

April 17, 2018

Mayor Hemminger and Town Council

Re: 1165 Weaver Dairy Road

This is a long letter (sorry!) because I support honoring our Comprehensive Plan and approving developments that make sustainable and financial sense for Chapel Hill. The history of this area goes back 10 years and some Council members may not be aware of all of the details, which I provide below.

As you know, you must be able to make all four findings in order to approve a Special Use Permit. A case could be made that this development satisfies none of them, but as Chair of the Northern Area Task Force, I will address just one:

d) That the use or development conforms with the general plans for the physical development of the Town as embodied in the Land Use Management Plan and in the Comprehensive Plan. (This is also a requirement for a rezoning which has been applied for as well.)

BACKGROUND:

The Task Force report

(<http://www.townofchapelhill.org/home/showdocument?id=1050>

is part of the Comprehensive Plan. It was made up of a diverse group of 15 citizens and Advisory Board members including Tom Jensen (PB), David Johnson (PB) George Cianciolo (CDC), Augustus Cho, Kathryn James (CDC), and Brian Decker (Bike and Ped). John Morris and Amy Chute represented business and landowners, and 6 additional area residents were seated. Our Council liaison was Laurin Easthom. All these members, despite their contrasting principles, believed in the goals and objectives enough to reach full consensus on every aspect of this report.

The charge to the NATF was to recommend development regulations, design standards and appearance guidelines for the implementation of transit oriented development along Martin Luther King Jr Blvd, Weaver Dairy Road and Eubanks Road. Increased density at Charterwood (Evolve), Carraway Village, and Weaver Crossing have already been built or are in progress – other dense developments

are approved or in review. To justify that density, it is important for all projects to be “team players.”

The nuts and bolts of the Task Force were to refine the Comprehensive Plan and development ordinances with respect to:

1. *Integrating new development into the fabric of the existing community,*
2. *Creating a community that is pedestrian and transit friendly,*
3. *Treating existing residents, neighborhoods and the natural environment respectfully,*
4. *Creating an appropriate, economically and financially sustainable mixture of office, retail, and residential uses,*
5. *Creating new development and design standards that will ensure transit oriented and pedestrian friendly land uses*

One specific goal of the 7 recommended is:

Goal 4: Development that supports an active pedestrian environment and promotes transit use.

Some of the Objectives are:

- *Establish minimum densities in order to ensure transit supportive development*
- *Design buildings that are oriented and proximate to the transit corridors to maximize access to transit and transit use*
- *Discourage automobile oriented uses such as drive-in/drive-through services, gas stations, automobile services and repair, and car washes*
- *Design the ground floor level of mixed-use buildings to be capable of occupation by both residential and non-residential use*

The applicant is proposing 13,820 sq ft of clinic space, 32,247 sq ft of office space, and 2,557 sq ft of retail (part of which would entail moving the Timberlyne Subway to this location) along with a 3 story parking deck. The applicant’s justification for the highlighted objective above is:

“- Objective 6 – The development does not include drive through services.”

(Note: a parking deck, by definition is an automobile oriented use.)

This proposal is not at all supportive of transit-oriented development. The Town has to take a strong stand on supporting transit as traffic congestion is

worsening. When Carraway Village is finished a massive influx of cars will be added.

I requested a listing of vacant office space from Dwight Basset. (I can't find a way to attach the report I received) While the overall office vacancy rate is approximately 10%, the Weaver Dairy Road area is at 28%. Vilcom (across the street) recently presented plans for a 80,000 sq ft storage facility (as part of their approved Master Land Use Plan) because they have been unable to attract office tenants. Charterwood (across the street) gave up on an approved 3 story office building and SECU is considering a branch there instead. Approved office space is coming to Carraway Village (60,000 sq ft to 270,000 sq ft) Additionally, medical clinics are over-represented, not only with 40,000 sq ft at Weaver Crossing (next door), but with Timberhill (across the street – 83,200 sq ft–mostly medical – almost 20% vacant), Perkins Drive (across the street) and Vilcom. These proposed uses will not achieve 3 critical objectives of the NATF report:

- *Promote day and evening ground level pedestrian activity by including public space and attractive destinations*
- *Design upper floor residential accommodation to overlook public space and create eyes on the street*
- *Encourage niche pedestrian oriented commercial development such as hotels, clothing stores, book stores, cafés, bakeries, gyms, galleries, pre-schools, and a farmer's market*

The development will create a “dead zone” by providing uses that are generally closed after 5 p.m and will stifle pedestrian activity by not supplying any diverse walkable commercial enterprise to the area.

I do not believe that 1165 Weaver Dairy Road should be approved as proposed. At a minimum, the following changes should be made:

1. Reduce the number of parking spaces from the maximum number allowed to one that will realistically support transit, pedestrian and bicycle use. Maximum parking is NOT a transit-oriented goal. Traffic congestion and pollution will increase dramatically as Carraway Village and other projects are built out.

2. If a deck is included, include a pedestrian friendly façade. Additionally, lower the parking number by adding ground floor retail, or use of the top as a green stormwater function, recreation, or rooftop restaurant thereby making it a destination.

3. Include a grassy plaza as opposed to a concrete one to fulfill objective: *(“Provide breaks in building frontages through green spaces and plazas”)*

4. Consider the a meandering sidewalk similar to Vilcom’s (objective: *“Create meandering sidewalks for aesthetic appeal in appropriate locations.”*)

Ensure that what is approved is what is built: Weaver Crossing’s narrative proposed a mixed use building at the corner)

Thank you for your consideration –

Del Snow