

Public Meeting Notes

Re-Envisioning the Mill Plaza Workshop of the Durham / AIA 150 Community Partnership

September 8, 2007 3:00pm – 6:00pm, Oyster River High School

Members of the MPSC and AIA 150 Present: Dave Howland, Julian Smith, Doug Bencks, Mike Castanga, Debora Hirsch-Mayer, Ed Valencia, Crawford Mills Patricia Sherman, Patrick Field, Carolyn Isaak, Michelle White, Walt Staples.

3:06 Welcome, Introductions, and layout the Agenda
-Patrick Field

3:09 Process Reminder: where we have been, where we are today, where we are heading
-Dave Howland, MPSC Chair

3:18 JSA, Inc., Portsmouth, NH, 20 minute presentation by the design team, followed by five minutes of questions and comments from the public
Design team members present: Tom Ingebritson, Fabiannna Orlando, Elizabeth Dudley, and additional members not here today: Rob Westhelle, Bruce Dicker

Tom Ingebritson presenting

[A few details trying to capture some of the significant aspects of the scheme]

Scheme One – Main Street Extension –Addressing main concern of connecting Main Street with the mill plaza,

- Parking structures above the grocery and drug store
- City Hall and Library on the Mill Plaza site
- Same access to the site but changing the course of the drive
- Outdoor gathering center
- Multi story retail and residential
- Tower points trying to draw pedestrians into the complex
- River walk connecting to residential areas
- Retention pond
- Pedestrian access thru where the Grange used to be
- Overall numbers: Retail, 50,000 sq/ft, Civic 30,000, office 30,000 sq/ft, grocery 40,000, residential, 60,000, parking 300+ spaces

Scheme 2 – Urban Plaza –

- Mill Road side of the site is underdeveloped,
 - would like to capture university students as much as possible by adding more retail spaces along Mill Rd.,
- Town hall and library on site
- Centralized design approach, with a plaza in front of the Town Hall
- A central boulevard
- Housing above retail units, possibly work force housing, could be developed singly at a time
- Underground parking structures for residential

Comments and Questions: (The comments and questions from the public are in italics, and the responses from the design teams and AIA 150 team are in normal text)

What are the numbers on the second scheme?

-Retail 35,000 sq/ft, Civic 32,000, Office 60,000, grocery store 30,000, drug store 9,000, residential 85,000, parking 300+ spaces

For the units facing the green area, where are the entries into the units?

-[Access points pointed out on the display]

How do the numbers for retail and parking of the Schemes compare to what is there now?

-There is increased parking to account for new square footage.

What is the square footage today?

-Approximately 55,000 sq/ft. The new development schemes would almost or more than double retail space.

With regard to Scheme one, how far below grade are the parking structures?

-About 20 ft below Main Street grade

Have the designers or the MPSC considered the high cost of parking structures underground, as well as above ground, as this would seem to be a serious issue?

-The majority of economic analyses have not been done yet, and these concerns have not been factored into the designs. This round of design is meant to explore ideas and concepts.

Is there a plaza in both schemes?

-Yes there is a plaza in both schemes [pointed out on the displays]

Describe the view from Main Street? Would you see rooftops or what?

-As one walks down Main Street one would see building fronts and entryways, probably not roof tops of the Mill Plaza site buildings.

In Scheme one where is the drug store?

-Pointed out and confirmed presence

What is the access to the brook in Scheme Two? How much of a public space next to the brook is there?

-Access to the brook is open, and there is a public space along the brook.

Views of the brook may be more cut off due to buildings, which is a concern of building near or along the brook.

3:46 Schoonmaker and Team, Durham, NH, 20 minute presentation by the design team, followed by five minutes of questions and comments from the public

Team composed of Bill Schoonmaker, Robbi Woodburn, Walter Rous, Nick Isaak

Bill Schoonmaker Presenting

[A few details trying to capture some of the significant aspects of the scheme]

This design was presented in one scheme, shown in layers by elevation, and emphasizing the flow of the site.

Base Level 38 – From the point of view of standing looking at The Bagelry, for example. A new street from the Red Tower corner that follows the brook is imagined, with on street parking, and retail along this road. A 2nd main street of sorts.

