



Coulter Jewell Thames, PA

MAIN OFFICE
111 WEST MAIN STREET
DURHAM, NC 27701
p 919.682.0368 f 919.688.5646

Planning for the Future

COLUMBIA STREET ANNEX

1150 South Columbia Street

SPECIAL USE PERMIT APPLICATION - **STATEMENT OF JUSTIFICATION**

28 April 2014

The project site is located at the northwest corner of South Columbia Street and the NC54 westbound entry ramp. The proposed use will be a mix of 39 residential units and some office/retail/commercial space in a 56,870 sf building. Parking will meet the minimum Town requirements. Stormwater control and tree coverage will all meet Town standards. We will be asking for a modification of the landscape buffer on South Columbia Street, but the other landscape buffers will meet Town requirements. We believe the project satisfies all the required findings as stated in section 4.5.2 of the Town's Land Use Management Ordinance. These findings and our responses to how we address each finding are submitted as follows:

- 1. The use is located, designed, and proposed to be operated so as to maintain or promote the public health, safety, and general welfare.***

The project will be designed with open public space on the South Columbia frontage and more private space for residents on the west facing part of the building and site. Parking and plaza areas will be well lighted to meet the Town's lighting codes. Public sidewalk and handicap accessibility will be provided. The new building will comply with all current building and safety codes.

A small trip generation traffic memo was completed in relation to this project. The study found the additional daily trips generated by this project to be under 500, the limit at which the Town guidelines require a full TIA. Though a full TIA has not been completed, the proposed access to the site has been located at the north end of the whole parcel, across from Purefoy Road and as far from the highway overpass as possible. The drive would be located 420 feet away from the 15/501/54 / Columbia intersection. And street improvements currently under construction by NC DOT in this area provide a shared left turn lane at this driveway location. There is no other possible frontage for vehicular access to or from the site. The south end of the property fronts the NC54 entry ramp. The Monroe Street right

of way is not improved, topographically doesn't meet the South Columbia Street pavement elevation, and to the west crosses a jurisdictional stream buffer into a quiet residential street.

The project will have minimal impact on utility demands. The site is already serviced with water, sanitary sewer, power, and natural gas. There will be no need for public upgrade of utilities to service this site. The project will add a fire hydrant on South Columbia Street which will directly serve the new facility but which will also be an appropriate additional streetside and publicly accessible hydrant for the area.

- 2. The use complies with all required regulations and standards of the LUMO including all applicable provisions of articles 3 and 5, the applicable specific standards contained in the supplemental use regulations (article 6) and with all other applicable regulations.***

We are requesting a concurrent zoning amendment to allow for more built square footage than would currently be allowed. All dimensional, design, and development standards are in conformance with applicable LUMO standards for the proposed zone except for a request for one modified landscape buffer.

- 3. The use is located, designed and proposed to be operated so as to maintain or enhance the value of contiguous property, or the use is a public necessity.***

It is expected that the new project will maintain or enhance the value of contiguous property. The site is currently forested but is quite overgrown at the street edges. The streets have been built up over time in order to allow enough elevation for an overpass at the NC54 intersection. Because of this, the property sits as much as 25' below street level. It would be difficult to fill the site to make it usable for single family homes as there is a jurisdictional stream buffer 200-300' inside the site which runs the entire length north to south. The proposed design will create a building which takes advantage of the elevation changes by putting underground parking on the lowest level (away from street view), and creating a pedestrian connection at street level to a commercial/retail use space. The upper floors and the space facing west toward the stream and lower slopes would be used for residential purposes. In this way the building itself acts as beacon at the gateway into Town, and provides a transition between the busy arterial street on the east facing side, and the residential neighborhood to the west. Additionally because the space is constructed in a 7 story building, the economically efficient density can be reached while leaving more than half the site undisturbed in existing forest. The concurrent rezoning would support the mixed commercial and residential uses that are being proposed.

- 4. The use conforms with the general plans for the physical development of the town as embodied in the appendix and in the comprehensive plan.***

The project site is located at the northwest corner of South Columbia Street and NC 54. Though not in an area specifically identified for future development, the area has definitely changed since the

residential zoning was instated. The topographic constraints and the location of the parcel facing two arterial roads make it less attractive for single family home development than for a mix of other mixed uses.

