

Notes from Planning Board's Discussion about the draft Central West Small Area Plan

Planning Board Meeting – October 29, 2013

Planning Board members present: Melissa McCullough, John Ager, Suzanne Haff, Jason Baker (Vice-Chair), Kimberly Brewer, Amy Ryan, and Deborah Fulghieri

Planning Board members absent: Andrea Rohrbacher, Del Snow, and Neal Bench (Chair)

Town staff present: David Bonk and Megan Wooley

Councilmembers present: Jim Ward

Planning Board Comments

The Planning Board would like to have their comments transmitted to the Steering Committee. The Planning Board would like this item to return during their next meeting (November 19th) so that they can review the Steering Committee's response to their comments, and for the Planning Board's consideration and possible endorsement.

Suzanne Haff's Comments:

- A topographic map should be included in the plan.
- Consider the land swap idea.
- The specifics about the Resource Conservation District (i.e., 150 feet, etc.) and steep slopes should be included in the plan so that people in the future will understand why certain decisions were made.
- A stormwater district should be considered for this area. (A district would entail that the properties that have water running through them should pay into a fund).
- Should the stormwater plan be completed before the zoning is rewritten?
- Heights on MLK are fine.
- Concerned about the appearance of the buildings; they need to be articulated. Do not want to have cookie cutter houses. Like the appearance of the homes in Chapel Watch Village – a nice design. Want buildings that have variety.
- Encourages the Town to use sketch-up to draw an image of their proposed plan.
- Can we get a written statement from Todd LoFrese that the schools can handle the growth proposed in the Steering Committee's plan?

Melissa McCullough's Comments:

- Heights on MLK are fine.
- Want to be sure to have a critical mass so that we don't set up businesses to fail here.
- Like transitions to existing housing in the plan. We need multi-family in Chapel Hill.
- Traffic is the biggest concern; I tend to trust the traffic models more than conventional wisdom.
- Would like to counter the statement that new urbanism doesn't work well as infill – it does work well as infill.
- Would like to examine concerns about the rare habitat forest.
- A while until we will get rid of cars, but would like people to use them rarely.

Deborah Fulghieri's Comments:

- Small Area Plans don't talk to each other. Other plans have been presented as "gateways" into Chapel Hill; I don't see the integration of all these Small Area Plans together.

- Regarding the heights on MLK: I'm in favor of setbacks.
- My real estate friends say that condos aren't selling.
- Hope that residential quality of Chapel Hill does not go away.

Kimberly Brewer's Comments:

- Are the density numbers included in the plan?
- Would be good for the plan to state what the Steering Committee had in mind for "mix of uses."
- Having the existing conditions as the second chapter made the vision statement feel disconnected from the principles and concept plan; should be clearer about how these are connected.
- Need to vary the heights so that it doesn't look like a uniform mass.
- What a missed opportunity if had senior housing here and not workforce housing.
- Need to micromanage stormwater where it falls; use low impact infrastructure.
- Need a better discussion of the drivers of the Concept Plan.
- To the Council: Need to consider mobility; could have total gridlock in Chapel Hill.
- Add a principle that says no widening of Estes Drive.
- Don't have failing intersections and failing air quality.
- Demand management is very important.
- Consider shared parking, lease parking, payment-in-lieu for parking and other ideas.
- A traffic sensitivity analysis would be helpful.
- Need to have a strong statement regarding developing a partnership with UNC for workforce housing.
- Heights are on MLK are fine. Need to vary/break up the massing.
- Support no tall buildings on the ridge line.
- If there are sensitive species, support a land swap.
- Consider public/private partnerships for shared stormwater management.
- Objectives need to be more specific if two different plans could be developed based on these.

Amy Ryan's Comments:

- The Steering Committee would love to have an endorsement of the plan from the Planning Board.
- This plan will plug the donut-hole in the center of town for bicycle and pedestrian amenities.
- Supports the plan.

