

## **Design Review and Comments**

### **Longfellow: Chapel Hill Life Science Development**

Prepared by: Brian Peterson, AIA, Urban Designer, T.O.C.H.  
11-27-23

#### **Summary of Applicant Meetings and the Review Process**

- Numerous design meetings have been held with the applicant over the course of the project. The most recent occurred on November 20, 2023. These comments are based upon updated renderings that will be submitted to the Council in advance of the November 29<sup>th</sup> meeting.

#### **Design Review and Comments**

- The following comments will address components listed and described in the related “Chapel Hill Life Science Center Design Principles.”

##### Site Design and Pedestrian Frontages

1. A goal of the project is to design both sides (W. Franklin & W. Rosemary) as “fronts” to the building.

##### *W. Franklin Street Frontage*

2. The frontage contains streetscape elements (including canopy shade street trees, as allowable per fire access standards) as well as a landscaped open space. The building edge continues the street wall definition pattern and alignment of the neighboring buildings.
3. Continuous retail/food and beverage uses are proposed along the W. Franklin St. frontage. Plaza frontages will include continuous retail/beverage uses, the building entrance lobby, or employee amenity uses.
4. The base of the building along the frontage is well-defined, with ample transparency. Glass is provided along the first-floor building façade, with doors opening directly into proposed retail spaces. Canopies and signage will further enliven the pedestrian realm.
5. Outdoor seating and/or other street activating elements are proposed, which will be critical in ensuring the front of this building is in step with the lively character of Franklin Street.
6. The landscape open space is a mix of paved surfaces, and green space. The space should be designed to be flexible, and multi-purpose in activity mix. Canopy shade trees are indicated in the green space area, which should allow for vital shading and pedestrian comfort. Additional shade zones are provided along the western side of the open space, where the building edge recedes back to create a pedestrian arcade behind the columns, an ideal place for seating.
7. On the east side, the design incorporates the parking and service access to the Bicycle Chain in a well-integrated manner, extending the plaza paving into the parking zone and indicating vehicular placement and access via pavement demarcation and bollards, in a manner reminiscent of European plazas, where cars are accommodated without losing the pedestrian-oriented design character.

##### *W. Rosemary Street Frontage*

8. This façade fronts Rosemary Street with an enhanced 20’ building setback, and a landscaped open space. Landscape opportunities in the set back have been discussed with the applicant including planters and seating areas, to take advantage of this additional pedestrian space not often found on narrow W. Rosemary Street.

9. The first-floor façade along W. Rosemary will be transparent to interior spaces or to artwork or cultural displays, in order to facilitate street activation.
10. The W. Rosemary open space provides additional opportunities for integrating small gathering and seating areas as well as an accessibility ramp. It is this reviewer's opinion that these functions are not incompatible, and that there are precedents in which an accessibility ramp can comfortably coincide with other pedestrian features in an open space. The idea of a providing accessibility by an elevator was discussed; these can be problematic in terms of maintenance, security, vulnerability to vandalism, and the loss of site accessibility during a mechanical breakdown. Considering these concerns, moving forward with the currently proposed site ramp would be this reviewer's recommendation.

#### Architectural Character and Scale

11. The eight-story mass of the building has been broken down into a discrete series of subcomponents that are further differentiated by material selection. Of particular significance is how the building creates scale along the pedestrian frontages on W. Franklin Street, W. Rosemary Street, and along the pedestrian passage between Franklin and Rosemary. This has been well-addressed, as the massing presents four story elements along the Franklin and Rosemary Street facades, with the taller massing elements set back.
12. A two-story expression is established along the façade of the buildings facing the open spaces, with the provision of arcades, in which the building edge is set back to create covered areas while increasing space devoted to pedestrians. The arcade perpendicular to W. Franklin Street leads visually to the main building entrance and provides an interesting view terminus from Mallette Street.
13. The base of the building is further articulated by a one-story ground floor expression, consisting of the band of storefront glazing. The height of this banding relates to the one-story height of some of the other neighboring buildings along E. Rosemary Street.
14. The four and two-story elements are covered in reddish/brown masonry, referencing brick and masonry materials found in many other downtown Chapel Hill buildings. The base wraps around all sides of the building, helping establish a pedestrian-friendly scale, with the glass box elements "floating" above, which helps to dematerialize the overall mass of the building.
15. For the taller glass covered massings, a further articulation distinction is made to establish a "top" to the building. The lower portions of the glass volumes feature applied vertical mullion fins accentuating verticality and creating a screening effect for the glass surfaces. These fins do not continue on the top two floors, allowing more reflective glass to show, as the articulation "lightens up" and defines a cap to the building. Fire regulations do not allow an actual setback for these top two floors, but this transition strategy offers a subtle, but clear distinction as the building meets the sky.
16. The penthouse is set back from the building facades, and is intended to be articulated in a manner consistent with that of the glass massings.