

April, 2020

Dear Members of the Planning Board,

We write as members of the community, and as abutters to the Mill Plaza.

As the project-review process goes forward despite constraints to public input, it seems timely to summarize, in writing, some of the comments that we have offered at public hearings on several occasions over more than four years:

1. In principle, like the great majority of residents, we support the redevelopment of the Mill Plaza. Despite the transitory disruption and discomfort involved in such a major project, particularly to those of us in the Faculty Neighborhood and Brookside Commons, the appropriate upgrading of this dated, but vital, element in our central business district is long overdue and welcome;
2. However, each of the designs put forward by Colonial Durham change the use of the Mill Plaza, adding a substantial residential component. It is clear that this residential component is squarely aimed at the student market, even as UNH enrollment declines.

The Mill Plaza abuts our neighborhoods. The proposed change of use is plainly inconsistent with any fair reading of our Conditional-Use regulations, in particular when considering the increase in noise, light, odors, traffic, and trash, and extended hours of activity, that will result;

3. Finally, Colonial Durham's track record makes us less than confident that a redeveloped Mill Plaza with a substantial residential component will be a compatible abutter to a family neighborhood:
 - a. The College Brook continues to be damaged by Mill Plaza management practices (e.g., snow plowing);
 - b. Despite making a range of fundamental changes to their proposal, including now a peripheral parking lot, Colonial Durham insists that their "Final Submission" has not changed, thus attempting to finesse our town's current site-plan regulations;
 - c. While eluding, for years, any direct response to questions about the extent of unlicensed rental parking on the site, the number of vehicles displaying Mill Plaza parking stickers seems to have grown substantially.

These examples lead us to be skeptical about assurances given to our community about future behavior that purports to address neighborhood concerns.

Thank you again for your service on the Planning Committee, which demands long hours, deep research, and the patient and thoughtful consideration of differing views.

Mark and Jean McPeak
Brookside Commons
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