

# Rosemary / Columbia Hotel

Conditional Zoning Application

3 March 2021

---

03.03.2021 REVISED

## PROJECT NARRATIVE

This is a request for review of a Conditional Zoning application by the Town of Chapel Hill.

### Introduction

The proposed Rosemary / Columbia Hotel project will redevelop a site currently dominated by surface parking and non-descript single story commercial buildings, and redevelop it with a high quality, custom-designed hotel in downtown Chapel Hill. The project involves the redevelopment of 7 contiguous parcels in a generally L-shaped configuration: 3 parcels on the north side of West Rosemary, 2 on North Columbia, 1 on Pritchard Avenue, and 1 landlocked parcel with no street address. The project will involve removal of 4 surface parking lots, a small brick building, and a 2-story wood structure. The parcels will be recombined, then subdivided to accommodate a land swap between the developer and the Town. The final address is expected to be a West Rosemary address as the main drive entry and lobby area and public space entries will all be accessible from that frontage.

The project will be a 140-room, 4-5-story hotel with approximately 70 parking spaces. Most will be under the building in an under-building deck space, but there will be 11 surface spaces on the lower level behind the building, a few surface parking spaces will be accommodated along the entry drive for short term parking and loading, and one space will be constructed on the Town's property for use by Town service vehicles. The hotel will be targeted to extended stay visitors to Chapel Hill, and the facilities are proposed to include public spaces such as a ground floor coffee shop and a rooftop bar. Additional guest common areas will include a business center, guest dining area, meeting rooms, fitness center, and an outdoor recreational area. The hotel's public spaces and common areas will incorporate custom-designed elements that authentically reflect the hotel's downtown Chapel Hill location.

The proposal includes a land swap with the Town of Chapel Hill to provide a single parcel with a usable building envelope. The land owned by the Town is a 7,840 sf narrow parcel at 110 W Rosemary with a 16 space gravel parking lot. The trade would include that narrow parcel becoming part of the hotel project, and an approximately 8,887 sf portion of land fronting Pritchard Avenue and containing a 2-story wood frame house to be deeded to the Town. The project would also include improvements to the driveway behind the Historic Town Hall building and preparation of the lot beside that building to be used as a Town green space or pocket park.

The intent is to end up with an L-shaped parcel zoned TC-2 for the hotel development, and significant enhancement of the Town-owned site around the Historic Town Hall building for the Town to program. It would also result in the retention of the house on Pritchard which would be owned by the Town.

The project was submitted as a Concept Plan and reviewed by Town staff, the Community Design Commission, and Town Council in September and October 2019. Applicant responses to comments made at those meetings are attached to this application.

### **Site Description**

The site consists of 6 parcels, totaling 49,158 sf. A seventh parcel fronting W Rosemary is currently owned by the Town and will be part of a land swap with a subdivided parcel fronting Pritchard Avenue, for a total of 56,898 sf. The project assumes and requires a parcel exchange with the Town in order to develop the hotel while including an appropriate buffer to the adjacent neighborhood to the north, and enhancing the space around the historic Town Hall building with improvements including a pocket park. In the parcel exchange process, the Town would convey the surface parking lot located at 110 W Rosemary Street to the Developer, and the Developer would convey to the Town a parcel of comparable size comprising the majority portion of the 208 Pritchard Avenue parcel, including a house of historic construction. Post-land swap, the hotel parcel will total 48,010 sf, and the Town-owned homesite on Pritchard will be 8,887 sf.

The site is completely developed in small commercial buildings and gravel parking lots. All existing improvements will be removed, except for the home and associated site improvements on the Pritchard property.

The project site located at the edge of the Northside neighborhood, and is bounded by Rosemary Street to the south, the Historic Town Hall to the southeast, North Columbia Street to the east, a law office to the north, and residential rental properties to the northwest.

The site is fairly flat on the south half, but slopes down approximately 10' along the parcel spur toward N Columbia. The project will take advantage of this grade change to provide access along the northern property line to a lower level service area.

### **Site Access and Circulation**

The site is currently accessed via three driveways on W Rosemary and two driveways on N Columbia. The proposed configuration will be a single access point on W Rosemary, with a one-way circulation pattern toward an exit-only drive onto N Columbia, and toward the interior parking spaces. The northernmost driveway access to N Columbia will be 2-way allowing access to the lower level of the parking deck and to the lower level service area. This will result in the reduction of access points on W Rosemary and provide for a safer pedestrian experience along that frontage.

Per the Town of Chapel Hill LUMO, there is no required parking in the TC zone. But this use will require parking spaces. The parking deck can accommodate approximately 67 parking spaces,

plus three surface spaces, and overflow will be arranged at nearby parking decks via negotiations with the Town and adjacent property owners.

The project is within walking distance of downtown amenities and the UNC campus. The sidewalk in front of the hotel project will be improved with areas between building and back of curb designed to meet the West Rosemary design guidelines, and there will be ample pedestrian circulation routing within the site.

