

Developer Responses to HDC and Town Council Comments UNC Wesley Foundation

The UNC Wesley Foundation presented the Concept Plan for their development before the Historic District Commission on December 13, 2007 in the Town Council Chambers. The Foundation issues the following responses to the items that were raised *in bold italics*. Please note the following items were taken directly from the HDC's meeting minutes provided by Town staff. Please also note during that presentation, part of the Concept Plan included an alternative site on East Franklin Street. This concept has been eliminated from the current Concept Plan. The minutes have been edited to eliminate these discussions.

1. Commissioner Susan Smith expressed her belief that the design was too large in comparison to other existing buildings, while recognizing that a lot has been done to mitigate that on the Pittsboro Street side. She appreciated the effort in trying to create parking as well as the effort to keep the building users on campus, in a historical context.

Commissioner Smith appreciated the need for the applicant to do something because of the state of the existing building, understanding the need to make enough money for the project to be viable, but maintained her concerns about the scale.

2. Commissioner Sarah David expressed concern that about the proposed scale being too large and the building being too big for the location, although recognizing that the architects did a good job of trying to offset the massing. Commissioner David expressed concerned about the traffic impacts, despite the proposed use of innovative parking techniques.
3. Commissioner Stephen Rich liked the design of the building (also acknowledging the innovative parking), but shared the concern about its size.
4. Commissioner Louise Winstanly echoed Commissioner David's comments regarding size.
5. Commissioner Jim White concurred with the rest of the Commission.
6. Commissioner Jennifer Koach indicated concern that the massing planned for the Pittsboro site is too large.

WF Response: The consensus of the HDC was that the overall scale of the building was too large for the site. At that presentation, only the five-story scheme was presented. The current Concept Plan to be presented to Town Council on March 16, 2009 only includes the four-story scheme.

The UNC Wesley Foundation presented the Concept Plan for their development before the Town Council on March 10, 2008 in the Town Council Chambers. The Foundation issues the following responses to the items that were raised *in bold italics*. Please note the following items were taken directly from Council's meeting minutes published on the Town website. Please also note during that presentation, part of the Concept Plan included an alternative site on East Franklin Street. This concept has been eliminated from the current Concept Plan. Any reference to this concept has been deleted from the following minutes.

1. JB Culpepper, Planning Director, stated that a concept plan was being presented for the Wesley Foundation at 214 Pittsboro Street and displayed a vicinity map. She said the project was proposed at the west side of Pittsboro Street, south of Cameron Avenue, and north of

McCauley Street. She stated that the property was located in the Cameron/McCauley Historic District.

2. Ms. Culpepper said that as a concept plan review, there had been no staff review of the proposal and that neither a rezoning application nor a formal Special Use Permit (SUP) application had been received.
3. Ms. Culpepper said the proposal involved the demolition of the existing facility, construction of a four-story building with 148 beds, about 70,000 square feet of floor area, parking or storage for 31 vehicles, and the property is roughly 0.70 of an acre.
4. Ms. Culpepper recommended that the Council review the concept plan, receive comments, and following a discussion, adopt a resolution transmitting comments to the applicant.
5. Ms. Culpepper stated that the Historic District Commission (HDC) acted as the Community Design Commission (CDC) in reviewing the concept plan initially and that the comments were attached for the Council's consideration.
6. Mr. Didow stated that the Wesley Foundation is a private, non-profit 501(c)(3) that has been located at 214 Pittsboro Street in the Cameron/McCauley neighborhood since 1965. He said the Wesley Foundation serves the public good in a number of respects and operates exclusively for charitable, educational, and religious purposes. Mr. Didow stated that the Wesley Foundation provides a safe and secure religious center that is substance free and alcohol free, and intentional student housing. He said they serve the public good of the student residents, other students, the faculty at UNC, as well as the broader communities of Chapel Hill and Carrboro.
7. Mr. Didow stated that the existing facility, which opened in 1965, is showing its age and that the ability for staffing and programming is limited to the same scope and scale as the past 40 years. He said the plan to renew the Wesley Foundation in order to better serve the campus and the community for the next 50 years has been in the works for about a year.
8. Mr. Didow stated that this renewal was needed in order for the Wesley Foundation to serve the campus and community with the scope and scale needed, to be financially self-sufficient, and to increase the staff and residential and non-residential programming to reflect the growth in both the campus and community for both the past 40 years and the years to come.
9. Mr. Didow said this proposal was first submitted to the Council in November of 2007 after several meetings with the leaders of the Cameron/McCauley neighborhood association. He stated that the proposal that went to the Historic District Commission (HDC) involved a five-story building with 160 beds, program space, worship space, and 54 on-site parking spaces at the 214 Pittsboro Street site. Mr. Didow said that while most of the feedback from the original proposal was accepted and supported, there were other concerns that the mass and the scale was too great. He stated that in response to that, the proposal was revised and presented in September and included a four-story facility, 148 beds, program and worship space, and 31 on-site basement parking spaces. He said that safe off-site vehicle storage would be provided, the program would be green (pedestrian and bicycle friendly), the use of zip cars would be included, and property tax neutral and sales revenue and sales tax positive for downtown Chapel Hill.