- Parking structure, on street parking, and smaller parking areas
- Buffer around the brook
- Durham Market Place moved
- Retail masking the parking structure
- Town offices and library on site
- Outdoor cafe spaces

Level 48 – plaza opposite memorial park, town offices have forecourt

- Pedestrian connection to garage and to various levels
- Residential on second floor

Level 58 -

- Connections to plaza, space for retail
- Second story of residential
- Commercial on top of the grocery store

Level 68, 78 – residential and appropriate mix of commercial and retail.

Numbers: Retail/Commercial 230,000 sq./ft including the market and drug store, 700 parking spaces, 94 student units, 48 non-student housing units, roughly 1,000 sq./ft per unit...142,000 sq./ft residential.

Comments and Questions: (The comments and questions from the public are in italics, and the responses from the design teams and AIA 150 team are in normal text)

On 38 level – the most important criteria is what will the experience be for a pedestrian walking through the development, and some of this stuff doesn't work so well. Parking lots are dead spaces, and ways should be sought to break things up.

Parking on street in urban setting must be parallel or slanted. Here it is perpendicular, which means a parking lot...a no-no.

It is good what you have done in alternating with setbacks for the plaza and along the street, giving a sense of undulation. Some of the design seems hyperactive with niches and nooks. Simplifying frontages would be desirable.

Lines in urban settings should be straight with out curves, using angled sections, making 5 different straight sections, which leads the eye along.

Curves on this scale may work here though.

How much density is useful needs to be considered carefully in conjunction with who the project is catering to. Drivers are the main clientele, so this much density makes it harder for people driving in.

Diversity in residential units is desirable, and preferably work force housing and age restricted without students?

-Housing is definitely appropriate there, but what kind is an important question.

-Discussions ran the full gambit of mixes of housing, from all student housing, to no student housing and everything in between. This is something that will need further discussion.

I liked that the parking was tucked behind buildings, and that odd spaces and angles make things interesting and exciting. Density should be encouraged, as dead spaces are often the most interesting, allowing people to gather and mill around.

What I like most about the scheme is the feeling of a town center with access to pockets of green. The design is good except for the parking.

4:17 Break

4:32 Lavalle Brensinger, Manchester, NH 20 minute presentation by the design team, followed by five minutes of questions and comments from the public

Design team composed of Chris Drobat and Chris Urner
Both Presenting

[A few details trying to capture some of the significant aspects of the scheme]

The design emphasized a few key concepts and ideas, including a College Brook buffer, site access, views and connections to Main Street, and phased construction.

- 50 to 100ft buffer with brook
- Housing removed from highest density of retail and commercial, next to existing residential, with 2-3 story units, mixed use, town house style architecture
- Town civic center envisioned including a town hall, library, and public spaces
- Flexibility of stacking residential and commercial in various combinations
- Two access points – one through red tower corner, and then the original entry way as well
- 3 story parking structure of different sizes on levels
- Shops where folks can mill around, places to sit and meet people, performances...
- Grange – renovated for public use
- Numbers: civic 48,000 sq./ft, housing 90,000 or 70 to 80 units, retail 55,000, office 32,000, parking 450-500, 260,000 total minus the garage

Comments and Questions: (The comments and questions from the public are in italics, and the responses from the design teams and AIA 150 team are in normal text)

In the town house style residential where is the parking?

- In garage units under the units

Could you clarify about the structure of the parking garage?

- It is ground level to 3 stories, and the topmost story is landscaped with large planters.

Do the Main Street level buildings tie into the plaza?

- There is interesting space between the Plaza buildings and the Main Street buildings that could be put to use and could tie in Main Street very well.

5:00 Panel of Designers and Q&A

Considering the cost of the parking garage is there a conceivable alternative use if it doesn't financially pan out as a garage? This would restrict the use of space for the garage.

-Possibly yes there are alternative uses, but it would need forethought before the structure is built.

-If the levels of the garage are coincident with Main Street there could be more uses.

