



# Durham Appearance Commission

*Cultivate visual appeal & recognize the benefits of good design, which enhance quality of life.*

**TO:** Durham City Council and Durham County Board of Commissioners  
**FROM:** Durham City-County Appearance Commission  
**RE:** Police Headquarters Site  
**DATE:** September 20, 2017

The Durham City-County Appearance Commission appreciates the efforts being undertaken by the City Council to consider the future of the current Police Headquarters site. The Appearance Commission would like to take this opportunity to offer comments regarding the future of the site for your consideration. The Commission has reviewed the September 19, 2017 Policy Review memorandum prepared by HR&A and concurs their analysis. Durham has become a very desirable location for residential, office, and commercial development over the past several years and the debate over disposition of the site should consider maximizing the public benefit of the property. Public benefit could include public uses of the property but should also consider private development that achieves significant public goals.

We celebrate the unique aspects of our City and County and look to new developments to enhance that character and keep good things happening in Durham. Toward that end, the Appearance Commission would like to suggest the following factors be considered in the development of this site.

- **Existing Building.** The Appearance Commission recommends preservation and restoration of the existing building on the site. Restoration should open the interior of the building to the original open floor concept and the existing dark glazing should be replaced with clear glazing, especially on the ground floor, with an effort to maintain the existing curtain-wall proportions. To better integrate the building into the fabric of the larger development of the site and to better activate the ground level pedestrian realm, an addition to the building, or an active open space plaza should be developed between the building and Chapel Hill and Duke Streets. As the building is eligible for historic tax credits, there are economic incentives available to offset the cost of renovation.
- **Public or Private Development.** If the decision is made to sell the property, the Commission recommends that the property be sold to a private or non-profit sector developer with conditions to ensure a development that meets public goals and provides public benefit.
- **Parcel Division.** The Commission suggests that the City be open to options that may divide the property into multiple parcels for development by multiple developers including the city itself. Transferring the property as one complete block could reduce the likelihood that usable park space will be created. Dividing the property would also create an opportunity for smaller, local developers to participate in development of the site and encourage diversity in use and architectural design, and may encourage preservation of the existing building. If the City chose to retain ownership of the area of the site directly adjacent to Chapel Hill Street, there may be

opportunities to integrate park space on the NW corner with the existing building, as well as an opportunity for the City to develop the existing building into a space that acknowledges the building's history as the Police HQ and encourages public discourse on associated divisive issues.

- **Mixed-Use Development.** Development of the property should result in a mix of uses including neighborhood serving retail, general business office, residential, and open space. The site should be developed with either multiple buildings or building massing designed to break up the street frontage of the development. The need for Class A office space downtown and close proximity of the site to the Downtown Transportation Center should also be considerations.
- **Well-designed Affordable Housing.** Development of the property should include housing targeted at the demonstrated needs of the community including the needs of low and moderate-income families. Development should include, and reserve, a reasonable number of "family sized" units. Affordable housing units should fit within their context and not be visually distinctive from neighboring market rate housing units.
- **Recreation and Open Space.** Development of the site should include an amount of park space consistent with the city's Open Space Plan and appropriate recreation standards. Recreation space should be readily accessible to the general public. This space should include a mix of active and passive recreation options including a tot lot.
- **Neighborhood Serving Retail Uses.** Development of the property should require new buildings to be generally constructed to the front property line and ground floor spaces should be reserved for neighborhood serving retail and office uses such as laundry, hardware store, small grocery, barber shop, small health care office, or tax preparer's office that would provide commercial services as well as employment and entrepreneurial opportunities to residents of the neighborhood. Such uses should be required for the ground floor of new construction fronting on Chapel Hill, Gregson and Duke Streets.
- **Parking.** Surface parking should be prohibited from the site. All parking would be structured parking and should be interior to the development. All parking, except subterranean parking decks, should be located no closer than 50 feet from the perimeter of the site. Subsurface parking should be encouraged, if not required.
- **Development Along Jackson Street.** While the development of most of the site should be encouraged to build to the height limit the Appearance Commission recommends that the portion of the site along Jackson Street be developed with smaller three story townhouse style residential units suitable for family occupancy. The open space on the property could be located in proximity to this cluster of lower scale family housing.
- **Compliance with Long-range Planning and Community Goals.** Development of the property must comply with City and County planning documents and the UDO. Variances and exceptions from the UDO should not be permitted except as concern height and then only to take advantage of the topography of the site.