

Updated-Old Chapel Hill Road Apartments

Urban Designer Comments 06-06-25

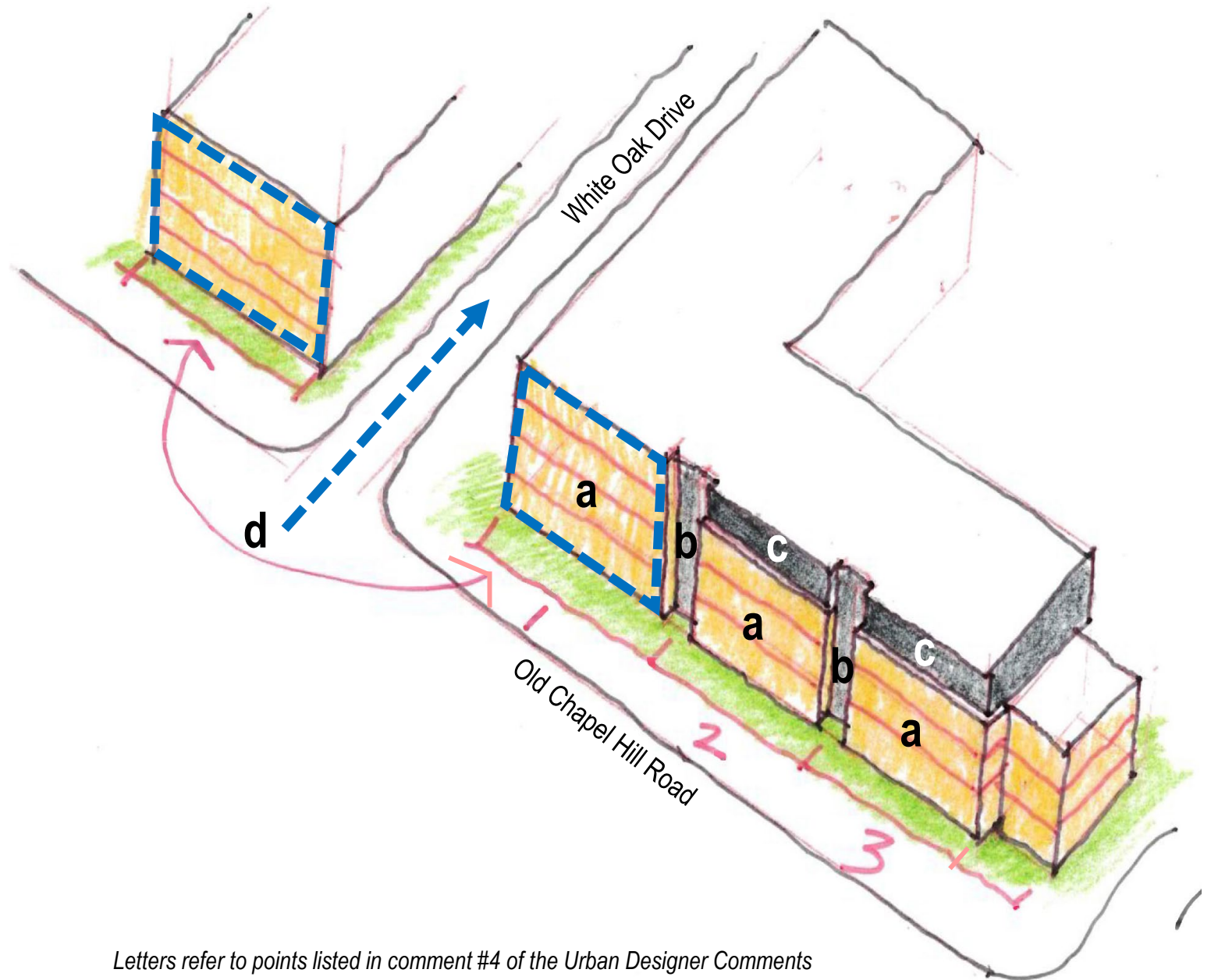
Submitted by Brian Peterson, AIA, Urban Designer, Town of Chapel Hill

Following the project presentation to the Council on 05-24-25, two recent meetings have been held with the applicant team to discuss the project, with a particular focus upon the massing of “building one” along Old Chapel Hill Road and is the subject of the comments that follow.

1. As noted in previous urban designer comments, the massing design objective is to find a way to articulate the linear massing along the Old Chapel Hill Road frontage to reduce scale along the façade by height reduction, articulation strategy, or a combined approach.
2. The applicant will pursue a strategy that includes height reduction and articulation strategies.
3. The applicant will reduce the height of a portion of the building to three stories, at the east end, which makes a clear stepping down transition that relates to the three-story front portion of the Chapel Hill Crossing Building to the east. This three-story mass also steps in from the main façade line, which serves to create a narrower element at the end of the building, as viewed when approaching the building heading west down Old Chapel Hill Road, helping to reduce mass on this end of the building.
4. A concept massing diagram was prepared and presented to the applicant team, which included the location and amount of the applicant’s east end height reduction. The diagram (please see attached sketch) outlined several suggested design concepts that can contribute to creating scale-defining elements for the 4-story portion of the façade:
 - a. Suggest establishing a rhythm of repeating at least three vertical modules that overlay and break down the linear mass to create discrete “pavilions” (segments 1,2 &3 on the diagram) along the frontage.
 - b. The “break” between the modules can be achieved by architectural techniques such as vertical setbacks, design of balconies, change of material, change of color, or other means.
 - c. In addition, for modules 2 & 3, provide a horizontal break in the façade, at the 4th floor, which can help articulate a “top” for this portion of the building, that in turn, articulates a 3-story reading to the two modules, which is another component in reducing scale. The horizontal “break” at this level can be achieved by methods like a physical distance change (setting back the façade plane of the 4th floor), a material change (or thickness), or a significant color change, as well as other architectural methods. Consider a flat or horizontally projecting roof over these two massing elements which can help in creating a “cap” to the building.
 - d. The Parkline East Village Framework Plan calls for a gateway element where White Oak Drive meets Old Chapel Hill Road. Module 1, as indicated on the attached diagram, occupies an important corner location within the neighborhood, as it sits at a neighborhood entrance point along Old Chapel Hill Road. It is suggested to articulate this module as a four-story mass, which can effectively establish a “book end” relationship to the end mass of the apartment building to the west, across White Oak Drive, and work together to establish a “gateway” as one enters the street corridor.

Old Chapel Hill Apartments Concept Massing Diagram

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Letters refer to points listed in comment #4 of the Urban Designer Comments