2020 Comprehensive Plan

The proposed project complies with the four applicable goals as specified in the 2020 Plan.

Theme 1: A Place For Everyone - The proposed development will add to the diversified housing types in town. (PFE.3)

Theme 2: Community Prosperity and Engagement - The project site is a vacant lot in a gateway location at the south end of town. The proposed development will increase the value of the land in a place where infrastructure is already completely in place. Because the site is so far below the street (25') and is limited by a stream and associated buffer only 200-200 feet inside the site, there is a limit to the R-2 potential building in this location. By recombining the parcels and creating access to the whole piece from the most northerly point, the lot will become more valuable by being fully developed, but only if the increased density and building height can be built. (CPE.1) The small size commercial space available within the building will foster small and start-up businesses, and the project provides housing and work space within walking distance of the hospital and science buildings on campus. (CPE.3)

Theme 3: Getting Around - The project site has accessible frontage on one public street and is already connected to the rest of the community by sidewalks, bike lanes, and local bus service. (GA.2) There is an existing Chapel Hill Transit stop at the north end of the site which is serviced by 8 local bus routes. (GA.4) The project is located very close to schools, the University, and the Morgan Creek Greenway Trail, allowing users to access the site on foot or by bicycle as well as public transit or private car. The project will provide underground and open car parking, and covered bicycle parking. (GA.8)

Theme 4: Good Places, New Spaces - The proposed development increases density in a well-served area, which helps minimize sprawl. (GPNS.1) Development of these lots was made difficult years ago when the raised South Columbia / NC 54 intersection was installed, creating a site located as much as 25' below street level at points, and with no possible access from the south end. Additionally, more stringent stormwater and stream protection requirements adopted during the past 15 years have severely limited the building envelope on site. The proposed development works within these limitations. The underground parking takes advantage of land below street level and the building itself acts as a transition providing a public street front on the east side and a more private space overlooking the natural environment of stream and forest toward the west. (GPNS.2 and GPNX.6) This development will be a signature building visible to everyone entering Town at this location. At the same time, the is protecting the stream and buffer area and by increasing the density on the east portion of the site is able to leave a large treed area protected in the western half of the site, thereby fully utilizing the site while protecting environmental elements. (GPNS.8)

Theme 5: Nurturing Our Community - The proposed development will provide tree coverage and stormwater management on site to meet or exceed the Town's standard requirements. (NOC.2) The steep difference between the street elevation and the stream elevation only 200-300 feet away creates a challenge to development that would require either fill or very high retaining walls to create a level building envelope. The building design takes advantage of this elevation difference by setting the building into the slope and allowing the building to become the transition between the street and stream as fixed elements. The site allows for building access on three levels and the development takes advantage of that by tucking two thirds of the parking under the building, thereby reducing impervious area and screening the parking from the street view. There will be a pedestrian plaza at street level providing an urban feel for the pedestrian and creating a gracious visual and pedestrian entry into the building. The west facing side of the building will have views of the stream and forest and allow the building to create a noise and visual buffer from the busy street. (NOC.7) The high density of the building itself allows the footprint to remain small and therefore allows a large portion of the site to remain undisturbed in existing forest. (NOC.3) The siting of the building also creates a transition between the noise and commotion of Columbia Street and the quieter residential neighborhood to the west. (NOC.8)

Theme 6: Town and Gown Collaboration - Though the project is not being built in collaboration with the University, it's location within easy walking distance of the south end of campus will make it an attractive support facility for University employees and students and people whose business is connected with the University. (TGC.4 and TGC.6)

Requested Modifications

The applicant is requesting a modification of the landscape buffer along the South Columbia Street frontage. The required buffer would be 30' wide and planted to 'D' level opacity. There is no required street building setback in the requested zoning. The Owner is creating a pedestrian plaza at the street level which is being partially built on top of underground parking and that roof system will not support the full landscape buffer. Additionally the design intent is to create an open space for pedestrians. Parking near the street will be located 16' below street level and retaining walls and landscaping will be used to screen that parking which will not be visible from the street. We will work with NC DOT and are requesting permission from them to plant some trees the Columbia Street DOT right of way. The buffer as currently designed will vary in width between zero and 30' with an average width of 12'. The modification also requests a 70% reduction in plant material from the required 23 canopy trees, 47 understory trees and 156 shrubs to 7 canopy trees, 15 understory trees, and 50 shrubs within the project site.



