

SUMMARY OF A CONCEPT PLAN REVIEW  
150 E. ROSEMARY STREET  
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION  
December 8, 2020

The Historic District Commission (HDC) conducted a concept review for 150 E. Rosemary Street on December 8, 2020. The project proposed demolition of the Wallace Deck in order to construct a new six to eight-story office building as well as green space. Key points made by members of the Commission about the concept plan include:

- Commissioner Murphy appreciated the architectural expression. Given the site's proximity to the local historic district immediately to the east and south and the design of the buildings on the opposite side of Rosemary Street, he recommended the use of traditional red brick. He found that the eight-story proposal was overpowering to the commercial buildings along Franklin Street and would dwarf the Post Office. He found the seven-story building to be less imposing. He liked the idea of opening up the corner of Rosemary and Henderson Streets as it was a dead pedestrian corner due to the height of the existing retaining walls.
- Commissioner Gurlitz echoed Murphy's sentiments. He loved the existing magnolia tree that was proposed to be removed in the parklet, but he thought new plantings could be provided. He was supportive of a building six or seven stories in height. He supported the design that called for a four-story masonry block base to connect with nearby brick structures. He thought red brick or terracotta could be utilized to compliment neighboring buildings. He was also supportive of the four-story element at the façade as it would be sympathetic to the Chapel Hill streetscape and recommended the design team explore the three-story element option further. Gurlitz also suggested that the applicant find a way to display the research-oriented use of the building as a kind of museum that would make it friendly to walk past.
- Commissioner McCormick also expressed concerns about an eight-story building overwhelming the Post Office. She was also supportive of a four-story masonry element that would reflect existing buildings on Franklin Street. She thought different materials above the fourth story would help differentiate the building and a lighter material, such as glass, may help the building from overwhelming the Post Office.
- Commissioner Van de Velde agreed that seven stories was the best height as it allowed the rear elevation to be articulated further and add interest to the Franklin Street streetscape. She also supported the use of terra cotta, but thought it might not need to be the same color as the terra cotta proposed for the parking deck at 125 E. Rosemary Street. She disagreed with Gurlitz and thought the magnolia tree should be preserved and suggested that pathways need not be straight. She thought the design needed to relate to both the bank building and the adjacent historic districts.
- Commissioner Stiefbold agreed with the other commissioners that the scale of the building should be limited to six to seven stories. She encouraged the developer to incorporate design

elements at the streetscape and sidewalk levels of the building to be more pedestrian friendly. She asked the design team to think about who would be using the green space. She expressed concern about the largeness of the building compared to the small-scale and pedestrian-oriented development of downtown and noted that, in order to adequately assess how the scale of the various building designs will be experienced, the design team should provide renderings showing the building elevation from additional vantage points, including the view from the north side of Rosemary St directly opposite the proposed building.

- Chair Schwartz noted that the memorandum of understanding the Town signed with Grubb properties stipulates that the developer will build on the site of the Wallace Deck an office building comprising **six stories totaling approximately 200,000 sf** and that it therefore seems ill-advised to pursue designs in excess of six stories. Schwartz found that even six stories may even be too high to blend harmoniously with the scale of the surrounding historic buildings but allowed that a creative use of massing and materials could make it work. Schwartz offered the example of Shortbread Lofts looming over the adjacent low-rise West Franklin commercial buildings as an example of what to avoid. Schwartz noted that the recently adopted West Rosemary Design Guidelines codifies the community's vision of how downtown commercial areas adjacent to older residential neighborhoods should redevelop and suggested that the redevelopment of the Wallace deck site should be consistent with that vision. He asked the design team to consider creative ways to break up the mass, including constructing the project as multiple smaller buildings rather than as one large building, so as not to dwarf any of the adjacent commercial buildings and to provide additional pedestrian circulation paths through the site. He found that additional vegetation and canopy trees would help contribute to the character of the historic district.

Submitted by: David Schwartz, Chair-Historic District Commission.

Attached: Letter to Town Council from Commissioner Angela Stiefbold and [West Rosemary Street Design Guidelines](#)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [http://chapelhill.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view\\_id=7&clip\\_id=3137&meta\\_id=164400](http://chapelhill.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=7&clip_id=3137&meta_id=164400)

## **Historic District Relationship and Considerations Regarding the Design of the Office Building Project Proposed at 150 E. Rosemary Street.**

Angela Stiefbold, Historic District Commission Member

April 2020

We should be concerned about the impact the proposal for 150 E. Rosemary Street has on Chapel Hill's historic resources. It is a large project that will have a significant impact on the streetscape. Many residents, students, alumni, and visitors love downtown Chapel Hill because of its pedestrian-oriented human scale and the historic character of its streetscape.

The corner of the site at the southwest corner of E. Rosemary Street and Henderson Street is within the Chapel Hill town-designated local historic district, a place the community intends for the HDC to approve the design of any future development to be congruous with existing historic buildings, such as the historic Post Office and the storefronts on Henderson Street.

While not included in the local historic district or under local regulation, the storefronts along East Franklin Street, just south of the proposed building, are part of the 2015 expansion of the historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places. State and national preservation authorities and many local residents have recognized that these buildings are an important part of Chapel Hill's history. What happens adjacent to them can have an impact on them.