10. Mr. Didow displayed a map of the 214 Pittsboro Street site and pointed out the property lines. He also stated that most properties around them were university owned and the Wesley Foundation was one of the few private properties that were left in the area.
11. Mr. Didow went on to say that any objections from the surrounding neighbors in respect to the project was that the Cameron/McCauley neighborhood's only protection came from always objecting to any rezoning requests and despite the opinion of the project, would hold true to that in order to maintain consistency.
12. Mr. Didow stated that the preference would be to renew the Wesley Foundation for the next 50 years on the existing site, but the reality is that the project needs to be done, regardless of the location.
13. Council Member Harrison addressed Ms. Culpepper and stated that at the concept plan level this proposal would be reviewed by the Historic District Commission (HDC) and by the Council. He asked if and when the proposal became a formal application, would it go through all of the advisory boards and then back to the HDC again. Ms. Culpepper confirmed that was the correct process. She said the Historic District Commission (HDC) would act as the Community Design Commission (CDC) because the project is located in a historic district.
14. Council Member Czajkowski addressed Mr. Didow in reference to the last slide of his presentation, which posed the questions to the Council of whether or not they thought the project had merit for the campus and community. Council Member Czajkowski stated that he believes this is exactly the kind of project that should be fostered and supported to the greatest extent possible by the Council. He said the Wesley Foundation does great work and the Town needs more of it. He added that Mr. Didow had done a great job on the site design and stated that he thought the project should be four stories.
15. Mayor pro tem Ward stated that he was trying to evaluate the impacts of this building on the adjacent and near neighbors. He said that the impacts seem minor and that he couldn't really form an opinion regarding the zoning changes that would be needed for this project. Mayor pro tem Ward said the day to day impacts of this project seemed appropriate.
16. Mayor pro tem Ward then addressed the issue of parking spaces. He said he would like to know how the Wesley Foundation could regulate the vehicle use of the residents so that the impact of parking is not on the adjacent neighborhoods.

WF Response: From the conception of this development, the Wesley Foundation has provided funds within the business model to purchase property off-campus on which to store resident's vehicles. This arrangement is no different than the way the University accommodates the storage of its resident's vehicles. Wesley Foundation intends to implement a Zip-car program, mentioned in the presentation, to satisfy routine student needs for local transportation. Wesley Foundation also intends to implement a 24/7 shuttle service from the Pittsboro Street site to the remote parking facility so students will have access to their cars for urgent needs.

17. Mayor pro tem Ward said the impacts of this building seem to be distant from the historic aspects of the community since it was in an area that was surrounded by other university buildings rather than being next to a series of homes. He stated that while he has been an

advocate for higher density in the community as a way of dealing with growth rather than sprawling, things such as the water restrictions cause hesitation in moving in that direction.

WF Response: Wesley Foundation applauds council members on their advocacy for higher density residential development in the Town. With the University's planned expansion of the student body ("UNC-CH has set a target for growth from 28,000 to 33,000 students in 10 years." – Daily Tarheel article, October 7, 2008), the Wesley Foundation believes that projects like the one it is proposing are part of the solution to the expected growth of the university. Wesley Foundation believes that it is providing a service to both students and university neighbors by providing purpose built student housing immediately adjacent to the campus, reducing the need for vehicle trips to campus and providing a better alternative than having students renting houses in the surrounding neighborhood.

18. Mayor pro tem Ward said he believed the work of the Wesley Foundation provided a significant good to the campus and community. He stated that the fact the residents there are mostly students, there will be less use of vehicles and the stacked parking will discourage more frequent usage, and they can take full advantage of the public transportation system.

WF Response: Wesley Foundation concurs with this comment.

19. Mayor pro tem Strom stated that he didn't know quite enough to make an informed decision on four stories versus five, but he was not ruling out his support for a five-story version of the project. He said he would like to confer more with the other members of the Council and the community before providing a definite answer.
20. Mayor Foy said he noticed that the Community Design Commission (CDC) consistently mentioned massing. He stated that he wasn't sure exactly what was meant by that and asked for clarification.

WF Response: The massing of the building has been addressed by reducing the number of stories from five to four.

21. Council Member Greene asked if Mr. Didow had considered adaptive reuse of the building. She pointed out that when a building is torn down, that is not an act of sustainability and that a lot of the debris ended up in the landfills. She said tearing a building down is ignoring all of the energy that was embodied within the building and all that it took to put the building there in the first place. She recommended that Mr. Didow give as much consideration as he could to the possibility of reusing the buildings, even if that entailed expansion.

WF Response: The adaptive reuse of the building was investigated and found to be unfeasible due to the condition and siting of the existing structure. Following a visit to the Wesley Foundation in August of 2008, it was Wesley Foundation's understanding that Ms. Greene agreed with that finding.