John Ager's Comments:

- The Steering Committee's plan looks great. I love it. I really do.
- Michael Parker said that this looks like an "operations research problem," and I agree.
- Hope the Council will do something with this plan.
- We need a lot more connectivity, more bold thinking, and more of an understanding that millennials think different than past generations.
- I think Estes Drive will be widened one day. You need to move large numbers of people. Either done by widening Estes Drive or a complicated set of traffic mitigations.
- We should demand that the Council look at the traffic impacts of the whole Town, of all the focus area plans put together.
- Carolina North is absolutely coming.

Jason Baker's Comments:

- Could be useful to have the existing conditions as a visualization, in sketch-up (tree heights, etc.).
- Comfortable with the heights on MLK. This is what we will be seeing along MLK.
- Want the buildings to do a good job interfacing with the street.
- Need to say why we are doing all of this. Need a proactive statement at the beginning of the plan.
- There is poor connectivity in the neighborhoods; disappointed that there is not more connectivity, but understand why.
- Most of the area in the impact area is not within a quarter mile of a bus stop.
- Make use of the Town's transit corridors.
- Affordability as housing + transit should be a part of our considerations.

Note: Planning Board member Del Snow was unable to attend the Planning Board meeting on October 29th. Below is an email that she sent to the Planning Board with her questions about the draft Central West Small Area Plan.

----Beginning of Email----

October 29, 2013

Fellow Planning Board members:

Tonight's meeting is an important one, and I wish that I could be with you to share my thoughts and give my input, however, at the moment I am wheelchair bound and in too much pain to attend.

That said, if I were there, I would pose the following questions:

1. It seems that traffic assumptions put more traffic flowing North-South, rather than East-West. How does this mesh with the Ephesus-Fordham small area plan that calls for a maximum of 500,000 sq ft of commercial and may have up to 900 residential units? This area lies east of MLK/Estes and Estes would be the most logical route to get there.

2. Thanks to Councilmember Harrison, I know feel that is fairly certain that no Estes Drive widening will occur for the next 20 years. How will this impact development that is sure to be proposed before then?

3. How can parking continue to be offered at existing ordinance calculations if we are promoting transit and walkability. If the excuse is that people will have cars anyway, then why are we building density?

4. Has south flowing traffic from Charterwood and the Walgreen's directly across the street concept plan (176,000 sq ft of office, 65,000 sq ft of retail, 1 hotel, 1 drive through bank, 800 parking spots for the two projects combined) been accounted for in the analysis?

5. What is the specific timeline for transit improvements for Estes Drive?

6. Include density units/acre as was done with the Northern Areas Task Force report.

7. Has cumulative totals for impervious surface been analyzed for consequences? For example, the Charterwood property presently has 10,000 sq feet of impervious surface and will have 227,500 when development is complete. Does exponential increase in impervious surface face a greater challenge in being controlled?

8. Has retail analysis been done to compare square footage already approved and proposed? Dwight Bassett has said that 1 million sq ft of retail should be added. Can it be supported? Average retail sales per sq ft in Chapel Hill, per Office and Market analysis is \$200. One million sq ft will generate \$200,000,000 in sales. If Chapel Hill residents account for only 70% of those sales, they will have to spend \$2.500 each (including every child) extra to support the additional retail. That's \$10,000 extra for a family of four. Is this sustainable?

Up to 500,000 sq ft of retail are proposed at Ephesus, add in 150,000 in approved smaller projects, then Glen Lennox, 123 West Franklin, Carolina North, The Edge, and Obey's Creek, and the total goes beyond 1 million.

Comment:

All of these issues remind me of the 7 blind men describing an elephant. There is a hyper focus on each separate focus area without ever considering how they will all work together. By doing this our town is being viewed out of context and we will end up with 6 disconnected areas that cannibalize each other's retail opportunities.

I appreciate the areas of agreement within the Steering Committee – especially the bike and ped plans and greenway vision. I would like to see work done on this plan to make it reflective of it location and provide lower density balance to the future Carolina North.

Thanks,
Del