

George H. Draper, IV

101 Foxridge Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27514

April 7, 2008

Mr. Kevin Foy, Mayor
Members of the Chapel Hill Town Council
Town of Chapel Hill
405 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Re: Request for Participation for Improvements to Amber Alley

Mayor Foy and Members of the Chapel Hill Town Council:

My name is George Draper. I am the principal owner of the Strowd Building which includes half of Amber Alley. One of my primary tenants is Sutton's Drug Store. I am also representing the Munch Family Properties, LLC which owns the Munch Building (previously known as the Sutton Building) and the west half of Amber Alley. Until recently their primary tenant was the Rathskeller. We have been talking for over a year about making major improvements to both Amber Alley and the facades of both buildings and we are requesting that the Town participate in the renovations to the alley as it is a private alley that is used as a public right-of-way.

The primary reason for wanting to make improvements to Amber Alley is a safety issue. The steps on the North end (Wallace Deck) are extremely worn and the bottom step is 21 inches above the bottom grade of the alleyway causing pedestrians to step off at an angle. With inclement weather the alleyway becomes slick because of the terracotta finish. There have been many spills over the years and fortunately no serious injuries except bruised egos. In addition to the request for participation from the Town for the steps and walkway renovation, the owners would also ask the Town to pay for the proposed Amber Alley signage above both entrances. Amber Alley was named by Ted Danziger when he opened the Rathskeller in the late 1940's. Mr. Danziger wanted to create an Old World atmosphere which the owners wish to maintain. We would like to incorporate the name at both entrances and we view the signage as public art.


The owners of Amber Alley are requesting that the Town partner with us in the renovations. The alleyway is used as the most direct public thoroughfare between Franklin Street and the public parking in the Wallace Deck. Most people when asked actually think the alleyway is public property owned by the Town of Chapel Hill. In addition, the alleyway is routinely used by Chapel Hill Police as an easily accessible conduit to and from Franklin and Rosemary Streets and the Wallace Deck late at night after the bars close.

In addition to making the alleyway safer as a public thoroughfare, the owners have outlined the work they will do to improve the aesthetics of the alleyway and to the facades of both buildings. These improvements will make Amber Alley the primary gateway to and from Franklin Street and spur increased economic development activity throughout the east end of downtown,

The costs associated with the Amber Alley walkway renovation that we are seeking from the Town during the 2008-09 fiscal year is a total of \$59,879. \$53,879 in steps and walkway improvements and \$6,000 in the decorative metal sculpture signs as seen in the attached plans. In addition, the owners will be investing \$43,850 in façade improvements and alley improvements during the 2008-2009 fiscal year.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to partnering with you on this project.

Sincerely,



George H. Draper, IV

Proposal for Amber Alley Improvements

Overview:

The purpose of this proposal is a request for participation between the Town of Chapel Hill, Strowd Building, LLC, Robert L. Strowd, III; Frances M. Strowd; and Munch Family Properties, LLC for the improvement and continued public use of Amber Alley. We look forward to enhancing this thoroughfare for Chapel Hill pedestrians. We believe that this will be an important upgrade to the Town that not only will be inviting to its residents and visitors, but will also improve their safety.

Last August, the Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership hired architect David Gall to design improvements for Amber Alley and the fronts and backs of the two buildings that define it. We worked from Mr. Gall's recommendations for all the improvements presented below.

Resurfacing:

After having met with several contractors, we believe that Accent Construction has presented the best solution for resurfacing Amber Alley. They propose the following approach:

1. Remove the surface of the alley floor.
2. Remove the back stairs.
3. Remove the usable part of the front stairs, from the Munch building to where they go under the upper stairs.
4. Inspect the drain line and repair or replace it if necessary.
5. Level the alley with proper slope for drainage, which will lower the back end of the alley.
6. Pour concrete steps, stained to match the color chosen for the alley floor, with 2 or 3 additional steps at the bottom of the back stairs.
7. Install and paint handrails for the stairs.
8. Resurface the alley floor with concrete, stained and stamped to look like cobblestone or brick.

Accent Construction is asking \$53,879 for this work. This price does not include work that might be needed to repair or replace the drain line.

