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Southern Community Park Town of Chapel Hill

Special Use Permit Submission / Statement of Justification

General Information

The park site is just over 70 acres and is mostly wooded. The site is immediately south of Southern Village with US 15-501 running the length of the property on the east side. Dogwood Acres Drive divides the property into a northern and southern half. The portion of Dogwood Acres Drive that crosses the park site will be taken out of NCDOT's control and turned over to the town. This process will be completed prior to issuance of ZCP. This will enable the construction of pedestrian crossings that would not have been permissible under NCDOT control.

More than half of the site will be preserved in a natural condition. Much of the existing vegetation in those areas that will be developed is young pine forest and / or has been severely damaged by storms over the past few years. The area being left natural exhibits the most valuable vegetation, steeper slopes and much of it is designated RCD by the town.

Park Program

The program for this 70 acre park includes:

- 3 athletic fields
- 1 youth baseball field
- dog park
- meadow
- greenway trail extension
- children's playground / water play area
- picnic areas
- roller hockey court
- basketball courts
- parking facilities
- reserved site for future community center
- picnic shelters
- restroom / maintenance buildings
- recycling center by Orange County

Landscape Architecture

Land Planning

Site Evaluation

Urban Design

Site Design

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A future community center will be located on the park site. The approval for this building will be a separate SUP process. At this time the exact program for and size of this building is unknown.

In addition, an extended construction completion date beyond the typical 3 year period is requested for this project. Currently funding is only available for a portion of what is illustrated by the SUP drawings. The project will have a subsequent construction phase at some point in the future. The applicant requests a 6 year period for construction completion.

Statement of Justification

The following addresses the four required findings as defined by the town.

Finding #1

That the use or development is located, designed, and proposed to be operated so as to maintain or promote the public health, safety, and general welfare;

The design of the park provides recreational opportunities for the public while preserving a large portion of the site in an undisturbed condition. These opportunities and the preservation of the natural environment promote the public's health, safety, and general welfare. Provisions have been made within the design to accomplish the following:

- Provide the parking required to serve the park needs. Parking on the south side of Dogwood Acres Drive has been doubled to better serve the park users. Total spaces 126. This will aid in keeping people from parking on Dogwood Acres Drive and in the adjacent neighborhood. Redesign of this parking area also increases the buffer along Dogwood Acres Drive and eliminates drive closest to 15-501.
- Additional drives and the intersection created with 15-501 have adequate sight lines.
- Water and sewer will be extended as part of the project.
- Drainage plans include bio-retention facilities
- Resource Conservation District existing on site will remain undisturbed

Finding #2

That the use or development complies with all required regulations and standards of this Chapter, including all applicable provisions of Articles 3 and 5. the applicable specific standards contained in the Supplemental Use Regulations(Article 6) and with all other applicable regulation.

Plans prepared for the use and development of this property as a park comply with all required regulations and standards including identified provisions. This includes those requirements and provisions relative to street improvements, buffers and setbacks, parking and preservation of open space.

All street improvements will comply with town standards as identified in Articles 5.8 and 5.9 of the Land Use Management Ordinance.

Buffers required along adjacent properties are 20' in width. Plans for the park provide buffers, which exceed that requirement. Along public rights of way plans for the park exceed the 30' required buffer as defined in Articles 3 and 5. There are no specific standards for providing parking for a park and the open space provided by the park equals over 60% of the site.

Finding #3

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

Relative to the current recreational opportunities available to the residents of Chapel Hill and Orange County and based on the recently completed town Parks and Recreation Master Plan the development of this park is considered a necessity.

Definition of this park as a public necessity is reflected in the Town Parks and Recreation Master Plan

The plans for Southern Community Park address recreation needs identified by the Parks and Recreation Master Plan for the Town of Chapel Hill and is compliant with the town's Comprehensive Plan.

The additional parking south of Dogwood acres Drive will help keep people from parking on Dogwood Acres Drive and therefore help maintain the value of contiguous properties

The park development as illustrated by the plans locates those activities that generate noise, and / or lighted at night as far from the adjacent residential subdivision, Dogwood Acres, as possible. This includes soccer fields, dog park, baseball field, basketball courts and roller hockey court.

Currently Chapel Hill owns 13 parks with a cumulative total of 126 acres. Along with Southern Community Park and Pritchard Park (site of the Chapel Hill Library) this total will reach 273 acres.

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.

The development of the park conforms to the general plans for the physical development of the town as embodied in the Comprehensive Plan.

Development of this property as a park conforms with Zoning Atlas and Comprehensive Plan. Southern Community Park is identified in section 11A-7 of the Comprehensive Plan. This section states " Widespread community interest in recreational activities makes the provision of parks a priority for the town. However, because Chapel Hill is largely built out, the town faces constraints in attempting to provide additional park and recreational facilities to serve its residents."

Among the attributes of the park which contribute to the themes of the comprehensive plan are the following:

- The park design responds to and will help protect the adjacent neighborhood, Dogwood Acres Subdivision.
- With over half of the 70 acre park site remaining in a natural condition the park will help preserve a natural setting within the town.
- The park is a desirable non residential development
- The park extends the existing greenway trail, which currently terminates just north of the park site.
- The park provides quality community facilities and services.
- The park's location adjacent to the Park and Ride Lot at Southern Village supports a balanced transportation system.

Compliance with the Entranceway Corridor Plan

While the proposed plan does not adhere to the specifics of the 1988 Entranceway Corridor Plan, the proposed buffers meet the intent of the plan to preserve the natural vegetated conditions along this corridor.

Existing vegetation along 15-501 north of the intersection with Dogwood Acres Drive is not considered particularly significant or attractive. Much of the existing tree cover is damaged from storms over recent years.

In the area of the athletic fields, preserving additional buffer depth from 15-501 beyond the 50' buffer proposed would have resulted in the athletic fields moving closer to the adjacent neighborhood, the loss of interior vegetation, which is more significant and valuable than the existing vegetation along 15-501 and encroachment into the RCD area. The proposal to provide a 50' wide planted buffer along this frontage will provide a dense vegetative buffer.

In the area of the dog park the proposed buffer meets the minimum requirement of 30' but does not comply with the Entranceway Corridor Plan. It is the applicant's intention to preserve the existing tree canopy and supplement that with plantings of evergreen trees and shrubs. It is felt that this approach coupled with the significant grade change along this frontage will keep the dog park screened and strengthen the buffer.

South of the dog park, no disturbance to the existing vegetative buffer is planned except for the location of the greenway trail. The emphasis along this frontage will be tree preservation. No additional plantings are planned.