

**Statement of the Durham Historic Association before the HDC
Sept. 4 2014**

Founded in 1851 the Durham Historic Association was the first historical society chartered in New Hampshire and organized “for the purpose of preserving the remembrance of events connected with the history of the Town of Durham, or individuals who may have resided there...” Since 1959, when the Selectman gave the Association space in the old brick town hall, it has maintained a museum of Durham documents and artifacts on the second floor. The DHA has enjoyed a wonderful, mutually beneficial relationship with the Town and the HDC that it wishes to continue. Only one other time has the Executive Board of the DHA taken a position on a controversial subject, but the potential for the demolition of the current town hall has caused the Executive Board to develop a position statement that it wishes to present to you, the HDC, and the public tonight.

The Durham Historic Association is committed to the integrity of the Durham Historic District. The District is comprised of buildings that are representative of the growth of the town from its origins in the early 17th century, to the height of its prosperity as a shipbuilding and brick-making center in the 18th and 19th centuries, to the dawn of the 20th century when the New Hampshire College of Agriculture (UNH) relocated to Durham in 1893.

The vote at the 1974 Town Meeting established the Historic District Ordinance to protect Durham’s unique assemblage of historic structures. This was followed by the National Register of Historic Places approving the listing of the District in 1980 stating:

“The Main Street area, in spite of minor commercial intrusions...retains a sense of continuity, representing the full range of Durham’s architectural history. The Newmarket Road area, basically rural in nature and displaying a heavier concentration of unaltered Georgian and Federal style houses, strongly reflects the integrity of the relationship between the built and natural environments within the district.” “Intrusions in the district...seriously detract from its character only at the intersection of Main Street and Newmarket Road.” The existing buildings listed as seriously detracting from the character of the Historic District in 1980 are:

4 Main Street - a brick apartment building built in 1959

2 Main Street - a Shell gas station, now a Holiday Inn motel

4 Newmarket Road - offices built in 1952, later a bank, site of town office under construction



4 MAIN ST built 1959 2 MAIN ST former Shell gas station 4 NEWMARKET RD new town hall site

The town offices at 13-15 Newmarket Road, listed in the Ordinance as component #31, were originally two dwellings of 19th century vernacular design, built between 1871 and 1892 by James W. Burnham, a leader in Durham and state government, serving as Selectman and Representative to the NH Legislature. In 1978 the two houses were connected by a 2-story ell, contemporary but sympathetic in design, for use as town offices. The current town hall is an example of adaptive reuse that carefully preserved the facades of the original structures as viewed from the street and expanded as needed at the rear beyond the public view, for which it received a prestigious architectural award.

The Durham Historic Association possesses an extensive collection of documents, maps, photographs and artifacts that relate to the houses in the District. Without these contributing structures our collection loses its context within the built environment and landscape.

- The Durham Historic Association objects to the demolition of 15 Newmarket Road as the removal of this building, fronting on Newmarket Road, will seriously detract from the character and continuity of the Historic District, causing the removal of the District from the National Register and depriving property owners of tax incentives and special benefits.
- The Durham Historic Association objects to the demolition of 15 Newmarket Road as this will increase the area of intrusion, or modern commercial blight, within the Historic District, hindering our understanding of how the town evolved over time and jeopardizing the benefits from the Historic Byways Project.
- The Durham Historic Association objects to the demolition of 15 Newmarket Road before consultation with historic preservation experts, hired by the Historic District Commission, in regard to other uses for the building at 15 Newmarket Road.

- The Durham Historic Association objects to the demolition of 15 Newmarket Road as the developer has not met his burden to prove there is no potential use of any type for the building.
- The Durham Historic Association objects to the demolition of 15 Newmarket Road as the developer has not offered any plan to utilize the existing building shell in his project.
- The Durham Historic Association objects to the demolition of 15 Newmarket Road because the New Hampshire statutes and the town ordinance provide no authority nor justification for the HDC to permit demolition due to financial concerns brought upon the town by avoidance of a bond vote to underwrite the cost of the new town offices.

The Durham Historic Association asserts that how the HDC votes on this issue will decide Durham's future. Will it retain its small-town New Hampshire character, or will its core be demolished and replaced with chain stores and fast food outlets? An historic structure is irreplaceable, and if demolished is lost forever.

***Presented by :
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