

Design Review and Comments

Longfellow: Chapel Hill Life Science Development

Applicant drawings/presentation dated 02-28-23

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Summary of Applicant Meetings and the Review Process

- An initial meeting was held with the applicant team in the Fall of 2022 in which general project goals and intentions were discussed.
- A second design review meeting was held with the applicant on Thursday February 2, 2023, to discuss building placement and site layout, initial massing concepts, and the design of public places and active edges especially along the ground floor.

Design Review and Comments

Building Placement and Orientation (how well the building relates to the street and public realm)

1. The building consists of two components: the main lab building situated on the western portion of the site, and the parking structure which lies to the east. A public exterior pedestrian/bicycle passage bisects the site, adding another public space to downtown while serving to carve a potentially large singular building mass into two smaller pieces, which is an essential aspect of the preliminary design.
2. Along the Franklin Street frontage, the building edge aligns with the established street wall at the western property line, then steps back in plan with a sawtooth configuration that leads into the passage. This configuration maintains the continuity of the public realm along the street, while gradually creating a transition into the pedestrian/bike passage, which should help to draw people into the mid-block portion of the site. In addition, the sawtooth configuration gives the façade a more dynamic quality by establishing multiple corner conditions, offering a more interesting and interactive storefront experience from a pedestrian perspective.
3. On the eastern Franklin frontage, a small courtyard green space adjacent to the sidewalk adds an amenity to the Franklin Street streetscape while establishing an additional access point for traversing the site from south to north. The court's green softness and intimate character can make for an effective complement to the more active entry plaza.
4. The passage is defined by the building edges on either side. The western side will be activated by the presence of retail or other commercial space, major building entrances, and a colonnaded space providing shade and protection from the elements. The western side will be defined by the edge of the parking structure and the adjacent bicycle and accessibility ramp.

Connectivity (internal and external, relationships to existing or planned networks and surrounding features)

5. The passage becomes a pedestrian extension of Mallett Street, extending the street grid to Rosemary, and effectively reducing the block grain for one of the longest blocks (E/W dimension) in the downtown, while providing a new direct connection between Franklin Street, W. Rosemary Street, and the Northside neighborhood.
6. A gradually sloping ramp through the site allows ADA accessibility and bicycle access.

7. The site is served by bus lines along Franklin Street and is two blocks away from the proposed BRT stop at Columbia and Rosemary.

Outdoor/Public Spaces (location, size, character)

8. The primary public space will be the passage. As configured, the passage is composed of five distinct character areas defined by width, edge conditions, and intended design character. At Franklin Street, the passage features an entrance plaza, which should serve as an active gathering area that becomes the “front porch” for the project. Surfaces should be a mix of hardscapes and landscape plantings, including shade trees appropriately located. Activities could include outdoor dining, spillover display for retail, small-scale public events, and street entertainment such as buskers.
9. At the W. Rosemary side of the site, a similar entrance plaza, albeit smaller and more intimate, should provide a similar transitory experience especially as it relates to being a point of interface to the Northside neighborhood.
10. The middle portion of the passage is a transitional landscape. While primarily functioning as a pedestrian and bicycle connector, it could also offer places to stop and enjoy the space, especially in the shaded colonnaded space along the western edge. Situated directly adjacent to the pedestrian flow, the shaded area should include benches and other seating, to enhance people watching opportunities. For the eastern side, careful design of the ramping system could allow for ledges, built in benches, or other features incorporated into the ramp so that it contributes to the scale and vitality of the space and is not just a means to get from point A to point B.
11. The passage acts as a vertical transition, navigating the approximate 10' grade difference between W. Rosemary Street and Franklin Street. The passage surface design should exploit the potential for terracing, seating steps, or other streetscape features that transform the ramping condition into an engaging public place.
12. Interrupting the transitional landscapes is a central courtyard space, which should become a “green oasis” within the mid-block. Because of its remote location from the hustle and bustle of Franklin Street, the courtyard could be a quiet gathering place, perhaps with a small lawn area to stretch out and relax in.
13. A small courtyard space along the Franklin Street frontage should be designed as a welcoming green alcove along the Franklin sidewalk, with a clearly defined entrance point for the bike/accessibility ramp.

