



“AURA SOUTH ELLIOTT” Apartment Community at 200 S. Elliott Rd.

Concept Plan Submittal, Chapel Hill, NC

January 24, 2023

1. Developer’s Program
2. Statement of Compliance with Comprehensive Plan
3. Statement of Compliance with Design Guidelines
4. Statement on Affordable Housing Program

1. DEVELOPER’S PROGRAM

Introduction

This is a request for review of the Aura South Elliott Concept Plan submittal for review by the Chapel Hill Town Council and, if applicable, the Community Design Commission and Housing Advisory Board.

The proposed apartment community is located on three parcels that are within the Blue Hill District but which are currently zoned OI-2 and R-5 and will need to be rezoned to either WR-7 (a Blue Hill zone) or R-6 Conditional to accommodate the proposed development. One parcel is located on the west side of South Elliott Road and two adjacent parcels are located on Couch Rd, which intersects with East Franklin Street.

The developer proposes a five-story apartment building with urban-style street frontages, tree-lined sidewalks and landscaped semi-public spaces on the 4.24-acre assemblage. The proposed design offers an opportunity to create a stand-alone parcel for affordable housing and/or work space that serves special-needs populations. All the buildings would be close to both local transit on South Elliott Road and local/regional transit on East Franklin Street, and pedestrian connections will be created between Couch Road and South Elliott Road.

**Statement & Vision:**

The proposed development will complement nearby Blue Hill mixed-use and retail properties on South Elliott Road to create a tree-lined urban streetscape along South Elliott Road. It will further the long-term vision set forth in the Blue Hill District for a mixed-use, walkable area with transit access and quality public spaces.

The irregular lot configuration and topography, along with the presence of an intermittent stream, present an opportunity to create a quality semi-public space that is accessible from Elliott Road and pedestrian connections between Elliott Road and Couch Road. The proposal includes buildings that look and feel like multiple buildings rather than a dominant wrapped-deck monolith. We do not expect the parking deck to be visible from the right of way.

The development proposes 330 multi-family dwelling units and a parking deck with 495 spaces. In addition, the developer is eager to work with a non-profit organization to create affordable housing and possibly work space for special needs populations that are currently underserved in Chapel Hill.

General Site Layout and Building Orientation

The property is approximately 4.24 acres. It is located on the west side of South Elliott Road and at the northeast end of Couch Road. The properties are contiguous, and both fall within the Blue Hill District. The primary frontage of the urban-style building with tree-lined sidewalks will face South Elliott Road, across from the Berkshire Chapel Hill mixed-use building and would include a semi-public park. The park would be designed around a currently unremarkable intermittent stream, enhancing its overall aesthetic by incorporating features of a rain garden or similar feature, along with sitting areas and shade trees.

The north edge of the property is bounded by a private street that borders the Citizens Bank property to the north and provides access to Signature senior living facility to the west. This development proposes reducing the size of this wide private street, enhancing the public realm and slowing cars as they enter the adjacent projects.



Site Access and Circulation

The South Elliott Road frontage provides pedestrian access to multiple entry points in the building façade. Access to the parking deck would be provided from South Elliott Road and from a private driveway behind the building, accessed from the private street to the north. The buildings on the Couch Road parcels would be accessed primarily by pedestrians and cyclists. The topography and natural features of the site prevent automobile connections between Couch Road and Elliott Road but ped-bike connections between the two roads will support the town's mobility plan.

Natural Features, Environment and Landscaping

The site has an irregular shape and topography and an intermittent stream, all of which create a design challenge. Urban trees are planned for the Elliott Road frontage, and a semi-public park with furnishings and enhanced landscaping is planned around the intermittent stream. Other landscaping would be located throughout the site to provide shade and appropriate enclosures, screening and/or buffers.

Project Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of this development proposal align with the goals and objectives of the Town's long-term vision for the Blue Hill District, a pedestrian-oriented mixed-use urban node in Chapel Hill.

A formal development application will follow this Concept Plan review process. The development team would like to gain insight into Town Council's priorities for this site so that an appropriate path for the rezoning application (Blue Hill or Conditional Zone) can be determined. The preferred rezoning category is WR-7.



2. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Chapel Hill's 2020 Comprehensive Plan (CH2020)

The Aura South Elliott Mixed-Use Concept Plan submittal is proposed in accordance with the CH2020 Comprehensive Plan and the goals of the Blue Hill District. This statement of compliance is provided regarding general concepts in CH2020 as well as the guiding principles of the Blue Hill District.

Two key concepts within CH2020 Comprehensive Plan are Community Choices and Community Connections defined in the plan as:

Choices: The community would like more choices about where and how people can live and house their families and more choices about how they travel through town.

Connections: The community also desires more connections and improved opportunities to meet others and to embrace the diversity of those who live, work, and play in the community. Community members want more connections in how they can get around and a real commitment to safe pedestrian and bicycle transportation. They want real connections between the decisions town leaders make and the ideals that the community has expressed in the Chapel Hill 2020 Comprehensive Plan. Chapel Hill wants a sense of connectedness from many perspectives.

Aura Elliott Compliance:

The Aura Elliott Concept Plan submittal will provide additional housing choices in close proximity to transit, work, retail and entertainment in Chapel Hill. These choices will be achieved by offering housing options, potentially including housing and work opportunities for those with special needs, in close proximity to transit and nearby grocery stores, bakeries, small-scale retail, restaurants and entertainment. The new physical connection for pedestrians and cyclists between East Franklin Street and South Elliott Road support the town's mobility plan. Social connections will be provided with expanded housing choices and new outdoor amenities and gathering spaces.



3. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH DESIGN GUIDELINES

Blue Hill Design Guidelines

The Blue Hill Design Guidelines call for “a pedestrian-friendly environment ... throughout the District, with attractive, inviting streetscapes and interconnected multi-use paths. Street edges will be defined with buildings that themselves are pedestrian-friendly. A dense canopy of trees and interwoven landscaped areas will soften the urban fabric while offering places to rest or play. Natural resources will be valued and actively used, and new developments will be designed to complement and enhance the connections to the natural resources.”

Our intent is to support these goals. Benches and other pedestrian and bicycle amenities will be provided to maximize enjoyment of the outdoor space. The design of the redesigned private street to the north will provide a pedestrian focus to slow vehicle speeds and cater to pedestrians and cyclists. The goals of the district are to be incorporated into all design elements, including access and circulation, storm water management, landscaping and tree canopy, parking and loading, street lighting, utilities, and solid waste management.

4. STATEMENT REGARDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAM

Aura Elliott offers an opportunity for collaboration with a local non-profit to provide housing and/or employment for special needs populations who are not currently served well in Chapel Hill. Alternately, the project could include a combination of 65% AMI and 80% AMI within its market-rate buildings.