Coulter Jewell Thames, PA

MAIN OFFICE
111 WEST MAIN STREET
DURHAM, NC 27701
p 919.682.0368 f 919.688.5646

Planning for the Future

COLUMBIA STREET ANNEX

1150 South Columbia Street

ZONING ATLAS AMENDMENT APPLICATION - **STATEMENT OF JUSTIFICATION**

28 April 2014

The project site is located at the northwest corner of South Columbia Street and the NC54 westbound entry ramp. The site is zoned R2 which permits only single family residential and duplexes, with a maximum FAR of .093. The parcel is not within any of the 2020 Plan Future Focus Areas, but is along a stretch of road currently being improved by NC DOT. We believe the proposed development meets many of the goals outlined in the 2020 Plan.

JUSTIFICATION FOR REZONING REQUEST

Article 4.4 of the Town's Land Use Management Plan (LUMO) allows a zoning map and zoning text amendment for any of the three following reasons:

- a) To correct a manifest error in the appendix, or
- b) Because of changed or changing conditions in a particular area or in the jurisdiction generally, or
- c) To achieve the purposes of the comprehensive plan.

The applicant believes that both criterion b and c are applicable to this rezoning request. They are addressed individually below.

Rezoning Justification Statement : Changed or Changing Conditions

The site is not part of any special protection district or any targeted redevelopment area. But it is a vacant lot located on a busy street that is currently being improved by NC DOT. Those improvements include bike lanes, sidewalks and turn lanes. The location of the site is at a gateway into Town and is within walking distance of the UNC campus. The site is currently zoned R-2 but is on a busy section of an arterial road and overlooks NC 54 bypass. The 2011 NCDOT maps show a traffic count of 13,000 trips

daily on this stretch of road. And it is on 8 Chapel Hill Transit bus routes. Because of the proximity of the site to the NC 54 and Fordham Blvd overpass intersection, this site is not conducive to being developed for a single family home. The site to the north is vacant but zoned NC. The properties to the west are zoned R-2 and developed as multi family and single family residential. But these properties are on the west side of the stream and its buffer which bisects the project site completely, and they will be separated from the new development by 280 feet of existing forest which will remain undisturbed.

Rezoning Justification Statement : Achieve the Purposes of the Comprehensive Plan

The Chapel Hill 2020 Comprehensive Plan was adopted in June 2012 and lists 5 “big ideas” to “serve as beacons to guide the efforts of the Town and the community as Chapel Hill’s future is created”. The proposed project supports two of these ideas.

The first of these “big ideas” is to implement a bikeable, walkable, green communities plan by 2020. The proposed project is in a location and is being built in a way that supports this philosophy. The location of the project along a major transportation corridor with established transit service and an existing bike lane and sidewalk network will encourage the use of alternate transportation methods. The project will treat excess stormwater runoff, will retain a large percentage of existing forest on site, and will be energy efficient in its design, orientation, and HVAC systems selection. The project increases density of use on the site and adds to the existing land uses to help provide a mixed use community.

The fourth big idea pushes for an increase of workforce housing and student housing in the community. Though the residential portion of the project is not aimed at students, it does add 39 residential units within walking distance of campus. The Owner would expect some of this residential to support the University community without putting pressure on existing residential neighborhoods and neighborhood streets.

The proposed project will support many of the 2020 Plan goals which are the same goals as the previous 2000 Comprehensive Plan including:

- Conserving and protecting existing neighborhoods
- Conserving and protecting natural areas in Chapel Hill
- Identifying areas of development opportunity
- Encouraging desirable non-residential development working toward a balanced transportation system and complete bicycle/greenway/sidewalk systems, and
- Providing quality facilities and services.

The 2020 Comprehensive Plan is organized around 6 themes which help to structure community discussion and Town goals. The themes and goals outlined in the 2020 plan are:

1. A place for everyone
2. Community prosperity and engagement
3. Getting around
4. Good places, new spaces

5. Nurturing our community
6. Town and gown collaboration.

The development of a residential / commercial mixed use project in this location strongly supports all 6 of the themes/goals.