Streetscape Activation (character and coordination/relationship to surrounding areas)

14. The Franklin Street frontage and western side of the passage will be the prime locations for street activation. These edges should be designed to provide a storefront character, with well-defined entrances into individual tenant spaces, scale defining architectural elements such as canopies, integrated lighting, and ample window display space. Glass can be the primary material along the frontages, but care should be taken so that the façade is not just flat glass (which may connote “office building”), but rather there be some depth and liveliness to the façade, making the surface more inviting and suggestive of a retail experience.
15. If these active frontages are primarily glass, consider creating continuity between exterior and interior materials, to help blur the distinction between inside and out. Visual borrowing in this manner can make exterior spaces seem to appear more expansive.

16. The main entrance for the office lab building is indicated in a mid-block location along the passage: this is advantageous for allowing more retail/commercial space along the Franklin Street corner of the passage.
17. Articulation of the parking structure façade along the east side of the passage will be a challenge. Several options could be considered: architectural screening, a living wall of plantings, art installations, integrated seating, and creative use of lighting. The articulation of this wall should correlate to the height of the first-floor façade of the office building across the passage. When walking down the passage, there should be a sense of harmony between both sides and a feeling of being in an outdoor room.
18. Along the W. Rosemary Street frontage, the parking garage should not present a row of cars along the sidewalk at the building edge. During the 02-02-23 design meeting with the applicant team, we discussed that the layer of the building along the sidewalk could feature an engaging architectural design element, setback, or a use that would be engaging to the pedestrian.
19. For the office portion of the W. Rosemary frontage, the architectural character of the façade should be open and engaging and not present any “back of house” operations to the street frontage.
20. Throughout the site, opportunities abound for incorporating artwork. Because of the linear nature of the passage space, art that is episodic in nature, that is, unfolds as a series of installations meant to be experienced in sequence as one walks by, might be an intriguing possibility.

Parking (location, screening, and architectural treatment)

21. The parking structure has been reoriented from earlier sketches, with the short end now fronting W. Rosemary, which presents less of the garage along the sidewalk. An additional advantage of this orientation is that it locates the level ramp floors along the W. Rosemary frontage, with the more architecturally problematic sloped floor expression on the side elevations.
22. The entrance for the parking garage has been relocated away from the passage and is now at the far east end of the structure which helps isolate the entrance drive and provides for a more continuous activated edge along the W. Rosemary frontage. The opening of the garage entrance should be kept as narrow as possible and should not have any dumpsters, recycling containers, or other building service elements viewable from the street and sidewalk. Feasibility for providing a garage door should be investigated.
23. The main pedestrian entrance for the ramp is anticipated to be along the mid-block passage. The entrance should be a visually distinctive and engage positively with the passage streetscape design. If this entrance (and its corresponding elevator core) is at the southwest corner of the parking structure, there is an opportunity to treat this core as a distinctive architectural element in massing or articulation.

Massing (providing a sense of human scale)

24. The disposition of architectural massing will be a critical factor in settling the building into its downtown context. At an earlier kick-off design meeting with the applicant team, it was stressed that the tallest portions of the building should be pulled back from Franklin Street, with a gradual transition from Franklin up to the main massing element.
25. The current massing concept is exhibiting that idea. When viewed from Franklin Street, there is a progression of “layers” of building mass at varying heights which makes for a cascading

series of overlapping rectangular forms that lead up to the main building mass and help to break down the scale of the building.

26. Scale reduction is further enhanced by the pulling back of the façade edge at the first floor, which presents a colonnaded condition at the pedestrian level, widens outdoor public space and visually lightens the mass of the building as it meets the ground. The colonnade also provides a shaded alcove along the main pedestrian frontages of the passage.
27. Design of the cross-sectional properties of the passage should strive to provide daylighting opportunities as much as possible.

Articulation and Materials (architectural expression and character)

28. The design submission for this round focuses primarily on massing, site access and connectivity, and how the building fits into the existing public realm. However, the massing sketches included with this submittal indicate a general articulation strategy that meshes with the massing concept, whereby stepping massing elements exhibit subtle variations in materiality, horizontal or vertical expression, and façade depth.
29. The submittal's street level perspectives amply show how important the material selection, articulation, and lighting strategy will be for the undersides of the colonnades, given the visual prominence of these surfaces from the pedestrian standpoint.