



**“AURA CHAPEL HILL” Mixed-Use @ 1000 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.**

**Concept Plan Submittal**

**Chapel Hill, NC**

**2.28.2020**

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 Chapel Hill Mixed-Use Concept Plan submittal for review by the Chapel Hill Town Council, the Community Design Commission, and the Housing Advisory Board.

The proposed mixed-use development is located at the northeast corner of Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. at Estes Drive. The 14.7 acre development proposes a mix of land uses: Retail/office, live-work space, and market-rate and affordable multi-family development.

The proposal embraces the adopted vision of the Town’s Central West Small Area Plan which calls for “residential, commercial, retail, and/or institutional” at this important corner of Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. at Estes Drive. As anticipated, transit-friendly development is proposed to welcome Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) at Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. Community gathering spaces will be a key component of the new development as well as easily accessible bicycle and pedestrian amenities to connect the new community.

The new development-proposes to reinvigorate the intersection with new uses, architecturally appropriate buildings (scale, character, articulation, etc.) and future BRT Station. The proposed BRT Station will be integral to the site design,



engaging with community gathering spaces and innovative landscape that is part of an urban forestry program.

**Statement & Vision:**

The proposed development will be a vibrant transit-oriented, mixed-use development, comprised of flats, townhomes and select live-work units in addition to a complimentary mix of neighborhood commercial structures (restaurants, service retail, and small office). The commercial uses are intended to serve both new and nearby residents and orient to shared greenspaces, gathering areas with connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods. An affordable housing component will be integral to the development. The development will NOT be a “monolithic box” such as recent “wrap” and “podium” developments in Chapel Hill.

Aura Chapel Hill buildings will have thoughtful contextual architecture, respecting the historic qualities of design in the Town and the UNC Campus. The site design will be organized to include properly scaled “outdoor rooms” and shared gathering areas. Aura Chapel Hill will have a carefully considered parking plan that minimizes “field” parking, screens a high percentage of spaces from public view and maximizes-on-street parking.

The development proposes 335 multi-family dwelling units (a combination of flats and townhomes) and approximately 25,000 sq.ft. of non-residential uses (comprised of retail/office and live-work units along Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., up to 60 affordable housing units (see Section 4 below) and approximately 12,000 sq.ft of community amenity space interior to the development. The concept plan proposal conforms to the vision and scale offered with the guidelines for this quadrant of the Central West area. We feel that it is a validation of the hard work done by the Central West Steering Committee.

**General Site Layout and Building Orientation**

The property is approximately 14.7 acres. It is located on the east side of Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. at the Estes Drive intersection. The future Carolina North campus associated with UNC-Chapel Hill is to be located on the west side of



Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. at the site of the retired Horace Williams Airport. As a reminder, the UNC Carolina North campus is approved for research and educational uses with various supportive functions, as well as housing for students and faculty.

Shadowoods Apartments is contiguous with the property to the north and fronts MLK Jr Blvd. To the east of Shadowoods Apartments, and at the northeast corner of this property, is the Coker Woods cluster single-family neighborhood. The Coker Woods development is buffered from the property with a 30 ft. deep, commonly owned wooded open space at its perimeter.

Mr. Whit Rummel owns the undeveloped 7.5 acres adjoining to the east, across an abandoned power line easement. Amity Methodist Church is located to the south across Estes Drive, along with the Estes Drive frontage of the YMCA.

### **Site Access and Circulation**

The development proposes the creation of a mixed use community that will connect to and integrate with the existing fabric of the area. The community will also function as a bridge between the high frequency BRT corridor and neighboring properties. A general grid pattern of development is proposed, reflecting recommendations of the Central West Small Area Plan.

