

Porthole Alley Redevelopment

Applicant drawings dated November 2021

Plan Comments/Notes

Prepared by: Brian Peterson, AIA, Urban Designer, TOCH

Date of Comments: 4-20-22

The following notes and comments are from a review meeting held on 04-18-22 with Evan Yassky, University Architect for UNC.

1. The design team examined four strategies for developing the site, ranging from full demolition of existing buildings to retaining some of the existing structures. The option selected retains the Hill Building, which contains the Carolina Coffee Shop.
2. The massing strategy is well-calibrated in terms of relating to the scale of existing buildings along Franklin Street, with the proposed building at 3 stories, and to the adjacent Church, with a height maximum of 4 stories. The tallest mass is towards the rear, on the Southwest portion of the site.
3. The disposition and articulation of the overall massing helps de-emphasize the sense of a large building. Because of the inclusion of courtyards, the retention of the alley, the use of subtractive massing elements, the provision of overhead pedestrian walkways, and the use of varying heights, the overall effect is of several linked buildings rather than one of a singular large structure.
4. The ground floor program layout places the most public components (retail spaces and visitor center) along and adjacent to the Franklin Street frontage and along Porthole Alley. This should help activate the street edges: Doors and main entrances into these spaces should also be placed along these frontages.
5. The cross section of the alley space varies in width, narrower at Franklin Street and gradually widening toward the rear courtyards. This should help create a sense of movement and progression as one walks through, making the alley a more interesting public space.
6. For the new buildings, consider making most of the ground floor alley facades transparent, allowing for views both from and into the interior functions.
7. The proposed courtyard space behind the existing Hill building creates a new and dramatic view of the church steeple while walking southward along the alley.
8. Renderings indicate the provision of rooftop pedestrian spaces in various locations: seeing people on these levels can help contribute to the activation of the alley and courtyard spaces.
9. On the south elevations, facing the sculpture court, two large porch-like spaces provide a significant amenity and help expand the spaciousness of the courtyards. These courtyards should be designed to encourage lingering and interaction (by providing benches, seat walls or other means of seating), as well as serving as a location for sculptures and other artwork.
10. The undersides of these porch areas (as viewed in the perspective entitled "Standing on West Porch Looking Toward Terraced Sculpture Garden" are currently shown as blank surfaces, but should be considered as an opportunity for articulated ceilings (via patterns, material selection, or lighting strategy) to help enhance the vibrancy of the porch spaces.
11. There is a great opportunity to someday continue the pedestrian character of Porthole Alley further southward, to eventually connect to Cameron Avenue, as indicated in the 2015 Landscape Master Plan for Porthole Alley.