



# TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

Town Hall  
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## Legislation Details (With Text)

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**Title:** Discuss the Concept Plan Review Process.

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**Attachments:** 1. Draft Staff Presentation, 2. Staff Presentation, 3. Council Questions with Staff Response, 4. Emails from the Public

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
9/16/2020	1	Town Council	received and filed	

### Discuss the Concept Plan Review Process.

**Staff:**

Judy Johnson, Interim Director  
Corey Liles, Principal Planner  
Adam Nicholson, Senior Planner

**Department:**

Planning

**Overview:** On June 26, 2019, the Community Design Commission (CDC) submitted a [petition](https://chapelhill.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=7334249&GUID=AA1C60E9-4112-426D-BF21-F9EEDC5081D5) [to the Council to revise the Concept Plan Review process in an effort to provide effective, timely, and meaningful feedback to applicants and the Council. The Town Council discussed the Concept Plan Review process at the June 6, 2020](https://chapelhill.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=7334249&GUID=AA1C60E9-4112-426D-BF21-F9EEDC5081D5) [Council Committee on Economic Sustainability meeting. Following that discussion, staff met with stakeholders, collected input, and will share that information this evening.](https://www.townofchapelhill.org/home/showdocument?id=46035)



### Recommendation(s):

That the Council hear stakeholder input received over the summer, provide input on the current Concept Plan process, and provide feedback on potential changes to the process.

### Priorities

- Creating quality projects with a focus on the general form of the land and spatial relationships of the proposed development and surrounding area
- Promoting quality public participation and engagement
- Efficiently using staff and applicant resources

### Discussion

Per [LUMO 4.3](https://library.municode.com/nc/chapel_hill/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CO_APXALOUSMA_ART4PR_4.3COPLRE) [the purpose of Concept Plans is to provide an opportunity for the Town Council, CDC, staff, and the community to consider the impact of a major](https://library.municode.com/nc/chapel_hill/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CO_APXALOUSMA_ART4PR_4.3COPLRE)

development program on the character of the area in which it is proposed to be located. The process is intended:

- A. *to take into consideration the general form of the land before and after development as well as the **spatial relationships** of the **proposed structures, open spaces, landscaped areas**, and **general access and circulation patterns** as they relate to the proposed development and the surrounding area; and*
- B. *to consider the various aspects of design, with special emphasis on whether the proposed development is consistent with the **town's design guidelines** and the **goals and objectives of the town's comprehensive plan**.*

## 1. What is the Problem?

Concept Plans pose different issues for each group involved in the process:

- CDC has expressed concerns over materials provided, specifically requesting additional context and narrative.
- Planning Commission has expressed an interest in reviewing Concept Plans.
- Historic District Commission seeks guidance on how to separate Concept Plans from their review of Certificates of Appropriateness.
- The Council remains supportive of an early review of project concepts and believes a revised process could more effectively improve final project design.
- Developers are frustrated with meeting lengths, the quality of advisory board discussions, and limited Council feedback for the concept plan process.

## 2. Current Process Overview

### Application types:

Concept Plans are required prior to the submittal of Special Use Permit (SUP), Master Land Use Plan, Conditional Zoning, and Major Subdivisions.

### Steps:

1. Applicant submits a Concept Plan Review application containing a rough sketch of their proposal
2. The proposal is reviewed by the CDC, or the Historic District Commission (HDC) acting as the CDC in the historic districts
3. Housing Advisory Board (HAB) reviews residential projects (as a courtesy review)
4. Advisory Boards share their comments with Council
5. Council reviews the Concept Plan and provides feedback to the applicant

## 3. Concept Plan Review Options

Considering the Priorities listed above, staff have formulated several options for possible improvements to the Concept Plan Review process. Changes could include any of the following:

### A. Community Concept Meeting (CCM)

This informal meeting will allow the applicant an opportunity to present a 'sketch' proposal and address questions, concerns, or comments. Neighbors, community members, and stakeholders would learn more about the project from the applicant team. Staff, Council members, and advisory board members could also attend and participate.

### B. Staff Review

For a staff-based Concept Plan review, key staff members from departments such as Fire, Stormwater, and Planning would submit comments and meet with the applicant. Staff could then provide Advisory Boards a regular report on projects that were reviewed.

### C. Design Reviews

1. The Planning Commission in place of the CDC/HDC
2. Town Council only
3. Urban Design Assessment (UDA) or an Urban Design Report (UDR) where the Urban Designer provides an analysis including how the development will function in its proposed neighborhood context and a summary of feedback on the project.

D. Staff Output

1. Providing a quarterly concept plan summary report to Council
2. Presenting supplemental information to the Council Committee on Economic Sustainability (CCES)

**Background**

*Concept Plan Statistics*

In a survey of **55** Concept Plan submittals reviewed by Council since 2006, staff found:

- The average time between Town Council review and submission of a formal application was 320 days.
- 1 out of 10 applicants do not submit a formal application after 2 years.
- The typical start time for Concept Plan discussions at Council Meetings is 9:33 PM, with the latest starting at 11:50 PM.

*Concept Plan History*

Concept Plans originated in 1998 when the Development Ordinance charged the newly created CDC with providing feedback on proposed developments. This was an opportunity for designers to receive a peer review of their sketches. The Land Use Management Ordinance (LUMO) has since formalized this process, requiring significant application materials to present to the Advisory Boards and Council for recommendations.



**Attachments:**

- Draft Staff Presentation

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**The Agenda will reflect the text below and/or the motion text will be used during the meeting.**

PRESENTER: Adam Nicholson, Senior Planner

The purpose of this item is for the Council to provide input on the Concept Plan Review process.