The development frontage at Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. is proposed to be a compelling-street edge along the high frequency transit corridor. The development plan reflects the latest plans from the consultant working on the transit corridor design that locates a BRT Station along the property frontage. Vehicular access from Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. is proposed as an inviting new tree-lined entry drive. A single point of vehicular access is proposed on Estes Drive through a full access round-about as contemplated in the Central West Small Area Plan. Potential vehicular connections are proposed to the north to Shadowoods Apartments and to the east to Mr. Rummel's property. Details related to access, maintenance and other specific items require considerable future discussion. Pedestrian and bicycle amenities are prevalent. Bike lanes, sidewalk connections, and a new multi-use trail on the tree-lined Estes Drive are proposed for easy pedestrian/cyclist movement within and around the site.



### **Natural Features, Environment and Landscaping**

Topographically, the property slopes gently to the south and southeast from the northwest corner at Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. As such, the site is able to accommodate this requested grid layout. The upper segment of a drainage area is located in the southeastern corner of the property. This area is generally dry except for rain event. Stormwater flows, for the most part, to the southeastern corner of the property. The project will comply will all stormwater and sedimentation/erosion control requirements utilizing a variety of protection measures authorized by the Town. The Concept Plan indicates a pond in the eastern portion of the property, which will serve both as an amenity and runoff control.

### **Project Goals and Objectives**

We believe that the goals and objectives of this development proposal are in positive alignment with the goals and objectives of the Town’s adopted Central West Small Area Plan.

A formal development application will follow this Concept Plan review process. The future land uses and intensity called for as part of the Central West Small Area Plan require rezoning of the property. We anticipate requesting a “conditional rezoning”. The rezoning requested will likely be to an office/institutional category, which accommodates the broadest mix of uses.

## **2. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

### **Chapel Hill’s 2020 Comprehensive Plan (CH2020)**

The Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use Concept Plan submittal is proposed in accordance with the CH2020 Comprehensive Plan and the Central West Small Area Plan, an element of the Town’s Comprehensive Plan. This statement of compliance is provided with regard to general concepts in CH2020 as well as the guiding principles of the Central West Small Area Plan.

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. The community also would like more choices about where to shop and how to meet daily needs. Community members also would like choices about where they can work and play in Chapel Hill.

**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 Chapel Hill Mixed-Use Compliance:**

The Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use Concept Plan submittal will contribute to choices regarding where to live, work, and play in Chapel Hill. These choices will be achieved by offering new office and retail space as well as a variety of housing options all in close proximity to downtown, schools, and University services and amenities. This will provide additional choices about where to live and work as well as where to shop and meet general daily needs.

The development will provide important connections for those who live and work in the new community in the form of physical connections. These physical connections include pedestrian and bicycle amenities and easy access to the high frequency BRT corridor on Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. Opportunities for social connections will be provided with expanded housing choices, new outdoor amenities and gathering spaces, small scale retail and work places, and a variety of commercial and employment opportunities.

**Chapel Hill's Central West Guiding Principles**

Thirteen principles were developed by the community to help guide future development in the Central West Area. These principles were adopted by the Town Council in 2013 as an element of the Town's Comprehensive Plan. The Aura



Chapel Hill Mixed-Use Concept Plan submittal demonstrates compliance with each of these principles:

- Principle 1: Create a Strong Sense of Place
- Principle 2: Ensure Community Compatibility
- Principle 3: Create Social Connections
- Principle 4: Improve Physical Connections
- Principle 5: Minimize Vehicular Traffic Impacts
- Principle 6: Enhance the Pedestrian/Bicycle Experience
- Principle 7: Improve the Transit System
- Principle 8: Encourage a Diverse Mix of Uses
- Principle 9: A Diverse Population
- Principle 10: Respect Existing Neighborhoods
- Principle 11: Employ Environmentally Sound Practices
- Principle 12: Feature, Repair, and Enhance Natural Resources
- Principle 13: Consider Economic Impacts in Development Decisions

**Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use Compliance:**

The Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use development will be a vibrant addition to the area and will provide a strong sense of place within both the Central West area and the Town. This gateway development, at a major intersection positively contributes to the fabric of the Central West area.