Design of the open space proposed for the corner of E. Rosemary and Henderson Street should comply with the Design Guidelines for the Chapel Hill Historic Districts and is subject to review by the Historic District Commission. While the proposed building itself is not required to go through this process, it would be a show of good faith and a desire to integrate with and preserve the historic character of Chapel Hill's downtown for the entire design to take into consideration the Design Guidelines for the Chapel Hill Historic Districts.

The proposed building and open space should be compatible with the existing historic scale and materials of the district. The building should not be so large as to overpower the adjacent structures and spaces. It should have a relationship to the streetscape that is encouraging of human-scale, pedestrian interactions. Window and door openings should be placed in a manner and be of a proportion, shape, scale, and pattern that is compatible with the surrounding historic district.

Materials used in the building and in site features in the open space should be compatible with those commonly used in the historic district, particularly the commercial portion of the historic district. Common wall materials for the district are primarily brick, with some stone and painted wood architectural features. Site features are also generally brick, wooden, or black painted metal, and pathways are primarily brick pavers or Chapel Hill gravel. Signs should be of a scale, material and location that is congruous with historic features.

If grade changes are made to the open space site, they should both encourage a positive relationship to the streetscape and to the Post Office Building, as well as the proposed new construction. Mature trees should be preserved to the greatest extent possible.

Determination should be made as to whether there is a possibility of significant archaeological features on the site, and if so, steps should be taken to document and protect them during the construction process.

The sections of the Design Guidelines for the Chapel Hill Historic Districts that should be closely reviewed and considered as this project is designed included: Setting; Site Features & Plantings; Archaeology; Public Right-Of-Way; Walls & Fences; Walkways, Driveways & Offstreet Parking; Signage; and New Construction. Consultation with the Historic District Commission or a subcommittee of the commission on an advisory basis at the early stage of design is recommended.

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150 East Rosemary  
COMMUNITY DESIGN COMMISSION

January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021

The Community Design Commission conducted a Concept Plan review for 150 East Rosemary Street at a meeting on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021. The project proposes approx. 250,000sf of office and research/lab space for business and institutional tenants.

*\*Key points made by members of the Commission about the concept plan are listed below.*

- Multiple commissioners voiced support of creating an enhanced pedestrian experience along the alley adjacent to the backside of the project. Failure to address would result in this being the weak link for this project. Enhancing the alley could be a tremendous positive.
- Multiple commissioners voiced support of a modernist approach to building design. A member noted the historic district guidelines encourage this approach.
- Multiple commissioners expressed confidence in the design team's ability to develop a plan that is modernist and that fits within the area's historic context.
- Multiple commissioners voiced support of a 6-7 story structure.
- Multiple commissioners highlighted the need to create a dynamic pedestrian and streetscape experience. Members stressed the importance of prioritizing pedestrians in this design.
- Multiple commissioners recommended pedestrian planning take into account the importance of the Rathskeller Alley as a north/south connection.
- Multiple commissioners voiced concern regarding stormwater requirements.
- Multiple commissioners voiced support of creating a strong entrance and providing vertical breaks in the Rosemary street façade.
- Multiple commissioners voiced support of bringing the town green down to the sidewalk and street level should take priority over saving the magnolia tree. One commissioner voiced support for saving the pencil mural and the magnolia, as well as minimizing grading down the lot.
- Two commissioners were supportive of the developer's statement regarding integrating the architectural features with the adjacent redevelopment projects. In particular, it is important to integrate the building to the proposed deck and the

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renovation of the NCNB building. This building will be the transformative use in the area.

- Two commissioners voiced support of finding a way to create more friction for vehicular traffic on Rosemary St. The West Rosemary Street improvements could be a model for East Rosemary Street. On-street parking could be added.
- One commissioner suggested the building design should take into account the views of church spires downtown and the 100 block of Franklin Street, and relate to UNC campus building design.
- One commissioner applauded the developer's visual modelling of the effects of the proposed building on the surrounding areas and encouraged continued use of this modelling as the design progresses.
- One commissioner stated it is important to be sensitive to effects on the local historic district and the Franklin Street National Register historic district.
- One commissioner voiced support for public art integration.
- One commissioner noted there is a potential greenway connection at the end of Cobb Terrace which could be part of an area pedestrian plan.
- One commissioner expressed concern with the potential visibility of wet lab and other mechanical equipment on the roof of the building, and felt this needed special design care
- One commissioner voiced support of a potential 8 story structure, but noted it would have to be done brilliantly.
- One commissioner voiced concern over the location of the ground level parking entrance on Rosemary St., as related to the number of curb cuts.
- One commissioner felt the automobile access on the east side would take away the connection of the building to the public space on the corner.
- One commissioner suggested creating a pedestrian access plan for the site and the adjacent properties including the new parking deck across Rosemary St.
- One commissioner liked using glass on the north side of the building because the light is good there.

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- One commissioner noted that there is only right-of-way for part of the alley, and that coordinating with the various Franklin Street property owners is critical.