

701 MLK Blvd.

Urban Designer Comments 07-30-25

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

Urban design meetings have been held with the applicant team several times during the plan preparation process. These comments refer to recent drawings prepared as part of the latest submittal package.

1. The building massing follows the edges of the irregular shaped site, with an appropriate focus on the corner, at Longview and MLK Blvd., where the building pulls back and provides a plaza that leads to the main building entrance. Because of the shape of the site, the façade frontage along MLK Blvd. pulls back and away from the street edge, visually lessening the impact of the building massing.
2. The plaza takes advantage of the sloping topography by providing a series of levels and steps, which can be used for seating or small gathering areas. A major architectural feature, the entrance canopy, is an appropriate gesture to assist in defining the area and establishing design character and scale for this important and visible urban location.
3. The frontage along MLK Blvd. continues this landscape approach. Terracing and seating walls are indicated, which can encourage pedestrian use.
4. The building has a well-defined base, middle and top articulation. The undulating parapet gives the building a lively profile as one passes by in a vehicle or as a pedestrian.
5. The massing is not one unitary block; differing “facets” are defined by building color and material selection to help break down the scale of the mass. Taller brick massings at the corners help bookend the main massing element of the building along the MLK and Longview frontages.
6. Massing is further broken down and articulated by vertical bands of projecting balconies and balcony recesses, along with vertical groupings of windows and spandrel panels.
7. Large expanses of glass near the corner plaza help provide necessary façade transparency at the urban corner, and allow a blending of interior and exterior space, helping to create a more inviting entrance character to the building. The expanses of ground level glass continue along the MLK Blvd. frontage as well, providing a similar experience.
8. There are some large expanses of unadorned solid walls along the Longview pedestrian frontage, which could be good opportunities for providing murals or other art pieces, to further enhance the pedestrian character. One area in particular that could benefit from this approach is adjacent to the stepping terraced area, on the wall surface just west of the large window and where the solid exit door is located.
9. The façade area of the exposed parking garage, as it emerges out of the sloping site, is an important architectural surface to articulate correctly. The elevations indicate this is being addressed by the creation of vertical bays with window-like openings covered by louvers and railings which continue the rhythm of the retail and lobby window bays.