

Conditional Zoning Application for 157 E Rosemary Street

Historic District Commission Recommendation

November 20, 2023

Mayor and Council Members,

On November 29, the Chapel Hill Town Council will review an application for 157 E. Rosemary, a site which borders the Franklin-Rosemary Historic District. It is customary for the Town to solicit comments and recommendations from the Historic District Commission (HDC) regarding projects adjacent to a local historic district. The HDC therefore discussed this application at its October 10th, 2023, meeting and received comments from the public. At its November 14 meeting, the HDC unanimously approved the following recommendation.

The HDC recommends that the Town Council deny the Conditional Zoning application for 157 E Rosemary for three main reasons:

- The currently proposed design violates principles set forth in the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) approved by Council on December 20, 2020;
- The proposed design is inconsistent with the Town's LUMO guidance on Setbacks;
- The proposed design is not congruous with the character of neighboring historic structures, based on the guidelines outlined in the *Chapel Hill Historic District Principles and Design Standards*.

157 E. Rosemary is located in the Downtown Focus Area identified in the FLUM. The principles for this focus area include:

- Large step backs from the front façade are desirable to create a more human-scaled public realm.
- When new structures are built along Rosemary Street, incorporate setbacks and step backs that respect the adjacent residences.

The building proposed for 157 E Rosemary appears inconsistent with both of these principles.

The FLUM classifies 157 E Rosemary as located in Sub-Area E within the Downtown Focus Area. On page 52 of the FLUM, the Sub-Area E prescribed height is “Up to 4 stories at the front setback and core height of 6 stories on the north side of E Rosemary.” The proposed design, which features a 12-story height with no setback, is inconsistent with this guideline. The application also fails to adhere to the FLUM’s design guidance that, “Adjacent to lower scale residential uses, step backs or other transitional methods are necessary to ensure harmonious transitions.”

The Town’s stated preference for harmonious transitions between areas that differ in character suggests that redevelopment of 157 E Rosemary should employ forms and materials characteristic of the immediately adjacent historic district. The HDC’s *Design Principles and Standards* provide specific guidance on New Construction, including:

- 4.0 New Construction Page 112: “New construction, when it is sensitively sited with regard to district context and carefully designed to respect the district’s historic architecture, can enhance the streetscape and contribute to the character of the district... special consideration should be given to the immediate surroundings – adjacent and neighboring historic structures.... In order to reinforce existing rhythms and structures.
- 4.1 Setback, Spacing & Orientation: Principles Page 113: New construction should reinforce, rather than deviate from, the siting and development patterns of nearby historic buildings.
- 4.2 Building Scale, Proportion & Form: Principles Page 117:
 - 4.2.1 Design new buildings so their size and scale do not visually overpower historic buildings in the immediate surroundings.

For the reasons enumerated above, the HDC recommends that the Council not approve the application in its current form. Furthermore, the HDC would welcome the opportunity to work with the applicant to revise the proposed design to achieve greater congruence with, and a more harmonious transition to, the adjacent historic district.