Before we adopted this solution, we discussed several possible ways to resurface Amber Alley, with Accent Construction and with other contractors. We concluded that there is no cheaper solution that will produce the results that we all desire for appearance and durability.

Whereas Mr. Gall recommended installing new brick paving on the alley floor and steps, we propose to resurface the alley floor with concrete, stained and stamped to look like cobblestone or brick. We found that the cost of brick paving is prohibitive, and we believe that our solution will be attractive, safe, and more durable.

Mr. Gall also recommended that new stairs be built on top of the existing ones. If new concrete were poured over the old steps, it would make the steps two inches higher. This would necessitate removing a large section of the Franklin Street sidewalk and the asphalt in the back alley and replacing them with a slope so that they would meet the heights of the top steps. Alternatively, entirely removing the north steps and the usable side of the south steps is a complete solution that will not present this problem. We were pleased to learn that this will not only provide the best result but that it can also be done for a lower price.

Accent Construction's proposal makes the following point: "Accent Construction is *committed to environmentally-conscious tenant* construction. Accent is the only general contractor in the state of North Carolina to be awarded the EPA Waste Wise partner status for being actively engaged in separating construction waste for recycling and reuse on a consistent basis at **no additional cost to our clients** and with **no effect on the construction schedule**. As the Town of Chapel Hill is interested in taking a leadership position in sustainable development, this unique feature of Accent's business will be of particular value."

Other Improvements:

In accordance with Mr. Gall's recommendations, we plan to improve the walls and the upper area of Amber Alley and the fronts and backs of our buildings.

We plan to make the following improvements to the walls and the upper area of Amber Alley:

1. Remove unnecessary attachments from the sides of our buildings.
2. Install wire mesh screens to hide the grease traps.
3. Install an overhead truss system along the alley, with a canopy and lights.
4. Paint the walls.

We will also need to provide an electrical system for the lights.

We plan to make the following improvements to the backs of our buildings:

1. Remove unnecessary attachments and equipment.
2. Install wire mesh screens to hide the remaining attachments.
3. Paint the walls and stairs.
4. Paint a crosswalk behind Amber Alley.

We plan to make the following improvements to the fronts of our buildings:

1. Install new awnings.
2. Paint the Munch building's wall.

We have obtained proposals from several contractors, for most of this work. We anticipate that this work will cost \$43,850.

Artwork:

Mr. Gall recommended that artwork that will identify Amber Alley be placed above the entries to the alley. We are working with a sculpture artist, Beechwood Metalworks, whom Mr. Gall recommended. Beechwood Metalworks is asking \$6,000 to create this public artwork.

Priorities:

The improvements presented above will improve Amber Alley greatly, in terms of its attractiveness, convenience, and safety. Among these improvements, however, the resurfacing of Amber Alley is of the highest importance, because it will improve the safety of the Town's residents and visitors.

We are conscious of the fact that funds are limited for the Town and for all of us. For this reason, we request that, if the Town is unable to pay for both the resurfacing and the public artwork, the resurfacing be given the higher priority for the 2008-09 budget. If necessary, perhaps the artwork could be added into the 2009-10 budget.

Timeframe:

Because the proposed upgrades to Amber Alley will improve the safety of its pedestrians, we want to put them into effect as soon as possible. We also want to minimize the hardship on Bandido's Mexican Cafe, which will need to be closed while this work is being done. To support both of these interests, we request that the proposed improvements to Amber Alley be done in July.


Conclusion:

These enhancements to Amber Alley will be an improvement to Chapel Hill itself. Amber Alley is an important pedestrian thoroughfare between Rosemary Street and its parking garage and Franklin Street. The vast majority of the people who use Amber Alley are through traffic. Most of these people undoubtedly assume that Amber Alley is a public walkway.

Keeping Amber Alley open will help the Chapel Hill police to maintain security. Providing a more level, less slippery surface with better handrails and lighting will obviously improve the safety of Chapel Hill's pedestrians. In addition to these safety benefits, all of the recommended changes will greatly improve Amber Alley's appearance and be inviting to both residents and visitors, reflecting well on Chapel Hill.



George H. Draper, IV
Strowd Building, LLC



Mary A. Stockwell
Munch Family Properties LLC