### **Building Orientation and Site Layout**

The proposed L-shaped hotel will have a public presence on W Rosemary Street, which will have access to the hotel lobby and the public spaces. On the top floor of the Rosemary-facing wing will be a rooftop terrace inviting visitors and residents to enjoy the downtown view. The south wing will contain all the public spaces as well as hotel rooms.

The Columbia-facing wing will contain hotel rooms in 4 stories over the parking deck. There will also be a rooftop terrace on the eastern end of this wing for the use of hotel guests. That terrace will face north, east, and south.

### **Environmental and Landscaping**

The 1.1 acre site contains few trees and is mostly impervious. The redevelopment will include a small amount of additional impervious, and therefore a small underground stormwater mitigation facility is proposed. There will be new landscaping in the buffers and within the site. There are no stream buffer or RCD zones on the site.

### **Stormwater**

The existing site currently does not have any stormwater treatment. The proposed redevelopment will comply with the current stormwater quality and quantity regulations and because of some increased impervious, a small mitigation facility is proposed under the service drive at the northwest corner of the hotel. The project will comply with all sedimentation and erosion control requirements utilizing on- and offsite protection measures during construction.

### **Utilities**

The project site is currently served by OWASA water and sewer services. The new hotel facility will utilize existing water and sewer mains on N Columbia Street. Additional fire hydrants will be installed as necessary. Existing overhead electric services on site will be removed and relocated underground.

### **Outline of Modifications requested**

The following is list of Modifications to the LUMO that are being requested as part of this Conditional Zoning Application:

1. *Per LUMO section 5.6, landscape buffers would be required on the western, northern, and street frontages of the project.*

A Modification to regulations is requested to allow reduction of landscape buffers as follows:

- a) The required northeastern landscape buffer is a 10' width. This project is requesting a modification to reduce that to 6', including elimination of canopy trees and reduction of the understory and shrub requirements prorated to 60% of the total requirement.

*Justification:* The property to the north is also a commercial use, and we propose to install a fence and smaller maturing landscaping at the property line to help screen these two non-residential uses.

- b) The required street buffer on Columbia Street is 20', and we are asking to have this buffer removed. We are proposing to build approximately 4' off the right of way line, leaving approximately 17' from back of curb to building façade to accommodate a sidewalk and small planting area.

*Justification:* Small trees and flowering shrubs will be planted on that frontage to enhance the pedestrian experience, but it will not be a dense vegetative screen. We are also proposing public artwork on that façade to give the street space an urban identity benefitting the entry experience of the Columbia Street view.

- c) The required street buffer on W Rosemary Street is 20', and we are asking to have this buffer removed.

*Justification:* The West Rosemary Development Guide recommends a more urban approach with plazas and street trees and space for pedestrian circulation. The proposed design accommodates this with a 15' wide plaza and street tree plantings.

The landscape buffers along the east property line and in the north-west corner of the site near the residential uses will be installed to fully meet code.

- 2. *Per LUMO section 5.9.6(c), entrance drives shall be bordered by an 8' wide landscape strip and a 5' wide landscape strip is required between the exterior wall of the building and any parking area.*

A Modification to regulations is requested to allow reduction of these entry and parking lot landscape strips as follows:

- a) Along the entry drive from W Rosemary Street, we are requesting to combine the two requirements in a 12' wide landscape area to be located between the building and the sidewalk.

*Justification:* This will provide a wider space to allow for various plant types including small trees, shrubs, and ornamental grasses for a layered effect giving more depth to the planting pallet. There would be no landscape strip in the vicinity of the guest drop off zone in front of the lobby.

- b) Along the entry drive from S Columbia Street, we are requesting a 6' wide strip on one side of the drive, and in lieu of the planting strip between the building and the parking area, a series of small landscape areas to support vines and green walls.

*Justification:* This is a narrow zone which provides access to the service areas and includes access in two locations to the under-building parking spaces as well as stormwater piping and water and sewer service. There isn't room in this very urban site for 13'-16' of landscaping along the driveways. We are proposing a

fence to help screen this area with a 6' wide landscape strip on the north side of the drive. Additionally there will be vines and trellises to create a green wall on the south side of the drive between the parking and the building, and to grow over the streetside entry to the parking deck.

3. *Per LUMO Appendix B section 1.4, Maximum primary building height in the TC-2 zone of the NCD is 40', and maximum secondary building height is 50'.*

A modification to regulations is requested to allow a secondary height of 65' as the project is on the edge of the NCD zone and across from similarly sized buildings. The project proposes to encroach beyond the secondary building height and solar setbacks of the LUMO for properties within the Northside Conservation District. More specifically, the top floor of the building along portions of both the Rosemary and Columbia wings would encroach beyond this height limit.

*Justification:* The TC zone on adjacent blocks allows for heights up to 90'. The hotel is 65' at the street, but does consider the residential uses to the north and northwest by notching out the top floor in that corner to create a transition zone between the residential use and the TC zone across Rosemary which will allow for much taller development.