-There is also the possibility of a phased approach to building the garage in modular format, so to avoid building more than is needed or than can be afforded.

Has there been any thought about the cost of parking in the garage? This has to do with concerns about recouping the cost of the project.

-This is not the designers concern right now.

-The economics down the road have not been taken into consideration, but before the project begins planners should look 10, 20, 30 years down the road.

Parking for Main Street is very important. Is the garage intended for the plaza or the town?

-It is indeed important to serve town parking needs as well.

-We also do not want to jeopardize what is already there as well.

Given the potential cost of a parking structure there are potential issues down the road with building the structure. Is the project viable without a parking structure?

-Yes. The designs could be altered to reduce the number of parking spaces needed, including not putting in the Town hall, reducing the #s of residential units etc.

-Parking needs depend on the scale of density desired.

-The parking depends on the scale of the project and the economics behind things.

An issue that will need to be considered is the lost tax revenue if a parking structure is built.

What is Mr. Pinto's interest in the project?

It would have made sense to start with market analyses, as the concern with the cost of the project and its overall feasibility given certain larger town scale logistics, is of great importance.

What is the structural soundness of the Grange?

-The Town says it is not structurally sound currently.

Have the teams looked at a broader area than the immediate plaza boundaries as of today, considering issues such as the one-way traffic pattern downtown?

-JSA looked at just the current site, while Lavalley expanded a little bit more, and Bill Schoonmaker's team took an approach of looking at using more land.

-None of the teams looked at changing the bigger picture of downtown yet in terms of traffic patterns and such.

The traffic pattern downtown may be major issue in revitalizing downtown along with the plaza re-development.

-Traffic patterns are not part of this stage of design and are largely beyond the expertise of design teams right now.

If this redevelopment goes thru it would be a great time to correct the traffic pattern downtown.

-In this public design process we are encouraging folks to think about what they want downtown to look like.

Do not use the old plan for traffic in downtown Durham; there is too much traffic already for two-way traffic

It would be useful to hear what each of the design teams thinks about the other designs. Could we have each team tell us what they like best about the other team's plans?

The parking in the middle of the site is great, as it filters people into the parking area. Also, screening the parking structure with other buildings is great idea. The way the JSA team addressed Mill Street is also a good idea.

-The Lavalley Scheme's idea to create an artificial ground plan level with Main Street is interesting, and the way they differentiate the denser urban side and fade towards residential near the brook is interesting as well.

-It is very interesting that all three teams felt that Town Hall and the library was best sited on the plaza and combined into one structure.

-The concept of a village street parallel to Main Street is interesting.

-The Durham team Scheme also creates some beautiful spaces.

-In the Lavalley Scheme the edge of the plaza is well designed

-In the JSA #1 Scheme the change in paving patterns creates space for different things to occur, which is an exciting detail.

-In the JSA #2 Scheme the set up of the library is great; the placement is nice.

-The Lavalley Scheme's access route into middle of the plaza is a nice element.

Two plans put the grocery store far away from campus, which could put additional pressure on Chesley Drive.

-This was done to get folks to walk by other retail shops, with the idea that it is a central draw.

-Chuck Cressy thinks this location is a good idea, and its location makes it a destination.

-It can also be seen as creating a plug for Chesley Drive as well, blocking any potential access for traffic.

In the Lavalle plan they placed housing near [Chesley Drive](#), and new units are added it would put pressure on the residents there.

The presence of student housing south of Main Street is of concern, and mixed housing without students, or far fewer students, should be considered in this area.

Mixed-use housing creates activity and vitality, and thumbs up to not separating out housing from everything else.

Locating the Town Hall and library on the Plaza and in the same structure is a good idea.

The library and Town Hall locations in all the plans are great.

As much green space as possible, and places to gather, should be encouraged. As much as was shown in the design or even more.

There may be issues in establishing how much square footage the library may need or should get.

The noise from service vehicles is of concern, and it is important to make sure that the services access is on the north side of the plaza and that sound buffering is included.

5:30 Share Next Steps, Break and Talk to Design Teams one-on-one
MPSC meeting September 19th

6:00 Meeting was adjourned.