

April 20, 2021

Dear Planning Commission Members,

Estes Neighbors is a grass roots group organizing to make people aware of the consequences of the Aura plan and to advocate for development that will ensure Estes Drive remains mobile and safe. We believe the Aura proposal is Vehicle Oriented Development, not the desired Transit Oriented Development because it would magnify appreciably the congestion on Estes Drive by adding 650 parking spaces, and creating approximately 3,000 daily automobile trips, most via the primary entrance 800 feet from the major Estes/MLK intersection, on Estes Drive.

It is a positive sign that last week Maurice Jones, Town Manager, asked the transit staff to build in future expected growth into the town wide traffic model that can simulate future conditions on Estes Drive. However, we don't anticipate that the new model runs will be available until the Council public hearing for Aura now set for May 12th. The key point to observe is that you are reviewing Aura Tuesday night, April 20, without having in hand a good predictor for future conditions on Estes Drive. We would like to suggest that it would make sense to delay your final recommendation to the Town Council until you have the information.

Another major consideration is whether you can do a credible review without a holistic plan for allocating traffic capacity on N. Estes Drive among the various parcels awaiting development. A comprehensive traffic plan is important to keep Estes Drive mobile because Trinsic is not the only developer who wants to develop land in the immediate area. There are a number of additional land owners near the MLK/Estes intersection with plans for development or redevelopment in the near future beginning with Whit Rummel on the north side of Estes, as well as Sherman Richardson, Lucy Carol Davis, the Farrars, and the YMCA on the south side. Note that all of the properties along the south side of N. Estes recently were designated as a federal "Opportunity Zone" for purposes of spurring development.

A holistic approach to traffic planning will promote better outcomes in terms of roadway configurations (driveway locations, connections) and alignment of area density to Estes Drive roadway capacity. In contrast, a fragmented, "first mover" approach will foreclose some solutions and leave the Town in an awkward or untenable position vis-a-vis future applicants.

There are several other substantive issues that we will present tomorrow night in more detail, such a public safety near the schools, that adds more weight of the problems concerning this application and points toward a denial of the permit.

We were struck by the thoughtful Advisory Board discussion about the proposed Aura and want to share the conditions developed by them. We enclose the ones that were readily available.

**Transportation and Connectivity Advisory Board, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

Voted 5 - 0 to deny the Aura permit for these reasons:

- The development does not reflect the goals of the Central West Small Area Plan.
- The development does not meet the transit priority goals of the Town due to the number of parking spaces and the increase in single occupancy vehicle trips.
- The project will exacerbate existing pedestrian and bicycle safety issues due to the increase in traffic on Estes Drive and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., and thus is not in line with the Road to Zero pedestrian safety goals of the Town.
- The traffic impact analysis and the Town-wide traffic model do not reflect the current reality and lived experience of drivers on Estes Drive, nor do they take a holistic view of traffic on Estes Drive, including the future development of other surrounding parcels.
- The traffic model needs to be validated.
- The Estes Drive site access is a major safety hazard and should be right-in-right-out.

**Environmental Stewardship Advisory Board, March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

Voted 6 - 4 to approve the Aura permit assuming these conditions are met:

- Provide Council with a detailed stormwater management plan, ensuring that the NCDOT culvert has adequate capacity.
- Ensure zero stormwater runoff to neighbors on the northeastern side of the property, with some form of recourse if the standard is not met (e.g. stormwater bond)
- Provide a detailed landscaping plan, ahead of the Council's review of a buffer modification, that includes number of trees, species and location.

**Special considerations:**

- Model 50, 75, 100-year storm events to ensure that that the on-site stormwater infrastructure can meet capacity needs.
- Add solar as part of initial construction, which could help the project meet the AIA 2030 standards.
- Assess environmental health outcomes, both acute and larger.
- Meet the Council's energy policy regarding 20% better performance than ASHRAE 90.1.
- Allow the ESAB to review the project a second time once there are more details regarding: landscaping, traffic, stormwater

**Community Design Commission, March 29, 2021**

Voted 3 – 2 to approve the Aura permit with conditions  
(Minutes not yet complete)

**Housing Advisory Board, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

Voted unanimously for the Aura project with these comments:

“Members expressed their appreciation for the applicant’s commitment to providing 15% on the units as affordable, the rental units were floating throughout the site. They also asked whether parking could be unbundled and how compliance with affordable housing commitments would be monitored and enforced.” There was serious concern expressed about the planned affordable housing price levels.

Thank you for considering this important information!

Estes Neighbors and individual signers