With the careful placement of buildings, streets, sidewalks, parking and open space, a new sense of place will be established at this corner. Community gathering spaces, innovative landscape reinforce connection to the Bus Rapid Transit corridor. New tree-lined drives will provide connections as envisioned in the Town’s Small Area Plan for vehicles as well as ease of movement for pedestrians and bicyclists. Townhouses with entry stoops provide pedestrian scaled frontage along Estes Drive.



The Central West Plan promotes mixed-use at this location and encourages density and intensity of use that will further support the town's robust transit system plans. The Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use development will offer an improved physical connection to this major north-south transit corridor. A variety of vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle pathways provide connectivity within the development and to the perimeter community fabric.

The proposed development will provide compatible transition between the surrounding residential and institutional uses and the high frequency transit corridor of Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

Both physical and social connections are promoted with the new development. Opportunities for social interaction will be provided with diverse housing options, outdoor amenities/ gathering areas/ open spaces and a variety of live-work spaces contribute to opportunities for entrepreneurial development within the community. Affordable and workforce housing is proposed as a component of the development.

Vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian connectivity is provided as envisioned in the Central West Plan. Vehicular access-provided from Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. and contributes to the establishment of a street "grid". This primary access point will accommodate motorized and non-motorized vehicles as well as pedestrians through the site with street trees and amenities. Sidewalks, informal trails, and a new Estes Drive multiuse trail will be a welcoming component of the new development, as will an east-west "main street" connection internal to the property.

Traffic impacts on the surrounding areas will be mitigated because of the link to the north-south Bus Rapid Transit corridor. The transit-oriented nature of the design coupled with ease of access to high frequency public transportation will help reduce traffic impacts. The internal capture associated with a mixed-use development will further help to reduce vehicular traffic impacts. This overall transportation approach promotes better air quality and sustainability as well as energy conservation. Vehicular parking can be minimized with this holistic approach, and bicycle parking maximized.



The proposal works with the natural environment and the topography of the site and the stormwater management will be located in a naturally occurring low portion of the site.

The applicant proposes to comply with the Town's policies and requirement for reduced energy consumption.

Storm water run-off from the development will be managed on-site with storm water retention and water quality treatment to be sized to meet all requirements. Storm water elements which are developed as bio-retention or permanent basins will become positive visual features. The proposed storm water facilities will constitute Best Management Practices to ensure that storm water runoff does not negatively impact neighboring properties. These practices will also do double duty as an aesthetic amenity for the residents

This new development will contribute to the strength and the economic prosperity of the Central West area and the larger community. The Town's tax base will be enhanced with sustainable land uses and intensities.

### **3. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH DESIGN GUIDELINES**

#### **Chapel Hill's Design Guidelines**

All aspects of this project will be designed to comply with the Town's Design Guidelines. We understand that newer design guidelines have not yet been adopted so we are referencing the broad categories of earlier Design Guidelines. This includes access and circulation, storm water management, landscaping and tree canopy, parking and loading, street lighting, utilities, and solid waste management.

The purpose of the Town's Design Guidelines document "is to assure that new designs remain in continuity with the town's existing design 'successes,' and at



the same time inspire exciting and creative additions to the community's blend of distinctive buildings from many eras” (p. 1).

The Chapel Hill Design Guidelines provide categories of town-wide criteria for design. The Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use Concept Plan submittal demonstrates compliance with each of the following design criteria as identified below:

### **Chapel Hill General Design Criteria**

#### Design Criteria: Livability

Buildings and outdoor spaces should be designed to fit human scale, harmonize with design of streets, and accommodate pedestrian traffic.

### **Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use Compliance:**

The Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use project will provide design of a human scale that embraces the traditional grid street layout recommended by the Central West Plan. With the new development, density and intensity is focused on the Town’s high intensity BRT at Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. The new buildings and outdoor amenity and community gathering spaces will harmonize with the new tree lined drives pedestrian-oriented spaces and lively storefronts as well as with the surrounding area. As a transit-friendly, walkable and bike friendly development, with sidewalks and trails throughout, the human scale will be emphasized.