Theme 1: A Place For Everyone - The proposed development will add to the diversified housing types in town. (PFE.3)

Theme 2: Community Prosperity and Engagement - The project site is a vacant lot in a gateway location at the south end of town. The proposed development will increase the value of the land in a place where infrastructure is already completely in place. Because the site is so far below the street (25') and is limited by a stream and associated buffer only 200-200 feet inside the site, there is a limit to the R-2 potential building in this location. By recombining the parcels and creating access to the whole piece from the most northerly point, the lot will become more valuable by being fully developed, but only if the increased density and building height can be built. (CPE.1) The small size commercial space available within the building will foster small and start-up businesses, and the project provides housing and work space within walking distance of the hospital and science buildings on campus. (CPE.3)

Theme 3: Getting Around - The project site has accessible frontage on one public street and is already connected to the rest of the community by sidewalks, bike lanes, and local bus service. (GA.2) There is an existing Chapel Hill Transit stop at the north end of the site which is serviced by 8 local bus routes. (GA.4) The project is located very close to schools, the University, and the Morgan Creek Greenway Trail, allowing users to access the site on foot or by bicycle as well as public transit or private car. The project will provide underground and open car parking, and covered bicycle parking. (GA.8)

Theme 4: Good Places, New Spaces - The proposed development increases density in a well-served area, which helps minimize sprawl. (GPNS.1) Development of these lots was made difficult years ago when the raised South Columbia / NC 54 intersection was installed, creating a site located as much as 25' below street level at points, and with no possible access from the south end. Additionally, more stringent stormwater and stream protection requirements adopted during the past 15 years have severely limited the building envelope on site. The proposed development works within these limitations. The underground parking takes advantage of land below street level and the building itself acts as a transition providing a public street front on the east side and a more private space overlooking the natural environment of stream and forest toward the west. (GPNS.2 and GPNX.6) This development will be a signature building visible to everyone entering Town at this location. At the same time, the is protecting the stream and buffer area and by increasing the density on the east portion of the site is able to leave a large forested area protected in the western half of the site, thereby fully utilizing the site while protecting environmental elements. (GPNS.8)

Theme 5: Nurturing Our Community - The proposed development will provide tree coverage and stormwater management on site to meet or exceed the Town's standard requirements. (NOC.2) The

steep difference between the street elevation and the stream elevation only 200-300 feet from the street creates a challenge to development that would require either fill or very high retaining walls to create a level building envelope. The building design takes advantage of this elevation difference by setting the building into the slope and allowing the building to become the transition between the street and stream as fixed elements. The site allows for building access on three levels and the development takes advantage of that by tucking two thirds of the parking under the building, thereby reducing impervious area and screening the parking from the street view. There will be a pedestrian plaza at street level providing an urban feel for the pedestrian and creating a gracious visual and pedestrian entry into the building. The west facing side of the building will have views of the stream and forest and allow the building to create a buffer from noise and traffic of the busy street. (NOC.7) The high density of the building itself allows the footprint to remain small and therefore allows a large portion of the site to remain undisturbed in existing forest. (NOC.3) The siting of the building also creates a transition between the noise and commotion of Columbia Street and the quieter residential neighborhood to the west. (NOC.8)

Theme 6: Town and Gown Collaboration - Though the project is not being built in collaboration with the University, it's location within easy walking distance of the south end of campus will make it an attractive support facility for University employees and students, and people whose business is connected with the University. (TGC.4 and TGC.6)

IN SUMMARY

The ZAA request is based on two of the three justifications for zoning amendment as defined in the Town's Land Use Management Plan. The area is changing and the Columbia Street improvements currently under construction will improve circulation in this area, allowing for some denser development to occur. Increased density here supports desired goals as stated in the 2020 Comprehensive Plan. The ZAA request and proposed use support all of the applicable themes and goals as listed in the 2020 Comprehensive Plan and makes good use of an undesirable site at one of Chapel Hill's main UNC gateways. Allowing an increased density on this site will bring allow development of the property in line with the Town's development goals.