



TOWN OF DURHAM
8 NEWMARKET RD
DURHAM, NH 03824-2898
603/868-8064
www.ci.durham.nh.us

Town Planner's Project Review
Wednesday, June 14, 2017

VIII. **Public Hearing - Mill Plaza Redevelopment.** 7 Mill Road. Design Review (preliminary application). Site plan and conditional use for the redevelopment of this 10-acre site. The project involves demolition of the rear commercial building; construction of new mixed-use buildings; new garage parking spaces; residential space for 330 occupants; new public spaces; and other site changes. Colonial Durham Associates, LP, property owner. Sean McCauley, agent. Joe Persechino, Tighe & Bond, engineer. Steve Cecil and Emily Innes, Harriman, site planner. Ari Pollack, attorney. Central Business District. Map 5, Lot 1-1. Recommended action: Public hearing, discussion, and closing design review.

- I recommend that the board open the public hearing, discuss the project, offer comments, and close the design review.

Please note the following:

- 1) Iteration. The most recent iteration of the project is included in the packets and posted on the website. I saw the plans only on Wednesday in a meeting with the applicant so I am including only basic comments here. The plans will be forwarded to the Technical Review Group on Friday when submitted.
- 2) Rite Aid. The applicant discussed with Rite Aid relocation of the drug store to a new building on site and believes this can be realized. The updated plans show Rite Aid in the new building. This adjustment has allowed for a number of positive changes in the plans, including adding a multi-story, mixed use building where Rite Aid is now located and reducing the highest buildings to 4 stories.
- 3) Basic design. There are a number of other adjustments that were made which the applicant describes in the new material and will explain at the Planning Board meeting. The basic configuration of buildings, streets, parking lots, and pedestrian ways, however, has not changed substantially from the prior draft.
- 4) Design review phase. This project has been in the design review phase for several years and the public hearing has been open throughout most of this phase. The applicant has revised the plan half a dozen times.
- 5) Administrative meetings. The applicant postponed the project several times over the past several months to give them time to work on the design and coordinate with Rite Aid about relocating. The applicant met with Todd Selig, Town Administrator, and Mary Ellen Humphrey, Economic Development Director, on several occasions to discuss potential ways to improve the project. Todd hired architect Patricia Sherman, who worked with the Town on the

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2008 Mill Plaza Study, to join these discussions and advise the Town on ways to improve the design. We had a final meeting on Wednesday where the updated plans were submitted.

Note that these were administrative/staff meetings convened by Todd Selig for discussion purposes only. The updated plans that were developed in the course of those meetings are now presented to the Planning Board and the public for review. It is common practice to include administrative/staff meetings in the course of larger, more complex projects to help improve the design potentially and to provide suggestions to the Planning Board. Of course, the Planning Board may respond to the updated plans as it sees fit. Todd, Mary Ellen, and Patricia will attend the board meeting to answer any questions.

- 6) Variances. The applicant will likely need to apply for several variances, possibly including configuration of building floors and uses, setbacks from the College Brook wetland, adding a drive through for the drugstore, and other elements. Once the design review is closed, the applicant will coordinate with Audrey Cline, Building Official/Zoning Administrator, and me on which variances exactly would be needed.
- 7) Quality of design. I think that the design is quite good given the various constraints for the project. Patricia Sherman stated in our meeting yesterday that, given the constraints, she believes it is consistent with the principles embodied in the Mill Plaza Study. Again, this is a preliminary submission and many details will be submitted and reviewed carefully as part of the formal submission later.
- 8) Architecture. The architectural renderings presented now are largely for the purpose of conveying a sense of space. Detailed renderings will be developed with the formal site plan application. The Durham Architectural Regulations apply to this site so there will certainly be much discussion about all of the details at that time. We will want to analyze the streets and passageways through the development carefully to optimize the attractiveness and pedestrian character of those spaces (including paving colors and materials, proportions of the spaces, building frontages, widths of sidewalks, treatment of parking, etc.).
- 9) Issues. There are numerous items to discuss further as part of the formal review. For example, there have been different views on whether there should be any outbuildings in the buffer/park area along Mill Road. Many items are customarily not addressed in detail until the formal application – such as stormwater designs, landscaping designs, architecture, signage, lighting, utilities, a traffic study, etc. – provided it appears that the basic preliminary plan can reasonably accommodate those concerns later.
- 10) Close design review. Unless there are significant elements of the project that warrant further discussion or submission of additional documentation, recognizing this is a preliminary submission, I think it appropriate to close the design review process now (which the Planning Board or applicant may do at their option). Once the design review is closed, the applicant will submit a formal application when they are ready.
- 11) Timeframe. The applicant said they hope to submit the formal application soon and then to start construction this time next year.
- 12) Comments. If the Planning Board closes the public hearing on Wednesday, it would be helpful if each Planning Board member could offer general (nonbinding) comments on this updated draft.