

TO: Northwood Ravin, Developer;
McAdams Design Consultant

FROM: Community Design Commission , Chapel Hill

RE: Site Design Standards, Hilmont March 5, 2025

The Town Council for Chapel Hill has asked the CDC to review and comment on the Site Design Standards prepared by McAdams for Northwood Ravin's proposed Hilmont project in Chapel Hill.

The Developer appeared before the Commission on February 25th and received comments on the project's elevations and site plan.

SITE DESIGN STANDARDS

The document prepared by McAdams is organized into two sections, General and Site Design.

GENERAL

The initial paragraph states that the project will consist of residential villages with garden style flats, townhomes and single-family homes. It then states that the project will address Chapel Hill's Complete Community Framework. But addressing the Framework is not the same as adhering to or incorporating the Framework.

The six elements from Complete Communities are:

A Place for Everyone, Community Engagement, Getting Around, Good Places, Nurturing; Environmental Stewardship, and Town Gown Collaboration.

Place for Everyone: This element calls for the provision of a range of housing types. We believe that the project does provide a range of units; whether they will be welcoming cannot be determined.

Community Engagement and Connection: Spaces have been provided for each housing type but there is no connection between the duplexes to the multi-family units. There are also no large outdoor community gathering spaces or defined places which are safe for families and children for play (playgrounds, bike paths or more passive engagement such as picnic tables).

Getting Around: The project does provide sidewalks and multi-use paths but there is no attempt to reduce auto dependency. The primary entrance is not designed to slow traffic especially close to the family type residences. In addition, consideration needs to be given to easy access to bus transportation.

Good Places: Abundant open spaces have been provided. But they are only for Hilmont residents; none for the general public.

Environmental stewardship: Stormwater retention ponds are provided in appropriate locations. The creek located at the northern portion of the property is protected but there is a missed opportunity to create visual engagement with that area.

Town/Gown Collaboration. Although providing a variety of housing types will be attractive to UNC employees; the lack of any For Sale units is a missed opportunity.

SITE DESIGN ISSUES

Although there were a number of comments from Commission members regarding the Elevations provided, the overwhelming majority of concerns were raised about how buildings relate to each other, roadway design, at grade parking and relationship of open spaces to buildings.

The buildings that were most positively reviewed were those that self-parked or utilized only a small amount of at grade parking. Buildings 6,7 & 8 and the townhomes and single-family units form a low density attractive area with interesting designs. The absence of large-scale parking lots adds to the sense of place. Buildings 1&2 which are the public face of Hilmont utilize slope to create a good number of parking spaces under the buildings and have no spaces facing Raleigh Road.

The heart of the project, buildings 3,4 and 5 are the most problematic and comprise 273 of the 480 total units (57%). Buildings 3 and 4 are surrounded by over 200 at grade parking spaces with perpendicular spaces along the major roadway that runs through the project. The four-sided parking detracts from any benefit that might accrue from an otherwise good design of building façades. Moreover, instead of relating to each other they turn away and negate any possibility of creating a “Special Place”.

A final comment is warranted about the relationship to the property now owned by Northwood formerly known as Barbee Chapel Apartments. Although the developer has shown future roadway and walkway linkages to that property, being able to Master Plan a 50+ acre property and create a real community

instead of two separate projects is a missed opportunity and one that will weigh heavily on the Town for years to come.