

South Columbia Street Annex

Chapel Hill is determined to mitigate the affects of Climate Change by altering its transportation approach, increasing density to mitigate the carbon footprint of its citizens and to inspire open public spaces that are planted with trees to provide shade, reducing the heat island effect and to provide carbon sinks within the city limits. The proposed Columbia St. Annex provides the opportunity to meet all of these goals with some alterations to the requirements of the outdated Land Use Management Ordinance. The project also provides eight affordable housing units, based on 8% of the total constructed.

The site of the South Columbia Street Annex is a difficult building site due to the elevation differential across the site, a perennial stream through the middle of the site and the site being located on a congested entry road to Chapel Hill to the East and a ramp to access Highway 54 West on the south side.

The stream recently had its classification changed from variant to perennial requiring a 50 foot setback for construction as well as reduced areas of land disturbance and impervious surface in the Managed and Upland areas that drain into the stream bed. The proposed design locates the building and parking in the southeast corner of the property on the Highway 54 ramp and Columbia street. This location preserves the wooded western 40% of the property and provides protection for the stream. There is some encroachment proposed into the Managed and Upland stream drainage areas. The end result being an impervious surface increase in the Midland zone of 5,380 square feet and in the Upland zone of 13,650 square feet. To mitigate the run-off from the building and impervious surface increase in these areas, an underground detention system is proposed and stream bed restoration will also be provided.

The proposed parking will be a combination of parking below the structure and flat-lot parking behind the street presentation. The elevation differential across the site is to be mitigated by retaining walls. The eastern side will have a poured concrete retaining wall of 10-14 feet to support Columbia Street and the Plaza that engages the street. The western side of the proposed building/parking precinct will be supported by a segmented retaining wall of 16-25 feet. This taller wall will face the interior of the property.

Chapel Hill has a goal of 33% of town transportation to be public transport, biking and walking by 2050. The developer is requesting a reduction of 50% of the required parking and proposes an increase in bicycle storage, a majority of which will be available at the main entrance. There is a Public Transport stop on the east side of Columbia Street and a Bus Rapid Transit stop is planned for the future. The project will trigger sidewalk improvements on the west side of Columbia Street and an additional pedestrian crosswalk from the buildings Plaza where it engages the street. The crosswalks will have pedestrian beacons to facilitate safer passage. The traffic reports for south Columbia Street are trending downward for the last two assessments from 17K to 14K trips per day. The Columbia Street Annex will provide housing for essential workers at UNC Memorial Hospital and the University.

The structure is to be PV 'ready' at completion. The Planning Commission prefers that the building have a rooftop array installed at completion of construction. We also hope that the building is built to its maximum allowable height, to maximize the number of affordable units and to take advantage of the southwestern exposure above the tree canopy that covers 40% of the overall property.

The Planning Commission approved the proposed development because it met many of the Proposals in the soon to be implemented Climate Action Plan, made good use of the tenets of Urban infill that Chapel Hill espouses, and advances the Town's goal of housing Choice.

Climate action requires new approaches and urgency. The South Columbia Street Annex provides an alternative lifestyle for residents and newcomers to the area, and the members of the Advisory Board encourage its passage, after all, we cannot bring about change with the thinking that got us to this point.