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NC Botanical Garden Visitor Education Center SUP PD-OI

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Revised Statement of Justification - Revised December 20, 2006

*Changes noted in italics*

**PD-OI**

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**The NC Botanical Garden Visitor Education Center meets the requirements of Section 6.18 of the Land Use Management Ordinance (LUMO) for planned developments.**

**a) General**

The NC Botanical Garden is in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan as explained in Finding 4, below.

**b) Relation to major transportation facilities**

The NC Botanical Garden is well positioned for access from major transportation facilities including 15/501, Highway 54 and I-40. Additionally it is accessible by local bicycle and pedestrian networks. Primary vehicular access is at the main entrance on Old Mason Farm Road, near the intersection of Old Mason Farm Road and Fordham Boulevard (15/501).

**c) Relation to public utilities, facilities and services**

The proposed Visitor Education Center is located and designed adjacent to existing utility services and will not impose a burden on those systems.

**d) Relation to physical character of the site**

The addition of the Visitor Education Center to the existing NC Botanical Garden has been designed in a site-sensitive manner. The Garden has a vested interest in preserving and protecting the natural characteristics of the site and this project's design process reflects those values identified in the LUMO. The current design includes a rainwater collection system to be used for irrigation, porous paving and bioswales to infiltrate runoff in the parking lot, and minimal clearing and grading of the site.

**e) Relation to Energy Use**

The proposed Visitor Education Center has been designed as a LEED Platinum building, the highest LEED certification, and will promote energy conservation and efficient use of energy. Photovoltaic panels will provide a portion of the buildings electrical energy. Daylight harvesting, a well designed building envelope, and geothermal wells will help to keep the building's heating and cooling requirements low.

**f) Reduction or increase in required land areas**

This project does not require a reduction or increase in the required land area.

**The Planned Development-Office and Institutional use applies to a complementary grouping of institutional uses at location in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan in accord with standards in the Land Use Management Ordinance.**

**a) Intent**

This project is scaled and located to reduce general traffic congestion by providing convenient pedestrian and bicycle circulation systems. The project meets the intent of the ordinance by separating vehicular flows from residential areas, providing maximum pedestrian and bicycle convenience for those arriving by foot or bicycle and the arrangement of buildings uses and open

space provides appropriate transitions between the NC Botanical Garden and adjacent residential neighborhoods.

b) Land Area Requirements

The NC Botanical Garden meets the minimum gross land area of five (5) acres.

c) Permitted Uses

University is a permitted use in PD-OI.

d) Intensity Regulations

The proposed Visitor Education Center meets the intensity regulations of the Section 3.7 of the LUMO.

e) Design Standards

The proposed Visitor Education Center meets the design standards of Article 5 of the LUMO. The project is served by direct access to an arterial and signage is oriented away from residential neighborhoods.

### **Special Use Permit**

In order to grant a Special Use Permit, the Town Council must make the required four findings contained in Section 4.5 of the Land Use Management Ordinance. The applicant shall submit a statement entitled Statement of Justification prepared by the applicant, presenting factual information supporting each of the four required findings.

The four required findings and suggested considerations to be addressed (as per the Town's Description of Required Information) are listed below, along with the applicant's detailed responses:

**Finding 1:** That the use and development is located, designed, and proposed to be operated so as to maintain or promote the public health, safety, and general welfare.

- a. Traffic conditions in the vicinity, including the effect of additional traffic on streets, street intersections, and sight line at street intersections and driveways. The current gravel lot will be resurfaced with porous concrete pavers. The choice of surface material was made with the goal of reducing or eliminating stormwater runoff. The entry/exit to the Garden will remain on Old Mason Farm Road but will be relocated farther to the south, away from Fordham Boulevard, directly across from the new entry to the Highland Woods neighborhood. This will create a more visible entry and better sightlines for exiting. This project includes improvements to the existing Botanical Garden visitor parking lot, 14 additional parking spaces and a realignment of the entry drive. New parking spaces include those designated for bus parking for school and other groups. Increase in traffic on adjacent streets is not anticipated to be significant.
- b. Provision for services and utilities, including sewer, water, electric, garbage collection, and fire protection. The new Visitor Education Center will be serviced by UNC from Laurel Hill Road for garbage collection, just as the Totten Center is currently served. Access for fire trucks will be both via the visitor parking lot and via Laurel Hill Road. A new fire hydrant will be added on Laurel Hill Road. The facility will have a fire sprinkler system. New water and sewer lines will be installed for this project and the current layout is shown on the attached plan.

