



## PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Town of Durham

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### **Planning Consultant's Review**

#### **Planning Board Meeting – Wednesday, August 26, 2020**

- X. ***Public Hearing - Mill Plaza Redevelopment***, 7 Mill Road. *Continued discussion of proposed architectural design.* Continued review of application for site plan and conditional use for mixed use redevelopment project and activity within the wetland and shoreland overlay districts. Colonial Durham Associates, property owner. Sean McCauley, agent. Joe Persechino, Tighe & Bond, engineer. Emily Innes and Sharon Ames, Harriman, project designer. Ari Pollack, attorney. (Rick Taintor is serving as the Town's Contract Planner.) Central Business District. Map 5, Lot 1-1.
- I recommend that the Board reopen the public hearing and vote to continue it to September 23, 2020.

Please note the following:

- 1) On July 22, 2020, the Planning Board opened the continued public hearing on the revised Site Plan for the Mill Plaza redevelopment project. The applicant's team presented the proposed architectural design and heard comments from residents. The Board voted to continue the hearing to the August 26 meeting.
- 2) Please note the following with respect to the project's architectural design:
  - The applicant held a forum on Saturday, August 8, to provide an opportunity for interested residents to further review and give input on the architectural design. This forum was not part of the Planning Board's site plan review process. The applicant's design team will likely report on what they heard at the forum and how or whether it might result in design changes.
  - At the July meeting several Board members requested the design team to clearly address how the proposed design is consistent with the detailed guidance in the Town's Architectural Design Standards. It is expected that this will be presented at the August 26 meeting.
  - As suggested last month, the Board may decide to engage an independent design professional to evaluate the proposed architectural designs for the Mill Plaza project and report back to the Board at a future meeting.
- 3) As requested at the July meeting, Town Assessor Jim Rice has provided the Board with a letter summarizing his opinion on the report by Brian White regarding the proposed development's impacts on neighborhood real estate values.

4) On July 31 the applicant submitted a Traffic Impact and Access Study prepared by Tighe & Bond. I have several concerns about the content and scope of the study which I conveyed to the applicant in emails on August 6 and 7. My concerns include the following:

- The report does not recognize any traffic impact from the residential component of the proposed development. While no parking is proposed on-site for the residences, and the potential for providing parking on the adjacent lot is uncertain, the report should nevertheless incorporate assumptions as to where future residents will park and how that will translate into increased traffic volumes in the road network.
- The report does not include traffic counts or analyses for the weekday morning and Saturday midday peak hours. Saturday peak hour traffic is particularly relevant for a development that includes a significant retail component.
- The report does not assess the impacts of future traffic volumes on pedestrian safety and convenience, or consider the potential for improved accommodation for pedestrian crossings on Mill Road and Main Street.

I do not believe that it would be useful for the Board to schedule a discussion of the traffic report until the applicant has submitted a revised and expanded report that adequately addresses these matters.

5) At its June 17 meeting the Board voted to request an independent peer review of the applicant's traffic study. I have received a proposed scope and budget for the peer review from RSG, who have committed to complete the review by the September 21 meeting if they are approved to proceed by the end of August. However, at this point I do not feel that it would be appropriate to request a review of what I consider to be an incomplete study. Unless the Board directs otherwise, I will advise RSG to wait for a revised traffic study.

6) As a reminder, the following items still remain to be addressed. I have updated some possible meeting dates for these topics based on continuing the process of meeting once per month on this project.

- Review of proposed architectural design by independent design professional (if the Board requires this)
- Presentation and review of CDA's traffic study (9/23 or later)
- Presentation and review of the independent peer review of the traffic study (9/23 or 10/14)
- Residential uses (i.e., mixed-use conditional use permit) (9/23 or 10/14?)
- College Brook buffer management / stream improvement plan (9/23 or 10/14?)
- Wetland and shoreland conditional use permit criteria (10/14?)
- Presentation and review of complete revised plan set (11/18?)

- Findings, waivers, and conditions of approval – site plan review (12/9 or 1/13/21?)
- Findings and conditions of approval – conditional use permits (12/9 or 1/13/21?)

This rough timeline is subject to change depending on when the applicant's materials are available, how much time is required for any independent reviews, and the Board's workload.

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Taintor, AICP  
Community Planning Consultant  
August 20, 2020