

I appreciate that the applicant has agreed that buildings in Pod C should be a minimum of two stories. Have they agreed that these are two functional stories, not simply taller buildings? Would they consider this requirement in other pods as single-story buildings are redeveloped?

Applicant Response:

Yes, we are proposing that the two story requirement be a minimum of two functional/occupiable levels. We could include Pod A in this requirement but not Pod D given the limitations to building footprint due to the proximity and sensitivity to the floodplain.

Council Question:

If the SUP were denied, how long would the applicant have to wait to come back with another SUP application? How long if they changed to a development agreement?

Staff Response:

If the Special Use Permit is denied, the Land Use Management Ordinance, Section 4.5.3(i) states that a similar application shall not be accepted for approval, affecting the same property or a portion thereof, until 12 months have elapsed from the date of denial. If the applicant chose a different process, like a development agreement, we do not believe that this time limit would apply.

University Place: Pod A**Design Discussion: 5/14/21** *(with planning staff and development team)*

Submitted by Brian Peterson, AIA, Urban Designer, Town of Chapel Hill

Site Plan

1. All frontages along the SW, NW & NE sides of the building should be designed to be attractive, interesting and comfortable places for pedestrians. This can be accomplished by providing retail space (or residential amenity space that presents an active use character to the sidewalk), landscape features, or architectural features that create pedestrian scale along the frontages.
2. The “service drive” between the new building and the existing mall is not seen as a primary pedestrian route. Even so, it was suggested that the design team consider simple ways to enliven the blank wall of the movie theater, such as painting murals, or providing ad space such as movie posters.
3. It was pointed out by the design team that there is retail space provided at the NE corner of the building, facing the existing mall and parking area. This is important in continuing the pedestrian character by wrapping it around the corner to then tie in with the sidewalks and entrances on the back side of the mall.
4. A market hall/shelter structure has been added along the SW façade. This helps establish a focal point for activity at an important entrance point to the redeveloping mall property. Other major entrance points to the mall should include some kind of gateway feature as well, to help interface the redeveloped mall with the surrounding community.

Architecture/Massing

5. The height of the building would likely fit in as other buildings of similar height are constructed over time along the other side of Willow Drive, if those properties were redeveloped in a like manner.
6. Agreed that a “pass through” type corridor from Willow to the back of the building, along the parking structure would not provide benefit in this situation. The building is designed as a “perimeter block” when the emphasis is creating a pedestrian realm on the outer edges of the building.
7. The jogs, insets, and courtyards along the building perimeter along Willow are vital in providing scale and breaking up the mass of the building. Suggested flipping the U-shaped building at the SW corner which currently has the courtyard facing the mall, so that the courtyard faces Willow. This would break up the massing along Willow even more.
8. Along the Willow façade, the jogging of mass creates many corner conditions. Suggested exploiting the corners as small tower-like elements or vertical bays. The repetition of vertical elements could help animate the façade as one passes along on Willow.