

  
 Concept Plan Review  
 Greenbridge

*Council Comments*

- 1) Council Member Kleinschmidt asked how the change in building height protected the integrity of the neighborhood.

Changing the height of the west building is a design response intended to respect the St. Pauls Church on Merritt Mill Road. Respect for social and religious institutions is an important factor in retaining and reinforcing the integrity of neighborhoods.

- 2) Council Member Kleinschmidt asked for any thoughts on providing opportunities for people to live in this development.

Greenbridge has a two pronged approach to providing affordable housing. The first prong is to provide on-site affordable living units and the second prong is to support affordability throughout the surrounding neighborhood by decreasing the cost of ownership to existing home-owning families. Please see the attached "Guidelines for a Comprehensive Rehabilitation Program for the North Side/Pine Knolls Neighborhoods".

- 3) Council Member Kleinschmidt asked how the courtyard was to work. He said he was concerned about the interior, asking whether it would be an activated center or for residents only. Council Member Kleinschmidt said he was concerned that it would become "dead space" and that it was so small.

The Greenbridge design team has responded to the several comments regarding this interior second floor courtyard. As presented the second floor courtyard was intended to be a public space with active storefront equally divided between storefront on the public sidewalk and storefront within the courtyard. The new design has increased the amount of sidewalk oriented storefront and has limited the size of the second story courtyard. Now the second story courtyard functions as private space for the residents of this building.

- 4) Council Member Kleinschmidt asked about the division of affordable housing, noting that the Town was a champion of social justice. He asked for a fuller explanation, asking if this was considered a social justice victory even though the Town consistently asked for 15 percent of a project to be affordable.

Please see the response to item # 2 above. This team considered a variety of approach to housing affordability and is proposing an approach that will 1) provide new units and 2) help make existing older units more affordable. This approach increases the total number of affordable units in the community beyond the 15% required of this project, and offers affordability to a very large number of existing Chapel Hill homeowners who live in a fragile neighborhood.

(11-2)

- 5) Council Member Kleinschmidt asked if the plan was to design those spaces specifically to attract that group of people.

Marketing for these units will be focused in local venues where the specific target population will be reached.

- 6) Council Member Kleinschmidt said he was pleased that other groups would be involved in finding the best way to provide affordable housing. He said he would like to see the idea of providing affordable housing in Northside integrated into the project, noting it might be a way to enhance the 15 percent goal, but not to substitute for the 15 percent to be provided on site.

The intent of this affordability program is to expand and extend the effect of the developer's financial contribution to an affordability program, within the approximate cost range that would normally be expended to achieve the 15% number.

- 7) Council Member Kleinschmidt asked how many units they were talking about.

We are talking about 7 units provided on site and a rehabilitation program that will cost slightly more than the subsidized cost of the additional 8 units that would be required to meet the town's affordability guidelines.

- 8) Mayor Foy asked what was the total number of units planned for the project.

The total number of residential living units in this proposed development is 101.

- 9) Council Member Kleinschmidt said to forecast a little farther down the road in the process, the inclusion of 15 percent affordable housing was a great idea, going out into Northside and finding creative ways to invest in the neighborhood was a great idea, and meeting LEED requirements and all the other positive aspects of the project that would meet many goals would encourage the Council to move forward on this project.

- 10) Council Member Harrison commented that he was provoked when the statement was made that it was time to get "unafraid" of tall buildings. He stated he had received a voice mail over the holidays from a woman who expressed alarm about the planned height of this building, noting that the building was sitting on a line in the Town that would not allow this height. Council Member Harrison stated he had to reply to her that this Council "did not have a leg to stand on" because it was asking for so much more. He said he was not afraid of tall buildings, having grown up around them. Council Member Harrison said since no one from Carrboro was present to protest the height, he assumed that would not be a hurdle.

The Greenbridge team understands that the height of the proposed building exceeds the dimensional requirements of the Chapel Hill Land Use Management Ordinance. This team believes that there are good and sufficient reasons for the Chapel Hill Town Council to enable this approach to the design of this project. Those reasons are elaborated in the Statement of Justification which accompanies this request.

Further, we believe that the building has been carefully sculpted and designed to minimize the impacts of the additional height being requested.

- 11) Council Member Harrison said he would like someone on the planning team to speak about the concepts regarding stormwater management, noting there were regulations to meet and saying he did not know how they would do it. He said he specifically wanted to know about stormwater management. Council Member Harrison remarked that with expedited review they did not have a lot of time to figure this out, so he hoped they were starting now.

