

Aura Blue Hill
Developer's Written Narrative and Summary of Proposed Design Alternatives
August 24, 2021
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The Aura Blue Hill site is a 2.76-acre (+/-) site located within the Blue Hill Form District (formerly Ephesus/Fordham Form District). The site is currently accessed via the Bypass Lane off Fordham Boulevard to the west and Ephesus Church Road to the east. The Aura Blue Hill proposal is located south of the Millennium Chapel Hill Apartments project and just north of the Park Apartments that are currently under construction.

The site presently consists of three (3) parcels containing Chapel Hill Baptist Church, a private residence, and a commercial building containing multiple tenants. Additionally, the church and commercial building properties both include asphalt parking areas and associated improvements. The site is relatively flat sloping east to west. The existing landscaping/vegetation on the site is limited to parking lot trees, trees along a portion of the ditch channel to the north, and trees on the southeast edge of the project site. The Aura Blue Hill proposal is to demolish all existing site structures and improvements, and create a new development which will be known as Aura Blue Hill.

Aura Blue Hill is a four (4) to six (6) story mixed-use project that consists of two (2) separate mixed-use buildings and a seven (7) tier parking garage (with an average height of 66'). The parking garage is wrapped with units on three (3) sides to conceal it from public view and the other building is connected to the garage via an open-air pedestrian bridge located at each floor. Both mixed-use buildings step down from six (6) to four (4) stories with rooftop terraces overlooking the proposed courtyards within each building. The proposal consists of approximately 285 total residential units and 30,291 sf of non-residential space.

The building provides on-site amenities such as a clubhouse, fitness center, rooftop amenities, and non-residential uses. To create a friendly, dynamic, and all-weather interaction, the building has several pedestrian access points to the indoor and outdoor amenities with clearly defined walkways. The primary vehicular access to the garage is provided off Fordham Blvd and secondary access is provided from the roundabout on "Proposed Road" (AKA Ackland Ln.).

The overall design will be compatible and harmonious to the surrounding neighborhood and promote and enhance pedestrian scale, encouraging interaction between building, space, and people.

The building will be clearly articulated with proportional openings and offsets in wall planes. The articulation of building will help break up the building massing, and add visual interest, giving a sense of multiple structures vs. one large, massive structure. The building massing will simultaneously incorporate the overall scale with the human scale. The overall mass will be harmonious with the surrounding neighborhood by adding various residential architectural elements to the roofline, architectural details introduced at the base, and emphasize human scale to the building at the pedestrian level.

The architectural vernacular will introduce ground level features that are integrated with upper floor design and are compatible with the overall character. Windows at ground level with specific architectural details and adequate lighting will encourage interaction and activities, visual interest and maximize visibility and connectivity. Units at the ground level adjacent to streets will be above grade as required and be provided with a unit-dedicated stoop. All elevations will have consistent design, detailing, and materials. Trees and landscape plantings will enhance the streetscape feel of the building at the site perimeter where it steps back to create both formal pedestrian plazas and smaller pockets of greenspace in the building breaks as described above.

The site plan proposed is a product of an analysis with the Developer, Design Team, Town Staff and Town of Chapel Hill Fire Department. The site plan being presented furthers the goals and objectives of the Blue Hill Form District; however, two (2) minor Design Alternatives will be required. The Design Alternatives presented below provides a statement of mitigating factor(s). The Design Alternatives proposed seek to balance the highest-level goals of walkability, streetscape activity and form with site constraints and generally has a minor conflict with the Blue Hill Form Based Code requirements.

Design Alternatives Proposed

DESIGN ALTERNATIVE-1

Landscaping Standards Along Fordham Boulevard, Legion Road extension, Proposed Street (AKA Ackland Avenue) & Ephesus Church Road Frontages.

FBC Requirement:

Sect. 3.11.4.2.D Landscaping Standards - Frontages

Frontages must be planted in accordance with the Town of Chapel Hill Design Manual

Site Constraints:

1. Utility poles with overhead lines exist along Fordham Boulevard and Ephesus Church Road frontages.
2. Utility company landscape requirements.
3. Fire access along Legion Road Extension and the Proposed Street (AKA Ackland Avenue)

Design Alternative-1:

Allowance for the substitution of alternate street tree species and placement where overhead lines, sight triangles or fire access limits placement. We are proposing to plant 12-14' ht. native flowering trees in groups of 2-3 at an average spacing of 40' on-center along Fordham Boulevard, Legion Road Extension, Ephesus Church Road Frontages, and the Proposed Street (AKA Ackland Avenue).

Mitigating Factors:

1. Presence of utility poles and overhead lines along the Fordham Boulevard and Ephesus Church Road frontages.
2. Fire accessibility (aerial access) along Legion Region extension and the Proposed Street (AKA Ackland Avenue)

Narrative: Along the Fordham Boulevard and Ephesus Church Road frontages, utility poles with overhead lines exist. Duke Energy landscaping standards prohibit mature tree heights more than 15-feet when the trees are located within 20-feet of overhead lines. Additionally, aerial fire access along Legion Road extension and the Proposed Street (AKA Ackland Avenue) is required. These requirements prohibit the planting of street trees in accordance with the Town's Design Manual. We are proposing to plant 12-14' ht. native flowering trees in groups of 2-3 at an average spacing of 40' on-center. The request is also being made to allow for flexibility based upon possible minor design adjustments of site improvements and tree placement/species selection based upon site conditions encountered during the construction phase of the project.

DESIGN ALTERNATIVE-2

Increase the upper floor plate area of the fourth (4th) story to have floor area to exceed 100% of the ground story floor plate area. Additionally, the average of all floors above the 4th story shall not exceed 80% (in accordance with LUMO section 3.11.2.7.T.).

FBC Requirement:

Sect. 3.11.2.4.3.C Mass Variation

4 story buildings or greater: 4th story can be up to 80% of floor plate area of ground floor, and the 5th floors and above can be up to 80% of the ground story floor plate area; with average floor plate for the 5th floors and above not to exceed an average of 70%.

Site Constraints: N/A

Design Alternative-2:

Increase the upper floor plate area of the fourth (4th) story to have floor area to exceed 100% of the ground story floor plate area. The fourth (4th) story will be up to 100% of the third (3rd) story floor plate area. The average building floor plate areas above the 4th story shall not exceed 80% of the ground floor plate area. The average building stories above the 4th story shall be below 70% of the 3rd story floor plate area.

Mitigating Factors:

1. Provide a street frontage presence desired by the design commission. Additional screening of garage structure with units on fourth (4th) story.
2. Ground level floor plate area is based on only the conditioned floor area. This would exclude the areas under upper stories such as the arcade, breezeways, lower level patios and stoops.

Narrative: We are proposing the fourth (4th) story floor plate area to exceed 100% of the ground level. It would be the same footprint as the third (3rd) floor. The average building floor plate areas above the 4th story shall not exceed 80% of the ground floor plate area. The average building floor plate areas above the 4th story shall not exceed 70% of the 3rd story floor plate area. The upper stories of the garage will be screened along Legion Road extension to address the CDC's concern about the proximity to the property line and the proposed Millennium Chapel Hill development to the north. This area also provides additional amenity space in the form of a roof top terrace

on the 5th floor for the residents.

We believe the intent of the reduction in the total floor area is a means of requiring the building facade to modulate in both the vertical and horizontal plane. Based on the feedback we've received from the CDC board members and the town's urban planner, Brian Peterson, we believe that we have met the intent of the requirement with the way the facades have been broken down, the transitions in the horizontal planes to address the ground plane experience, and the reduction of the 5th and 6th floors to achieve mass variations.

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