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Planning for the Future

April 26, 2018

Ms Kay Pearlstein
Town of Chapel Hill Planning Department
405 Martin Luther King Jr Blvd
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

RE: SPECIAL USE PERMIT APPLICATION – PROJECT NARRATIVE
COLUMBIA STREET ANNEX, 1150 South Columbia Street

Kay:

Enclosed is the Special Use Permit application for the Columbia Street Annex multi-use project.

The project site is located at the northwest corner of South Columbia Street and the NC 54 westbound on-ramp at the south end of Chapel Hill. The site is currently wooded / vacant with a jurisdictional stream buffer running north to south approximately 200-300 feet west of the street right of way.

The proposed development will include 6 and 7 story buildings set into the steep drop between the Columbia Street roadway and the much lower stream area to the west, and connected by a pedestrian plaza at street level. The lowest two levels will be underground parking and entries to three residential units facing the stream area. The next floor will be residential and retail/office space. This level will sit above and overlook the stream area to the west, but will be at street level with street pedestrian access on the Columbia Street side. The top four levels will be 1 and 2 story residential units.

Total square footage for the building is 56,870 square feet broken down as 7,150 sf of retail/office, and 49,720 sf for 46 residential units. There will be 68 parking spaces in an underground garage and surface spaces on the west side of the building, not visible from the street. Some parking located near Columbia Street right of way will sit 16' below street level and will be separated from the street view by a retaining wall and plant screening. Service and trash will be located under the northernmost building and not visible from the road. The vehicular layout allows service and emergency vehicle access. Bicycle parking will be accommodated in the residential units, in the underground garage, and a few spaces located in the street level plaza accessible from Columbia Street.

Site vehicular access would be located at the northernmost part of the site, across from Purefoy Road to remove it as much as possible from the 15/501/53 / Columbia Street intersection. A new sidewalk would be built in the right of way to connect to existing sidewalk to the north. There is a requirement for 40% tree coverage on site. That requirement will be satisfied entirely with existing trees on the west side of the stream buffer. This project will not include any land disturbance in that area. Landscape buffers will be planted in disturbed areas on the northern, northwestern and eastern property lines.

The applicant is requesting a landscape buffer modification on South Columbia Street. The required buffer would be a 30' wide buffer planted to 'D' level opacity. But we are requesting a buffer ranging in width from 0 to 30' and with 30% of the total required plantings on the project property. This frontage will be opening to a pedestrian plaza to allow this awkward site to be accessible by pedestrians from South Columbia Street. The Owner would like to also plant some street trees in the DOT right of way and will work with DOT toward this condition. Those would be additional to the 30% plantings. The reduction will provide some buffering between the street and the building and shade for pedestrians along that sidewalk, while still providing view of the building and extensive access to the plaza area.

The applicant is requesting a modification to the secondary height limit of 60' in Zone CC-C. The proposed building height would range from 58.5' on the Columbia Street frontage, to 84.5' on the stream side, where the plan proposes six stories of housing and one story of parking beneath. The building's Columbia Street frontage would be 5 stories above street elevation, with plantings and a pedestrian plaza between the building and the sidewalk. The building height is critical to the relatively small building footprint, which would cut down on impervious surface and allow the majority of the site to remain a wooded buffer between the residential neighborhood to the west and the 15 / 501 / 54 / Columbia intersection.

The applicant is requesting a reduction in parking to 80% of the minimum requirement. The proposed 68 spaces on site are expected to satisfy the parking demand at this location. There are 32 double stacked spaces in the underground garage, suiting parking needs for 16 two-bedroom residential units. With the existing sidewalk system in place, the bike lanes, public transit service, and the location of this project close to campus and downtown Chapel Hill, it is expected that 80% of the parking requirement will fulfil the user demands and encourage alternative forms of transportation.

Stormwater management will be handled through a BMP located under the surface parking west of the building. Stormwater management will meet State regulations. The developer is arguing that during the early application review in 2014 the stream was determined to be intermittent and therefore needs only a 50' RCD and buffer area. This is the information shown on the plans. The site is steeply sloped and is not in a flood plain. The 50' buffer will be protected and all construction and disturbance will remain outside of that zone. The stream itself does not always have water in it, and is only 1-2 feet wide, and any visible banks are less than a foot above the bottom of the channel. Where necessary, the new project will have a retaining wall as the divider between the buffer and the parking lot. Otherwise grades are steep enough that a retaining wall is not needed. The development sits a minimum of 11 feet higher than the bottom of the stream.

Trash will be handled in a compactor located under the northernmost building. Both garbage truck and fire truck access will meet Town standards.

A traffic impact study has been completed for this project, which fronts two NC DOT streets and no Town streets. The Owner has spoken with Chuck Edwards at DOT and will work with DOT to provide the turn lanes and safety measures required by DOT.

The project has gone through the Town's Concept review process. It was presented to the Community Design Commission in October 2007 and there is a separate document responding to the board members' comments. The project also was reviewed by Town Council in February 2008, and a separate document addresses and responds to their concerns.

Sincerely,

Coulter Jewell Thames, PA

Wendi Ramsden RLA

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Wendi Ramsden". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

cc. Phil Szostak – Architect, Szostak Design
Roland Gammon – Owner, CH Properties