Benches and other pedestrian and bicycle amenities will be provided to maximize enjoyment of the outdoor space. The design of the new main access drive from Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. with a pedestrian focus will slow vehicle speeds and cater to pedestrians and cyclists. The proposed design promotes pedestrian and bicycle activity and safety and encourages easy access to the convenient public transportation/BRT Station located on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

#### Design Criteria: Visual Impact

New public and private projects should be visually appealing, and compatible with other development in the surrounding area.



**Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use Compliance:**

The visual impact of this new development will be compatible with its location and with the height guidance of the Central West Small Area Plan. High quality architecture with appropriate transparency will define the character of the development. The proposal will provide new plantings and landscape buffering to the immediately adjacent land uses to the north and east, but in a more urbanistic form along the street frontages.

Because the Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. frontage for the proposed development is on the North-South high capacity BRT route, and across the street from the University's future Carolina North campus, the visual impact on this corridor will be compatible with this transit-oriented nature including a focus on the BRT transit station as a major connection point.

**Design Criteria: Vegetation**

Landscape design concepts should preserve existing trees and incorporate native new trees and shrubbery. The landscape theme should be aesthetically compatible with that of the surrounding neighborhood.

**Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use Compliance:**

The landscape theme associated with this project will be evocative of the character of the surrounding Central West area. Because of the timbering of the property, special attention will be provided to the edges with adjoining properties and to incorporating native trees and shrubbery. The goal is to install plants that will over time lead to a new forested buffer. Compatible tree plantings are proposed along the new, main access drive envisioned by the Central West Plan and other internal drives. Compliance with the Town's tree canopy coverage requirements and parking lot landscaping requirements will ensure a compatible landscape theme for the development.

**Design Criteria: Mobility**

Land design concepts should provide a network of roads, bicycle paths and lanes, and sidewalks that give strong consideration to the safety of motorists, cyclists, joggers, and walkers.



**Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use Compliance:**

The new vehicular east-west connection through the project is an important element of the Central West Plan. It will be designed to slow vehicular movement. The street layout is intended to enhance pedestrian movement and promote access by bicyclists, and conversely to encourage people to get out of their cars and explore the neighborhood on foot.

Multiple pedestrian and bicycle connections will encourage safe movement throughout the site. This will include pedestrian trails as well as the multi-use path on Estes Drive as called for in the Central West Plan. Connection to the public transportation network will be an important element. This transit oriented and transit supportive development will be a destination for employees and residents choosing alternative modes of transportation.

Design Criteria: Activity Centers

Structures and complexes should enhance community life by use of "destination points" such as arcades, lobbies, and ground-level retail stores, while at the same time providing for safe movement of vehicles and pedestrians.

**Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use Compliance:**

The development itself will be a “destination point” and will provide an important addition to the activity centers envisioned with the Central West Plan ensuring a mix of land uses in the area. A commercial component is proposed close to the North-South BRT route and will encourage residents and neighbors to meet, both formally and informally. New pedestrian and bicycle connections will provide for safe movement both through and around the site.

Design Criteria: Views

Streets, buildings, and parking lots should enhance the urban environment by providing pleasant vistas and geographic orientations.



**Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use Compliance:**

This Concept Plan for 1000 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. is designed to enhance the urban environment with views from both within the new buildings as well as from the surrounding areas. Setbacks, building facades, roof lines/ varying building heights, community gathering spaces, and integrated landscape will be carefully designed for compatibility with the area. New street tree planting, common areas, parking lot landscaping, and the perimeter landscape buffer areas will promote views that are aesthetically pleasing and enhance the urban environment with pleasant vistas.

The Aura Chapel Hill Mixed-Use development will be a welcomed addition to the Central West area blending the intensity anticipated with the high intensity BRT transit corridor of Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. in a manner compatible with the surrounding area and in accordance with the Central West Plan.

**4. STATEMENT REGARDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAM**

Aura Chapel Hill will include an on-site affordable housing element that addresses particular housing needs within the Town. With that in mind, we will continue to meet with community members, local consultants, and decision-makers to propose an affordable housing plan that aligns with the Town's vision and present a more detailed plan at the CDC hearing.