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Town of Durham

July 10, 2014

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Planning, Assessing

To the members of the HDC Zoning

It is unfortunate that this meeting is being held during the height of summer when so many residents are unable to be here at this meeting, including me. However, I realize that the date of an application to you is determined by the applicant, not the Board.

I hope each of you on the HDC is able to withstand the extraordinary pressure exerted upon you by the Town Administrator, the Town Council, and Scott Mitchell to demolish the town offices in the Historic District to build a pharmacy and finance the construction of the new town office with the proceeds.

Since the Mitchell sales agreement is contingent on your approvals, it seems impossible, being human, not to feel undue pressure to do what the Town wants regardless of the Zoning Ordinance. Despite this pressure each of you has sworn to uphold the intent of the Historic Overlay District Ordinance.

I am relying on each one of you to take the time to consider carefully the demolition of this building. To me it qualifies to remain in the District because it meets several criteria for designation, having a unique location and characteristics as a visual landmark, having the age and special features of its period, having an award winning architectural design, and maintaining the visual continuity in the District.

Saying "no" to demolition does not prevent Mr. Mitchell from building a pharmacy. With your guidance a modern pharmacy can be built while preserving the historic facade that residents view and cherish every day. This public view of the building from Newmarket Road and School House Lane preserves the integrity of the District.

This Board should insist that Mr. Mitchell submit a plan for a pharmacy that preserves the exterior walls in the public view while accommodating a modern pharmacy beyond the public view. Insistence by the HDC will keep the District intact, maintain our gateway and preserve an important historic streetscape.

I will follow your discussions with great interest and concern.

Sincerely,  
Nancy Sandberg