

Aura South Elliott
Urban Designer Comments 12-19-24

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

The following comments are in reference to site plan drawing C2.00, from the applicant's most recent submittal. Two meetings have been held with the applicant to review the project, one focusing upon site layout, and the other on preliminary architectural concepts.

1. The building massing, which recedes back around two courtyards, has been broken down into components that reduce the apparent bulk of the building from the street.
2. The courtyard spaces create opportunities to provide pedestrian-related facilities and activities, effectively drawing people in from the sidewalk edges.
3. The provision of retail space along the courtyard frontages, can also help activate these spaces.
4. Because of the change in grade, the courtyard spaces can feature terraces and level changes that can provide seating walls and other transitional landscape spaces to make them welcoming and inviting from the sidewalk.
5. The greenway connection from the end of Couch Road through to South Elliott was discussed. For an earlier, preliminary concept, it was suggested to make the breezeway space more inviting as far as the width and height, to avoid a "tunnel effect." This suggestion was implemented in the current submittal, which helps tie together the greenway space to the west, with the courtyard, and the sidewalk frontage along South Elliott.
6. Blank walls along the interior elevations of the breezeway should be avoided. Windows, articulated bays, or other means of establishing pedestrian scale within this space should be provided. The breezeway ceiling should have a degree of articulation as well, and not be one unbroken expanse. Creative lighting could also help in this regard.
7. It was suggested to landscape the edge of the stormwater pond along the greenway to engage it with the pedestrian character of the greenway, for example, by adding some benches along the top of the pond directly adjacent to the greenway path.
8. Pedestrian scale lighting should be utilized along the entire greenway path, within the breezeway, and within the courtyard, to ensure a safe, comfortable, and attractive pedestrian experience.
9. Architectural character: architectural drawings were not a part of the drawing submittal I examined for this review, but in an earlier review meeting with the applicant, preliminary elevations and perspective drawings were discussed, and indicated an articulation and material allocation strategy that reinforced the massing strategy of breaking down the mass of the building with vertical elements. The first-floor edges along the courtyards and sidewalk frontages were beginning to suggest a level of articulation and scale necessary along the most publicly accessible faces of the building. The ultimate architectural character of these ground floor frontages will be an important detail to refine as the elevations are further developed in subsequent design iterations.