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Planning for the Future

May 20, 2021

Judy Johnson
Town of Chapel Hill Planning & Sustainability
405 Martin Luther King Jr Blvd.
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

RE: Project Aura Chapel Hill – Estes at MLK
Conditional Zoning – Response to Council and Public Comments and Questions

Dear Judy,

The Aura Chapel Hill project was presented to Council at the virtual Public Hearing on May 12th. Our design and development team members were able to address many of the questions raised by Council members during the hearing. However, there were several comments and questions provided by Council and the public during and after the hearing to which our team did not have an opportunity to respond. We are writing to address these additional questions and comments before Council continues the Public Hearing at their May 26th meeting.

Several issues were raised by more than one Council member and member of the public, so we have tried to group together and summarize these questions here for ease of reading. Please let us know if you, your colleagues on staff, or members of Council have any further questions you would like us to address on May 26th or prior.

Are there additional measures that we can take to manage stormwater beyond the current Town design requirements? These might include more on-site storage/filtration, reducing impervious surface, use of pervious pavers, and/or directing runoff to naturalized areas

The design team has looked at these and the mechanical measures proposed as part of the project design, and how they will actually perform and if they can be made more effective. As currently designed those measures fully manage the pre development vs post development runoff rate for the 1, 2- and 25-year storm, and the runoff volume for the 2-year storm, as prescribed by Town rules. After re-running the calculations, we further find that we are also managing some of the additional runoff volumes for the 50- and 100-year storm events...thus exceeding the current Town standards. We feel that the most effective way to further address the concerns we heard from the Council and downstream property owners is to add at least one of the additional above ground measures that Council suggested, and also fully manage the 50-year storm event

Can parking be reduced?

We have looked again at our parking rates, and have confirmed we have an extremely low number relative to industry standards, and 20 percent less than the parking allowed by the Chapel Hill ordinance.

- The apartment units are parked at an average rate of 1.25 per unit. We expect that our residents will use the bus system for work and some other activities, but cars (and a place to store them) are still necessary for most people, for at least part of their lives.
- 100 spaces are intended for the commercial area (half general retail, half restaurants). In order for the retail to be successful, our parking consultant has determined that these are the rates needed for the immediate future. This demand likely will diminish over time, but for now, this parking is necessary.
- Almost all of the 100 spaces for the townhomes are located in personal garages, most of which are accessed from the alleys.
- About 275 of the proposed spaces are either below grade or in garages meaning they are not contributing to impervious surface.
- The “upper level” of the parking in the apartment block can be converted to other uses as demand for parking decreases.

The Building seems very close to Estes, and are the trails/sidewalks/landscape verge drawn accurately?

The multi-use facilities along Estes are drawn per the dimensions provided by the Town.... those being a 5' landscape strip between the curb and sidewalk, a 5' sidewalk, and a 6' bike path. The distance from the buildings to the edge of the bike paths varies considerably because the building is not parallel to the street, but at the narrowest there are a few corners 12' from the edge of the sidewalk, with other areas 30' or more away from the sidewalk. We feel that all of these dimensions are in keeping with both turn of the century Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND) patterns, and current TND design principles. Estes Drive has a very suburban development pattern. The transition across the Aura frontage from the “Woodlands” to the east and the residential and commercial buildings at the center and west creates a transition to the less suburban feel envisioned in the Central West Plan. Exhibits illustrating this will be provided prior to the Council Meeting

Can more/all of the affordable units be offered at a 65% or Lower AMI rental rate? Can you accept Housing Vouchers? Can the 5 Affordable Townhomes be located on-site rather than off-site?

The applicant will provide two scenarios to weigh the relative costs of meeting lower-income thresholds. Both scenarios provide on-site townhouses for sale.

Will we allow a vehicular connection across the Rummel property to Somerset?

The developer believes that cut-through traffic from Somerset through Aura is bad for pedestrians and users of the public spaces in Aura. However, an easement to the east property line will be provided to the town so that the town can provide that connection at a future date, should the town decide that the public interest is served with this connection.

Can we set aside some area for current/future bike share parking, particularly near the BRT Station?

Yes.

Can the Council approve a higher amount of Commercial Floor Area in the event that future market demand would support it? Will the Applicant commit to making some of the residential space “convertible” to commercial in the future?

The applicant embraces the idea of having the ability to do additional commercial in the future. We will commit to making a portion of the residential square footage convertible.

Can we set designate some parking/drop off zones for ride share, Smart Cars?

Yes.

Can we commit to making some of the larger roof areas solar ready?

Yes. HVAC units are being grouped on the roof in a manner to maximize the opportunity for solar panels.

The conduits necessary to facilitate wiring and space in the electrical rooms for inverters and transfer switches will be provided.

Please clarify your commitment to constructing the BRT Station?

Conversations are ongoing with CH Transit folks to design a BRT station that is in a style and feel that is in character with the proposed development. This would be an important component of Placemaking for a Transit Oriented Development. It is our proposal that we design and construct the BRT station with the Developer contributing \$100,000 of those costs

Thank you and your colleagues for your ongoing work on this project, and please do let us know if you have received any additional questions, or whether more information from our team would be helpful prior to the upcoming Council vote.

Sincerely,
CJTpa

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Daniel A. Jewell", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Daniel A. Jewell, RLA, ASLA
President

Cc: Ryan Stewart
Sean Gleason
Susana Dancy
Chris Bauer