



PLANNING  
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**CONCEPT PLAN REVIEW SUMMARY MINUTES  
COMMUNITY DESIGN COMMISSION  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21, 2012, 7:00 P.M.**

Chairwoman Polly van de Velde called the meeting to order at 7.00 p.m. Commission members present were Erin Daniel, Beth Mueller, Hank Rodenburg, Del Snow, and Martin Rody.

Staff members present were Kay Pearlstein, Loryn Clark, and Eric Feld.

**Concept Plan Review**  
**Carolina Flats, Mixed Use Development**

A Concept Plan has been submitted to the Town by The Design Response for review. The submitted mixed use development proposes to construct a 4-story hotel with 125-145 rooms, parking deck, 190 apartments in seven 3-story buildings, and 532 parking spaces. The 16.2-acres site is located in the Residential-1 and Horace Williams Airport Hazard Overlay zoning districts and contains Resource Conservation District (PIN# 9789-35-9617).

**CONCEPT PLAN PRESENTATION**

Russ Greer of Progressive Capital Group from Orlando, Florida and Scott Radway of The Design Response provided a powerpoint presentation to the Commission.

**CITIZEN COMMENTS**

1. The President of Coker Hills Neighborhood Association, Julie McClintock, thought the application was coming at an awkward time as the Town is involved in creating a comprehensive plan. She recommended that no changes to zoning be done pending adoption of the comprehensive Plan.  
She was concerned about keeping Estes Drive a safe residential street. She said the neighborhood had concerns about stormwater and traffic. She also asked the applicant why they would want to do anything until the town has experienced the first phase of Carolina North.
2. Vish Viswanathan stated that it was inappropriate to ask neighbors to express views on a concept plan while community meetings for the comprehensive plan are still in process. We did not believe the town should be involved with two processes at the same time. He pointed out that two schools are in close proximity to the site and will share N. Estes Drive so the road will need to be widened taking considerable space away from the schools. There is already considerable traffic on the road and will change the character of Estes Drive. Will it continue to be residential? He was also concerned that the University does not have money to build Carolina North and they may build a few buildings and stop. He believed that if this happened, there would be more development on the outside of Carolina North.

3. Will Raymond, a neighbor from the Mt. Bolus neighborhood, believed the project is a poor fit with Carolina North's transparent process and environmentally sensitive development. UNC envisions the N. Estes Drive/MLKB intersection as an invitation to the campus. Carolina Flats proposes a hotel that blocks the property and is not integrated with multi-modal transportation. He believed the project fails miserably at trying to limit parking.
4. A neighbor on Somerset Drive, Priscilla Murray, supported everything that has been said so far, especially the timing of the project with development of the comprehensive plan. She believed we need to think about the "apron" around Carolina North - either a "barrier reef of commercial development" or a gateway to the campus. She believed that if the zoning changed, it could become a precedent with unintended consequences.
5. A neighbor from Coker Woods, Jill Blackburn, was concerned about the density and traffic proposed with Carolina Flats. She noted that traffic is currently locked almost three times a day. Estes Drive has never been designed as a major thoroughfare but a neighborhood road. She noted that Estes Drive is used by families and many cross the street. She believed the proposed project would significantly affect families and would create environmental impacts and affect the quality of life for the area residents.
6. Scott Huntington, a Somerset Drive resident, stated that he was not against the density but the traffic volume and impervious area proposed. He was also concerned that the proposal at this time leap-frogged Chapel Hill 2020 process.
7. Steve Rogers, a Coker Woods neighbor, thought the project was way out of scale. He believed delivery trucks would be using neighborhoods to turn around. He believed access and egress would be a disaster. He wanted to wait until Chapel Hill 2020 was adopted before the project could be reviewed.

#### COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

1. Commissioner Martin Rody believed the driveway onto MLK was too close to the intersection.
2. Commissioner Del Snow had problems with the number of cars proposed and still be transit oriented. She asked the applicant to explain how cars would get to campus.

The applicant replied that a TIA would need to be done and new development is expected to pay for street improvements. Residents and hotel guests would have access to near-by bus stops for southbound traffic and noted that pedestrian issues still needed to be studied.

Commissioner Snow was curious about how students who wanted to go back to campus and hotel guests who wanted to go downtown would get there.

The applicant replied that there could be a full service turn but remained undecided.

3. Commissioner Beth Mueller wanted the applicant to look at the intersection and focus on a positive relationship with the university. She suggested finding solutions that address the traffic and thought the landscape buffer looked narrow and to match what Carolina North has planned.

Commissioner Mueller was not sure a hotel was appropriate in this location. She stated that the drives through Chapel Hill were wonderful and that a hotel wrapping the intersection would act as a wall and could not be supported. She believed a pedestrian bridge should be investigated. She believed that if huge buildings are proposed, then the MLK corridor should be designed similarly.

Commissioner Mueller also suggested working with the Amity Church for shared recreation area.

4. Commissioner Hank Rodenburg recommended that the MLK corridor be designed and developed like the Highway 54 corridor. He could see that MLK and Estes Drive would become problematic like Hwy 54. Commissioner Rodenburg stated that resident participation was important when developing a plan for the corridors. He also said that we need to take time and let the Chapel Hill 2020 Comprehensive Plan be implemented.
5. Commissioner Erin Daniel thought traffic was a big concern. She noted that applicants proposing large scale, mixed use projects keep getting hammered with respect to traffic and parking. That being the case, Commissioner Daniel asked the applicant to get creative about how to minimize parking and encourage students to use the buses.
6. Commissioner Polly van de Velde agreed with other Commissioners that believed reviewing this project prior to the Comp Plan being finished is piecemeal. She asked the applicant if they are acquiring the adjacent properties. The applicant replied that it was not part of their plan.

Commissioner van de Velde stated that this was not multi-family but student housing. The applicant replied that the demographics are different than they were 20 years ago and that 10,000 UNC students are living outside Chapel Hill and 2/3 of students commute to campus. He explained that the private sector developers look at demand by the students for places to be safe and have cars. The applicant replied that the property owner has been considering development here before the Comp Plan began and did not feel that the development is inappropriately timed.

Commissioner van de Velde agreed that we need student housing but with high quality design. She did not support a hotel in this location and reiterated that traffic was a big concern.

7. Commissioner Martin Rody thought that the location at the intersection was ideal for student housing and should encourage some kind of student housing in this location that is acceptable to the community and the neighborhood protection. Commissioner Rody recommended the applicant talk to the neighbors and noted that many neighbors have had a long time to think about these things.

#### COMMISSIONER COMMENTS SUMMARY

The Commission's summary comments are listed below:

- Driveway too close to intersection.
- Traffic on N. Estes Drive is a major concern.
- Make the project transit-oriented and provide fewer parking spaces.
- Car movements and turn lanes
- Positive relationship to Carolina North
- Take cues from Carolina North – buffers, environmental planning
- Hotel on corner blocks views into site and should be away from corner.
- Wait for Chapel Hill 2020 to identify land use and guidelines before review this project.
- Use Hwy 54 corridor study as a model for studying MLKB.
- Minimize parking and student use of cars.
- This is not multi-family development but student housing and a hotel.
- Student housing must have a high quality of design.
- One Commissioner thought this was an ideal location for student housing.

Prepared for: Polly van de Velde, Chair

Prepared by: Kay Pearlstein, Staff