

*Ellie and Donald Sutherland
25 Faculty Rd.
Durham, NH*

February 6, 2016

Planning Board
Town of Durham, NH

Dear Planning Board Members,

We live at 25 Faculty Road in Durham, which is behind the Mill Road Plaza and next to the path through the woods to Thompson Lane.

We strongly feel that the proposed plan for the Mill Road Plaza will:

- not satisfy the town's desire to have a vibrant and successful "Durham village center" that provides residents a sense of place
- adversely affect our property values
- adversely affect our quality of life

Our review of the proposed plan reveals the following issues:

- Too-tall buildings crowded along the brook and in the middle of the plaza which will be unpleasant to the eye – it looks confined, segmented, no overall flow or cohesion to the plaza, and uninviting.
- Traffic flow is inadequate and more dangerous with the proposed traffic pattern – more blind spots, more student drivers, difficult large truck delivery, and more traffic with student residential usage.
- Dramatic increase in commercial square footage without new parking for customers – which threatens our town "village center" concept.
- Neighborhood children and residents walk through the plaza to go to school and to visit Durham businesses – the route will be through college student housing which will be a college-age campus experience, not the "village center" experience we want for the plaza.
- Don't see market demand or economic necessity for a major revamp of the plaza that features a large increase in student apartments or commercial space. Some of the current housing and commercial space in Durham remains vacant since this past summer with the completion of recent major construction projects.

- We imagine a scenario where the revamped plaza doesn't meet financial projections and we have vacant storefronts and empty apartments which will give a very poor feel to our town center.
- Concern that the owners will have poor quality or find some way to get out of the 24/7 security and management requirement – the “village center” feel of the plaza and the quality of life in our neighborhood will be negatively impacted with the place becoming party central for the students who do live there.
- Wetland encroachment appears inaccurate if you consider the increased vehicular and walking traffic
- Buildings with multiple stories of apartments directly behind our neighborhood which most likely will be filled with students is completely incompatible with the established character of our neighborhood. From our neighborhood we can easily see and hear what goes on in the plaza.
 - Having students located so closely directly behind our homes with their music, car noise, and outdoor evening loud conversations will degrade our quality of life and property values.
 - We will see an increase in drunken students wandering through the woods between the plaza and our homes and down the path in to our neighborhood further degrading our quality of life and property values.
 - The settlement with the Town stipulates that “as many beds as possible” of housing would be placed on the northern half of the property (toward Main/Mill), yet over 200 of the 330 beds are proposed for the southern part of the Plaza adjacent to the Faculty Neighborhood in three-story structures combining parking and housing.
- An increase in light pollution from buildings & car headlights.
- An increase in noise pollution from student voices, music, cars, etc.

Our positive vision for the plaza includes:

- Locate all buildings along the north side of the plaza and Mill Road.
 - Why leave the old Hannaford building? Why not build a new Hannaford facing Mill Road and replace the current Hannaford building with a multi-story building with commercial space on the ground floor for the other businesses in the Plaza?
- Keep the open feeling and space along the brook side of the plaza – develop more green space and not buildings here – this contributes to the community and “village center” feel.

- Keep the open parking and traffic patterns that now exist and introduce more green space within the parking areas.
- Dedicate a building to quality 55+ housing – the market supports this.
- Encourage relevant businesses that will give the plaza a “village center” feel – restaurants, services, and retail.
- Outdoor lighting that is downward-facing and doesn’t project sideways or upwards – reducing the amount of light pollution and “urban sky glow”.

Sincerely,

Ellie and Donald Sutherland