

DEMOLITION THREAT: 100 BLOCK OF CHARLOTTE ST

In reading through *Living Asheville: A Comprehensive Plan for Our Future*, it becomes very clear that the proposed development on Charlotte Street, Baird Street, Furman Avenue and Chestnut Street does not match the goals of the plan. We urge the Planning Department and City Council to encourage the developers to rethink their plans now.

Neighborhoods are the soul of Asheville and should be included in all placemaking efforts. The city should continue to engage neighborhoods to develop a Plan on a Page and consider neighborhood needs and concerns when developing small area plans. – Living Asheville

1. Balancing Preservation with Development to Protect Neighborhood Character

Given the existing character of the area, including historic districts/structures, there is a need to balance preservation with accommodation of new demand. The areas with the most potential for higher-density development are along the North's three primary commercial corridors: Broadway Avenue, Merrimon Avenue, and Charlotte Street. Therefore, strategies for North Asheville should promote maintaining local character in the residential neighborhoods, while encouraging higher-density development along the commercial corridors. – Living Asheville

This proposed project fails as a balance between the existing historic and natural character and the new development. All 13 historic homes will be lost along with the impressive old-growth tree canopy, to be replaced with architecture that is not sensitive to the neighborhood and new trees which will take another 100 years to mature.



2. Protection From Economic Downturn

Studies continue to show that places which are home to numerous locally-owned business are more prosperous, sustainable and resilient than those which rely on a few large companies or industries. Local and existing businesses can also help preserve the unique character of Asheville. The Older, Smaller, Better Report from the National Trust for Historic Preservation confirms a correlation between a higher concentration of creative jobs and older, smaller-scaled buildings and blocks. These areas also support higher levels of small and non-chain business, helping to keep dollars in the local economy and providing more resilience against future economic downturns. -Living Asheville

This same report from the National Trust also shows that these areas encourage more women and minority owned businesses and allow people from a wider range of incomes to live and work there. We fear that the rent in this new development will be unaffordable for local businesses, resulting in leases to national chains, vacant space or abandonment of the mixed-use design altogether and conversion to 100% residential.

In Chestnut Hill's National Register of Historic Places nomination form from 1983, residents' concerns for what happens to a place when a project is no longer viable is recognized – "Several gaps occur where the ground has been prepared for new construction... a broad grassy lot on E Chestnut near Charlotte St where Southern Bell took down a Westall house...several years ago in preparation for a building project that never materialized. One can only hope that future building on this vacant lot will be preceded by careful planning that recognizes the historic context and its physical patterns."

3. The Environment

Buildings are the greatest users of energy in the built environment. Thus new construction of green buildings is a valiant initiative. But existing buildings also contain substantial embodied energy which makes their preservation and adaptive reuse more efficient than building new. Implementing and incentivizing the principles, guidelines, and requirements of green building, and/or selecting an appropriate green building program for new and existing developments of all types should be an important priority for Asheville. By doing this in conjunction with encouraging and incentivizing the adaptive reuse of existing buildings and building preservation, Asheville can do its part to conserve embodied energy, preserve history, and combat societal challenges, including climate change. -Living Asheville

The developer's proposal to demolish 13 beautiful, restorable historic homes will result in a triple hit to the environment. First, by sending these homes to the landfill they will be throwing away millions of dollars of embodied energy. Second, they will be replaced with construction materials that are vastly more energy consumptive-plastic, steel, vinyl and aluminum. Third, it will take decades for the new structures to recover the embodied energy lost in the demolition of these 100-year old homes.

4. Walkability

*Greater demand for healthy living has increased demand for new bi-cycling facilities, sidewalks, and greenways. – **Living Asheville***

Our understanding is that the developer's plans improve the walkability of this area by providing wider sidewalks. However, enhanced walkability can be achieved without destroying the historic character of the corridor and neighborhood by improving connectivity between the existing structures and sensitively designed infill. The destruction of the historic Belgian block and stone wall along Charlotte Street and 13 historic homes proposed in the current plan is too much for our community to pay for wider sidewalks.

Furthermore, the road diet which PSABC supported, has been a great success in improving the walkability of this corridor. Maintaining the safety of those who walk, ride or drive on Charlotte Street should be weighed when considering such high-density development all in one location.

5. High Density, Mixed-Use Development

*Encourage moderately high-density, walkable, mixed-use development in growth areas with buildings located closer to the street and parking in the back. – **Living Asheville***

PSABC supports higher density infill on Charlotte Street that will contribute to the vibrancy of the corridor and benefit area businesses and neighborhoods. The developer's plans to demolish the majority of historic structures on this block in order to gain too much density is a gross misinterpretation of the goals that *Living Asheville* was trying to achieve. We think that there are better solutions to meet the desired density on Charlotte St. without losing the area's authenticity and historic character. We make suggestions for this on the next page.

*Of particular importance is encouraging the process of "placemaking", which is fostering a dynamic environment where places to live, work, and play exist in "mixed-use" harmony, and in which quality architecture, historic preservation, and smart urban planning create memorable, walkable places that are pleasant, vibrant, attractive and comforting. – **Living Asheville***

Solutions

While we recognize the property owners' desire to maximize the development potential for their property, this should not be done at the expense of their neighbors' financial and emotional investment in their own homes or the historic character and integrity of the larger Charlotte Street community.

On The Block:

- The homes along the 100 block of Charlotte Street are well suited for adaptive reuse that allows for small businesses and residential units. The owner should take their lead from properties in Biltmore Village like Corner Kitchen. These structures could be art galleries, hair salons, restaurants, etc. This area could become a destination for Asheville residents and tourists alike – especially visitors to the Grove Park Inn. As we know, local business will be far more likely to make use of smaller historic spaces. When appropriate, the second level of these homes could continue to function as residential spaces like Rose's Garden shop further up Charlotte Street.
- There are a number of empty and underdeveloped lots that belong to the developers and we would encourage them to consider compatible in-fill in those areas.
- The two acre property that Asheville Arms sits on and the adjacent .5 acre lot are underdeveloped. While we hate to see the loss of those units, which like the other the homes slated for demolition are relatively affordable, this could be a good site for some higher density development. It is the only structure owned by the developer on this site that is not contributing to the National Register District – and yet it is the only structure the developer plans to keep.
- We have and will continue to urge the developers to meet with staff from the State Historic Preservation Office to determine eligibility for taking advantage of the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits. These tax credits are available to all owners of contributing structures within National Register districts and can be used to recoup 35% of rehabilitation expenses on income-producing historic properties.

For Additional Density Along The Charlotte Street Corridor:

- There are a number of parcels that are well-suited for additional development along Charlotte Street. PSABC supports new development in locations that will not cause so much harm in the neighborhood. Please see the map on the following page highlighting existing underutilized areas.
- With a goal of higher density, there should be an effort made by City staff and potential developers to spread this density across several sites to lessen the impact on the neighborhood. 12 units per acre can be successfully accomplished on Charlotte Street by using multiple sites.

