

April 24, 2020

Dear Members of the Durham Planning Board:

Thank you for your service to the town under these challenging times. You are generous and rather courageous to carry on with the town's business during this pandemic, but I also believe it would be safer and wiser to suspend your meetings until the ramifications of the pandemic are better understood. None of the seven applications currently before the Planning Board is so important that it cannot be put on hold.

Of the applications before you, none compares with the proposed redevelopment of Mill Plaza in terms of its impact on the town. This project's tremendous scale, density, and location can be expected to fundamentally change the character of the downtown as well as local traffic patterns. Contemplating a large, high density project that would dramatically expand Durham's commercial and residential footprint without any notion of how the pandemic will affect the town is nothing short of reckless. It is likely that the pandemic will redefine Durham's business landscape and significantly reduce university enrollments, and there is a possibility that it will be devastating on both those fronts. Demand for high-density housing will decline in the post-pandemic era, whenever that will be.

No doubt your decision to continue to hold Planning Board meetings was made due to a sense of commitment to the town, but please note that more important proceedings have been put on hold, including the Major League Baseball season. Closer to home, the State of New Hampshire has suspended all criminal and civil jury trials until at least early June. To continue to hold public meetings and then actively discourage the public from attending them is not a sound approach to town planning or public health and is one that asks Planning Board members to take unnecessary risks.

Please read the letter submitted to you by Phyllis Heilbrunner on April 15<sup>th</sup> and to ask yourselves whether you are providing adequate access to Planning Board proceedings. We all know that Durham's elderly face higher risks due to the pandemic and that it will be dangerous for them to attend town hall meetings for the foreseeable future. We also know they normally contribute disproportionately to the discussion of town issues and that the town benefits considerably from their judgment and expertise. Therefore, it makes no sense to adopt procedures that exclude this important demographic from participating in town affairs. As it stands, all elderly residents who are not early adopters of Zoom technology, a recent phenomenon at best, will have to risk their lives to participate in the Mill Plaza proceedings or other Planning Board matters.

Please take a more reasonable approach and suspend Planning Board meetings indefinitely.

Regards,

Matt Komonchak