22. Council Member Kleinschmidt said he did not think this project was an inappropriate use of space for the redevelopment of the current space that the Wesley Foundation was in, but he did have some concerns regarding the massing issue. First, however, he pointed out that the way the four-story design was presented, the roof created the sense of a fifth floor. Council Member Kleinschmidt said the impression would be that though the project was proposed as being four stories, it would be perceived as a five-story building due to the design.

WF Response: The Wesley Foundation respectfully disagrees with Mr. Kleinschmidt on this point. Traditional architecture, such as the Carolina Inn and the adjacent fraternity and sorority houses, utilize pitched roofs, which do not give that perception.

23. Council Member Kleinschmidt stated that the way the building seemed to fill the envelope that it was placed in was a shock to the senses. He said that with the rest of the area containing more openness, the fact that this building was so solid and big would be overwhelming. Council Member Kleinschmidt stated that in looking at it in relation to the buildings around it, one's attention would immediately be drawn to this building because of the size of it and also what it was made out of. He said that bricks are not only made of heavy materials, but they give the look and feel of something being heavy and therefore this caused more concern because those were the types of sensory things that people would respond to.

WF Response: The materials on the building have been modified to reduce the 'heavy' feel of the building. The brick is still the predominant material to try to be compatible with the Carolina Inn and other nearby structures.

24. Council Member Kleinschmidt suggested finding a way to reflect some of the other architecture of the neighborhood, rather than following the lead of the Global Education Center or the Public Health Building. He stated that as it stands now, there is a clear division on Pittsboro Street with the large massive buildings on the left and the nice historic neighborhood feel on the right and he would like to see reflections of that neighborhood feel. Council Member Kleinschmidt proposed finding a way to make the building seem to be lighter, even if made of bricks by perhaps building it in a different style. He reiterated that he believes the building is a good fit for the neighborhood because of the surrounding student population and that the proposal makes appropriate use of the land.

WF Response: The Wesley Foundation appreciates Mr. Kleinschmidt's comments regarding the appropriate use of the land. It is the Wesley Foundation's intentions to fit into the context, namely the Carolina Inn and the nearby fraternity and sorority houses. The use of the arcade and the bay window on the second floor each try to provide functional space while breaking down the main façade.

25. Council Member Kleinschmidt said he hoped that he was being clear in his comments and stated that if one were to stand and count the windows going up this building, there are five which implies that there are actually five stories.

WF Response: The Wesley Foundation did investigate the utilization of a flat roof and found the resulting design less than pleasing.

26. Council Member Harrison then addressed the question of the merit for the campus and the community he stated that he had a soft spot for the Methodist Outreach. He went on to say that it was striking how unanimous the concerns were regarding the size and scale of the project. He stated that he reads the reports from the advisory boards and when the concept plan came in from the Historic District Commission (HDC) and six out of six of the commissioners expressed the same concerns, it was something he felt worthy of taking note of. Council Member Harrison stated there was a real concern about the mass not only with the commission, but with the Council as well. He suggested a new design that reduces the visual impact of what is in essence a private dormitory.

WF Response: The reduction in stories from five to four, and the modifications of the front and rear façade has tried to address these concerns.

27. Council Member Harrison then addressed the issue of the zoning modifications. He said that a neighborhood that has not experienced rezoning and has taken a stand against it, the domino effect of rezoning is quite a concern and whether the proposal is from the university or a private applicant, it is a valid concern worth looking into. Council Member Harrison pointed out that rezoning is becoming more and more commonplace and it would be good to figure out when rezoning is appropriate and when it isn't. He stated that it seems the Pittsboro site is more readily workable for the project, but with mass being an issue, scaling down the project might be inevitable.

WF Response: The Wesley Foundation would like to point out that with the current zoning of OI-2, the Wesley Foundation could not rebuild even the same size building on the Pittsboro Street site. No matter what the Wesley Foundation develops on that site would require a rezoning of the property due to limited FAR provided under OI-2.

28. Council Member Easthom stated that she is in agreement with the fact that the design needs to be scaled down and that it's like looking at a sea of brick. She stated that she thought the building was pretty, but that the brick was too harsh and that scaling back from the road would help.

WF Response: The reduction in stories from five to four, and the modifications of the front and rear façade has tried to address these concerns.

29. Mayor pro tem Ward commented on the facade looking blank and flat, but stated that when looking at the the floor plans, there is a great deal of articulation that isn't being translated when looking at the structure head on. He stated that he agreed with Mayor Foy that setting back the height would make a big difference.

WF Response: The Wesley Foundation has worked very hard to make sure the building mass that sits on Pittsboro Street is compatible with the adjacent structures. The four story portion of the building is set back approximately fifty feet from the main street façade. In reality, this should make the building appear less tall.

30. Mayor Foy stated that he would like for people to understand what stage of the process this was in. He stated that the Council invites a concept plan to give the applicant the opportunity to hear blunt appraisals before there is a significant investment or before a project has reached a point where the Council cannot support it. He said that all of the comments made by the Council were meant to be constructive and to ensure that in the long run everyone is as satisfied as they can be with the final outcome.

WF Response: The Wesley Foundation appreciates the Council's comments and has attempted to be responsive to those comments. The Wesley Foundation looks forward to further conceptual comments from the Council.