

CONCEPT PLAN COMMENTS

The Flats URBAN DESIGN REVIEW

March 5, 2021

The Town of Chapel Hill Urban Designer has conducted a Concept Plan review for The Flats. The project proposes an apartment building with around 200 units and 600-650 beds.

**Major issues identified by the Town's Urban Designer are listed below.*

- Height relationship to adjoining neighborhood: The new FLUM indicates this as the "South MLK" area, with a maximum height of 8 stories along the MLK frontage. As opposed to other nearby areas in South MLK, there is no indicated "transition zone" abutting the neighboring properties. I suggested that even if the FLUM does not formally indicate a transition zone that they still should make a gesture of transition somehow, even if the building is taller than the existing structures. They will look into creating some transition with massing and architectural responses to meet this end. One idea is to consider using unique interior two level apartment units with an internal stair along the Isley/Stinton frontage. While the total building height would be taller, you would get a kind of two story "townhouse" reading on the lower part of the building.
- In addition to their proposed public walkway on the south side of the building I suggested they create an additional pedestrian connection from MLK Blvd. to Stinson Street on the north side of the building. This would also provide more access to the proposed dog park helping to make it more of a public/neighborhood amenity. They thought there was merit in this and will look into it. Because of the slope it could have small terraces or landings along it to create small pockets for seating along the way.
- Suggested they be open to reducing the height of the building-they are pretty much set in what they have. The portion of the building along MLK is 8 stories, there is some variation in the heights of the various other pieces of the massing elements.
- We talked about parking, they feel they need the numbers they have. I think even if parking was reduced it wouldn't change the shape and size of the building much because of the tight dimension of the site. You could foreseeably take a floor off the parking garage, but it still would be the same shape. We talked about changing the footprint of the garage but they pointed out that it would greatly affect the efficiency and yield of the garage and likely be unworkable. I can see their point on that.
- Frontage along MLK: They have some interesting ideas about how to activate the MLK façade. The CDC suggested they move the building closer to the street, which they have done. They are looking into placing the social/communal/active residential spaces along the front, in a tall space with glass along the MLK frontage for a portion of the building. In the area between the sidewalk and the building façade, their

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sketches indicated some low retaining walls to accommodate the grade change. I suggested that they go further and think of the entire zone as a terrace with an inviting series of short levels with seating and gathering areas, leading up to the social spaces inside the building, blending inside and out. The idea is to externalize the social life of the building, to help activate the street edge. I suggested they consider allowing some residential amenities in the commons area (conference/meeting room etc.) be made available for the public to use on occasion.

- Along other portions of the MLK frontage they are considering residential units on the ground floor that have a kind of front porch and an entrance to the units from the sidewalk, which I encouraged, provided there is adequate transitioning with slight level changes from public to private.
- We talked about slices/view corridors through the building: they are proposing a passage cut through the portion of the building that features the interior courtyard and pool area. It's not for the public but it could create some visual transparency from MLK. I encouraged them to build on this idea, perhaps with an art piece or visual focal point at the passage's terminus along the MLK façade.
- On the MLK frontage they were concerned that they may not be able to meet the exact geometric angle to create the horizontal setback on the upper floors. They had some thoughts on how to create some amount of physical setback while also reinforcing the perception of a setback with additional architectural expressions.