- c. Drainage plans. This facility is designed to minimize stormwater runoff through a variety of measures. The parking lot will be paved with porous concrete pavers. The small amount of runoff generated will be captured and infiltrated in bioswales. All water from the building roof will be captured in cisterns and used onsite for irrigation.
- d. Relationship of the site to the Chapel Hill Floodway/Floodplain/Resource Conversation District. The site for this facility is adjacent to Meeting-of-the-waters Creek but care has been taken to locate all new structures outside of the Resource Conservation District and out of the floodplain. Although the Town's RCD overlay district is not applicable to this property, every effort has been taken to respect the intent of the RCD overlay district.
- e. Other considerations relevant to the proposed use. All applicable State and Federal environmental standards will be met with this project. This facility is designed to achieve a platinum LEED rating from the US Green Building Council.

**Finding 2:** That the use or development complies with all required regulations and standards of this chapter, including all applicable provisions of Article 3, 4, and 5 and the applicable specific standards contained in Sections 6, and with all other applicable regulations.

- a. Compliance with Development Ordinance and land development regulations and standards, including street improvements, screening and landscape buffer requirements, setbacks, height, parking and intensity regulations. The project will comply with all applicable regulations and standards of the Chapel Hill Development Ordinance. *Based on current use of the Totten center. and the anticipated program for the new Visitor Education Center. the 14 new parking spaces will provide adequate parking for the daily use of the facility. Bus parking has been provided for group visits.*
- b. Provision of recreation and open space. The Visitor Education Center is designed to act as a "gateway" to the Botanical Garden. The facility consists of three sections connected by covered breezeways: a Classroom building, an Exhibit and Information Hall and a Multipurpose Auditorium, all sited and designed to celebrate the surrounding Piedmont forest and associated botanical display areas.
- c. Other considerations relevant to the proposed use. The project will set a new standard for environmentally friendly public buildings in the state and region, striving to achieve a platinum (the highest) level on the US Green Building Council LEED rating system.

**Finding 3:** That the use of development is located, designed, and proposed to be operated so as to maintain or enhance the value of contiguous property, or that the use or development is a public necessity.

- a. Relationship of the proposed use and the character of development to surrounding uses, including possible conflicts between uses and how conflicts will be handled. The new Visitor Education Center will not change the relationship of the NC Botanical Garden to its neighbors. It will be visible from few houses, and only in the winter. The design minimizes parking lot lighting to minimize effects on the neighborhood and to limit light waste. Deliveries will continue to follow the current pattern.
- b. Conformance of the proposed use with the Zoning Atlas and the Comprehensive Plan for development of Chapel Hill and its environs. This proposed project will conform to the zoning atlas and the comprehensive plan. The Botanical Garden was in this location prior to adoption of the Town's zoning ordinance and the PD-OI Special Use Permit is consistent with the continuation of this use. This use is compatible with the comprehensive plan designation "Parks/Open Space" for this area.

- c. Affect on the value of surrounding properties. The new Visitor Education Center will maintain or enhance the value of the surrounding properties.
- d. Other considerations relevant to the proposed use. None

**Finding 4:** That the use or development conforms with the general plans for the physical development of the Town as embodied in this chapter and in the Comprehensive Plan.

- a. Conformance of the proposed development with the Zoning Atlas and the Comprehensive Plan for development of Chapel Hill and its environs. The North Carolina Botanical Garden is committed to excellence in research, university instruction, conservation, plant collections and public programs. The Visitor Education Center will provide a welcoming gateway into the NC Botanical Garden that exemplifies a positive union between natural and built environments. This use is compatible with the Parks/Open Space designation in the Comprehensive Plan for this area. The proposed improvements do not alter the character of the site, and mitigation measures are in keeping with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. This project will conserve and protect the natural setting of Chapel Hill, a major theme of the comprehensive plan. Furthermore, it will set a new standard for environmentally friendly public buildings in Chapel Hill.
- b. Relationship of the site to the Chapel Hill Resource Conservation District, the Chapel Hill Thoroughfare Plan, the Greenways Plan, the Land Use Plan, and the Urban Services Area. Although the Town's RCD overlay district is not applicable to this property, every effort has been taken to respect the intent of the RCD overlay district. The use of the property will not change with this improvement nor will there be any conflicts with the other Town plans.
- c. Other considerations relevant to the proposed use. None.

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**BOTANICAL GARDEN VISITOR EDUCATION CENTER SUP  
CONCEPT PLAN SUMMARY**

*The Visitor's Education Center was presented to the CDC on June 16, 2004 and to the Town Council on June 30, 2004.*

*The only significant change from the concept plan to this plan is the removal of the herbarium/library building.*

*Council comments on the concept plan were generally supportive of the project and the comments regarding Laurel Hill Road have been dealt with through the closure of Laurel Hill Road. The proposed parking surface is appropriate for the vision and the mission of the Garden and the Visitor's Education Center, as discussed in Finding 2a, above.*