

November 28, 2016

Planning Board  
8 Newmarket Road  
Durham, NH 03824

**RE: Public Hearing on the Mill Plaza Redevelopment – 7 Mill Road.  
Design Review (continued)**

Greetings,

Looking at the current proposed site plan labeled \*Scenario A (Revised)\* for the redevelopment of the Mill Plaza, I realize that the illustrations are deceptive.

It is the job of designers to deliver an aesthetically pleasing product. The reality of a built project, however, may be quite different. It is important that everyone be clear on that point as we proceed.

**Specifically, those illustrations present an unrealistic, prettified proposal.**

Today, the vegetated / tree buffer along the southern edge of the Plaza parking lot along the College Brook is aesthetically pathetic and ineffective as a noise buffer—even when in full foliage over the summer and early fall months. Apart from the sparseness of the tree buffer, most of the few remaining trees are unhealthy (made so by the snow removal practices of Colonial Durham Associates and the runoff from the parking lot). Indeed, as my neighbors and I have pointed out in comments to the Board, we see into the Plaza even through the woods along the Brook.

The drawings for Scenario A show a thick buffer of mature trees, softening the border between the huge, hard-surfaced commercial property and the family residences at Brookside Commons, on Faculty Road, and on Chesley Drive.

However, we *still* do not have the buffer that was required back in 1975, more than 40 years ago. I remind the Board of the March 4, 1975 letter to the Selectmen from D.C. Routley, Tree Warden, that I quoted a few months ago:

“...the whole landscaping of this site is woefully and shockingly inadequate. It grieves me that I was not consulted earlier in the planning stage and that I, and the town, should be forced to accept such a miserable landscaping job. Considering the amount of money spent on the building, that devoted to landscaping is laughable. It is essentially nothing.”

Today, our Site Plan Regulations address landscaping requirements in greater detail. For that we have much to be grateful. However, even if a few existing mature trees along the brook can be saved, and even if many new trees are planted and well

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maintained as terms of an approved redevelopment, **the thick buffer depicted will not develop in our lifetimes.**

It is important for both the Planning Board and the public that the applicant present **site plan designs stripped of landscaping.** To use an analogy, wine often tastes better with food, but professional tasters taste wine on its own so they can focus on the elements of the wine without external influence.

While it is still “early days” (despite more than two years elapsing since the first Design Review submission), at the appropriate time, **a separate plan should be presented for the buffer itself,** indeed for the “increased natural buffer” required in the Settlement Agreement. But even now, during Design Review, **a minimum space allotted for that buffer should be identified, so that other planned “uses” do not encroach upon it.**

In the meantime, let's be clear: There will be no effective visual or aural buffer between the Plaza and the neighborhood residences for many years to come. So your job is to make sure that the uses you allow at our borders today are appropriate for the location.

Sincerely yours,

*[Signed: Robin Mower, direct abutter]*