The stormwater management program for Greenbridge is described in the attached Stormwater Management report. We are storing and treating stormwater in tanks that will be located in the below grade parking areas. See sheet SUP 30 in the attached set. These tanks will be visible in the parking areas and will serve to inform and educate people about stormwater management as well as serving to meet our regulatory requirements.

- 12) Council Member Ward said regarding affordable housing, he hoped that would be incorporated into the project, although he was supportive of the efforts already expressed regarding the neighborhood. He said he was concerned that there were residential units that would be demolished, and the net result would not be 15 percent affordable housing for the community. He said that would be a reason why he would like to see additional attention paid to affordable housing since we were losing some in the process.

The living units that are being demolished are S.R.O. type units. Across Merritt Mill road from Greenbridge is a new building (in the Carrboro zoning jurisdiction) that has materially increased the number of S.R.O. type units available within this immediate neighborhood. The need for additional S.R.O. type living units is unquestionable. The policy question here is whether a large concentration of S.R.O. units around a single intersection in a single community (Northside) is desirable. The affordable living units in Greenbridge will include studios as well as living units that will appeal to small families.

- 13) Council Member Ward remarked that in the materials, it said they were striving for LEED standards. He said “striving” was a bit soft, and wanted more information on that.

Greenbridge has made the commitment to do more than strive and we appreciate Council Member Ward’s comment that striving is too soft. Greenbridge has engaged the professional services of Bill McDonough and of Flack & Kurtz (international leaders in sustainable and LEED engineering) to energize this aspect of Greenbridge. We have information on file regarding these firms which will underscore our commitment.

- 14) Council Member Ward asked for a characterization of the commitment beyond that, and what kind of premium was associated with that commitment in terms of cost to the project.

Please see the answer to #13 above.

- 15) Council Member Ward said his experience was that you needed to have more points than you think you need, so that when the project was completed you would have some breathing room.

The Greenbridge team agrees with this statement and will apply for more than the requisite number of points to enable “breathing room”.

- 16) Council Member Ward asked how you would protect the next project's solar access with a nine-story building? Council Member Ward said with a nine-story building, something built to the south may have problems.

Greenbridge has commissioned solar and "shadow" studies which show the shadow impact of this project on adjacent sites. The Greenbridge shadow studies indicate that the lots most affected by this proposed building would be the lots to the east across Graham Street. These lots would be affected in the late afternoon, when the sun is low in the sky and solar gain is least.

- 17) Council Member Ward said the materials mentioned having a connection between Carrboro and Chapel Hill, but did not mention the connectivity with the immediate neighborhood. Council Member Ward said he wanted to take this opportunity to emphasize that that was critically important to him. He said it had been stated that the project would be providing needed services to the local community, but he needed ultimately to be convinced that what happened at the retail level would be accessible to those living in the immediate neighborhood and not shops that were boutiques and the like. Council Member Ward said these retail shops should provide regular services that people needed day-to-day.

A door-to-door survey was conducted by Greenbridge to ascertain the retail services that were most highly valued by the neighborhood residents. Many of the elders recalled Mason's Grocery, which was the former retail shop opened at 602 West Rosemary, prior to the opening of the Mason Motel and Starlite Supper Club. Whether in historic reference to that market or due to a real need, a "grocery store" received the highest interest. A laundromat and a police substation, received the next most votes with numerous other services such as medical and dental offices, a health club, and a restaurant also receiving votes. Greenbridge will actively recruit an urban market to this site as well as a "green" cleaning service and restaurant.

- 18) Council Member Ward commented that regarding the slice through the project, he hoped they chose that angle based on some solstice or equinox element taking place so that they could have a celebration of this project each year. He said he hoped it would be one more link to the real world and would not be air-conditioned or insulated from nature.
- 19) Council Member Easthom said she was excited by this project, and appreciated the environmental design. She said she believed it was just what Chapel Hill needed and that this particular area of Town needed people living there to make it a vibrant community. Council Member Easthom said she agreed with Council Member Kleinschmidt that the 15 percent affordable housing should be supplied within the project.

Please see the answer to #2 and #4 above for this important issue.

- 20) Council Member Easthom said she would like to know a little more about how the 200 cars parked in the underground lot would enter and exit that area.

Please see sheet SUP-2.0 for automobile access to and egress from the parking garage.

- 21) Mayor Foy asked how many of the spaces were dedicated spaces and how many were public spaces.

Approximately 50% of the spaces will be dedicated to the residential living units and the remaining 50% will be for retail employees and the public.

