

TO: Durham Planning Board
FROM: John L. Hart, 13 Mill Road Unit 9, Durham NH 03924
DATE: 15 October 2014
IN RE: Abutter's Comments to Proposed Re-development/Expansion of Mill Plaza

I am an owner of a residential property (senior housing at Brookside Commons, 13 Mill Road, Durham) abutting Mill Plaza. As an abutter and as a Durham resident, I have some specific concerns about the recent proposal to re-develop and expand the current buildings and uses in Mill Plaza. I will be out of town for the public hearing on October 22, 2014, so I would like to submit these written comments to be included in the public record.

Regarding my background and credentials, I've lived in Durham since 2007. I've worked in Durham since 1985, specializing in horticulture, natural systems, and ecological landscape design at the Thompson School of Applied Science. I hold a Master of Science degree in forest ecology (Univ of Michigan) and a Master of Landscape Architecture degree (Univ of Massachusetts). I've been a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects since 1992. I've served on various municipal commissions, NGO's, and university committees in various localities since the 1970's (regional planning commission, conservation commission, landscape advisory board, sustainable landscape group, ecological task force, etc.). So, in addition to being an abutter, I have some level of expertise and experience in land use and land planning.

Firstly, I think that additional development of the Mill Plaza approaches the inevitable given population growth and an increasing need for walkable/livable communities with a smaller footprint than suburban developments. And I think that reconfiguration and some creative re-use of the Mill Plaza could be a great asset to Durham's residents, to its student population, and to its culture, aesthetics, sense of place, and ecology. I am in total support of a more engaging and vibrant downtown Durham, and (unlike some) I've been generally pleased with recent multi-story mixed-use buildings on Main Street and Pettee Brook Lane.

However, as presented, the proposal of Colonial Durham Associates, LLC, falls far short of any cogent vision of an improved Durham. I feel it would also impinge on my quality of life as a residential abutter. Since the current submission is quite preliminary (the term "sketchy" would also apply), I would like to make some broad observations about the proposed development, which will also include some specific suggestions:

- The ecological needs and aesthetic possibilities of College Brook are almost entirely ignored, and certainly not enhanced. This should be a focal area of re-development, creating a park-like zone of ecological buffer between the development and College Brook. The University has begun to address these issues upstream, and Mill Plaza could coordinate ecological improvements with UNH, possibly utilizing UNH expertise.

- Ditto, parking lots: as shown, these are poor designs from the 1970's in terms of addressing ecological and aesthetic issues (diversity of vegetation, water filtration and infiltration, runoff, heat-island effect, removal of pollutants from surface runoff, etc.).
- I see nothing on the "sketch" from Tighe and Bond to indicate any interest in creating a low-impact, sustainable development in keeping with reality and with the Town's master plan. I would like to see a major push toward energy-efficient buildings, green roofs, permeable paving, carbon-neutral buildings, water recycling on site, etc. The need for this approach is immediate, and the financial payback is well-established.
- Architecture needs to be appropriate to the village of Durham and the abutting historic district.
- "Mixed use" should be promoted, as in the plan, but housing should also foster diversity: student housing is being overbuilt in Durham, while senior and workforce and low-income housing is weak.
- From a personal perspective, as an abutter, I am seriously opposed to student housing on this site. Student housing in Durham is approaching a glut, which will only worsen as off-campus and on-line courses and degrees expand exponentially. Student housing here is a really bad idea from an investment and long-term viability perspective. Also, I am against additional housing here that will increase the lighting, the noise, and the traffic at Mill Plaza and in my residential and personal life.
- The plan should help mitigate traffic and parking issues in Durham. This plan clearly makes both problems worse.

My two cents. Thanks for reading, for those who got this far.

John L. Hart