- 22) Mayor pro tem Strom said it was extraordinary to see so many citizens come out to express support

for a project that was in the concept stage. He congratulated the applicants for bringing forward such a project, adding it was nice to see that the private sector had been paying attention to the Council's work with LUMO and the Comprehensive Plan.

Mayor pro tem Strom said regarding the affordable housing element, he agreed that it should be provided on the premises. He said it looked like it might be possible to add some density to the smaller building if they found it necessary to accommodate the affordable housing element as they proceed with the project.

Please see the answer to #2 and #4 for a full account of the affordable housing program we have created with local community input.

- 23) Mayor Foy commented regarding the affordable housing aspects of this discussion, he thought it was important what the applicants were doing to integrate this project into Northside. He said it was important to be aware of what this project might do to that neighborhood, noting there was more than one way to destroy a community. Mayor Foy said he was going to part with his colleagues on this, stating it was important that there be affordable housing within the project. He said developers knew that they could not buy their way out of that by placing affordable housing somewhere else. Mayor Foy said he did not believe that was what the applicants were trying to do, so he wanted a better explanation of what they were proposing. He said they would have to convince everyone as to why they were proposing what they were. Mayor Foy said that the Council wanted affordable housing to be a part of the project and that it would not be segregated from the rest of the project but dispersed throughout.

The Greenbridge team agrees with this comment and has redesigned the distribution of living units to make certain that the affordable housing within the building is dispersed throughout, rather than concentrated in one place. The affordable housing program has evolved since the Concept Plan stage and the current plan included council comments in its development.

- 24) Mayor Foy said he was struck by a comment made by a citizen regarding the courtyard drawing energy off the street.

Street energy is critical for this development and this Greenbridge has responded to this astute comment by increasing and enhancing the retail storefront on the street and diminishing the importance of the courtyard. In this way the proposed project should not draw energy off the street

- 25) Mayor Foy said he saw it differently when a building was being built in Northside and investing in Northside, as opposed to a building being provided somewhere else and then suggesting that affordable housing be provided in that neighborhood. He said that was why he was willing to consider how they might creatively deal with that social issue.

Greenbridge agrees that a creative approach to housing affordability here can serve to greatly enlarge the group of residents who will benefit from the town's commitment to housing affordability. We have proposed a creative approach here and will be very interested in the public response.

- 26) Council Member Ward said it appeared that a lot of thought and time had gone into and had been articulated about the education center proposed on the front edge of the building, that was meant to

celebrate the historic black businesses in the area. He said it had to be so much more than a celebration of what was there, and must be something that enabled and enriched the opportunities to be there now and in the future. Council Member Ward stated that was very important to him.

Greenbridge agrees that it is and will be important to celebrate the history and the future of a place. Greenbridge is committed to enabling opportunities for the future and is evolving programs that will support those opportunities. With extensive retail and commercial space dedicated at the ground level, Greenbridge estimates 6-12 new business establishments with associated job opportunities, where currently there are none. These include the retail establishments referenced for recruitment in response #17, service and retail businesses that will relocate to Greenbridge, the Sustainability Center, and concierge services provided to the residents.

- 27) Council Member Kleinschmidt said this reminded somewhat of a song that critiqued developers for cutting down a tree and building a tree museum. He said that this was the Northside business district with historically African-American owned businesses, and it was their ability to remain viable as this development moved forward that was at the core of Council Member Ward's question. Council Member Kleinschmidt said it appeared that they were tearing down some of these historically African-American owned businesses and putting in a museum about them.

It has been 30 years since this corner was a vibrant business district for African Americans. The buildings on-site are in serious disrepair, and only one business, "Queen of Sheeba" Ethiopian Restaurant survives today, due to rent waiver by the owner. The goal is to celebrate and restore the block to its pre-1975 vigor and create job opportunities and affordable housing opportunities in an area with a rich history that has become largely dormant and prone to high crime rates. An historic documentary captures the vibrant history and retail planning will aim to revitalize.

- 28) Council Member Kleinschmidt commented that if they see this as a place to graduate to, that would mean that some of the opportunities for commercial activity would be affordable in a similar way that the Town was looking towards the parking lot developments. He asked if that was a correct statement.

Greenbridge will create eight "live-work" units on-site that will meet the guidelines for permanent affordability. These units will be designed for an array of artistic and creative enterprise and will connect to a retail space for display and sale of goods. Stand-alone retail space will also be available to "graduates" of the incubator businesses nearby, although these will be offered at market rates. Greenbridge will surely bring shoppers and a "market" to a block that is not currently a retail magnet.

- 29) Mayor Foy commended the applicants for the ambitions put forward for this project, and wished them the best of luck as they continued through the process.