

February 3, 2022

Dear Members of the Planning Board:

I have lived in the Faculty Neighborhood since moving to Durham in 1993, first as a renter on Oyster River Road, then as a homeowner at 19 Garden Lane. When my husband and I began looking to buy a home in Durham, we searched in locations that were within biking distance of UNH where he works. Gradually our search narrowed because we realized that we wanted to remain in the Faculty Neighborhood. It took several years, but eventually we found our home.

The neighborhood has been mentioned frequently during Planning Board meetings in the years that CDA's proposals have been presented and discussed. I write now in the hope of providing a more vivid sense of this special place and what we stand to lose if CDA is allowed to proceed with their plans. If you digest what I describe, perhaps you will more fully understand how this proposal is incompatible with the established character of this abutting neighborhood and how the negative external impacts will certainly be greater than those currently existing, two factors in the Conditional Use Criteria you must consider.

Built within a small, rectangular grid of streets, with modestly-sized houses, generally close enough for residents to call to one another from their driveways, the Faculty Neighborhood has been just that – a true neighborhood. Our neighbors have been families with young children who play in our streets and yards, and those with teens who mow neighbors' lawns and shovel their sidewalks, empty-nesters, and those who are single by circumstance or choice. We have block parties, cookie swaps, impromptu gatherings in people's driveways, a little free library, and at all hours of day and night, neighbors out walking, often with dogs and/or strollers. We have a neighborhood discussion group on Facebook, a neighborhood newsletter sent occasionally to those who opt in. Faculty Neighborhood has been a wonderful, safe place to raise children, where kids can play in the street or ride their bikes around the block knowing that there are people all around who have an eye out for them, to whom they can turn for help if needed. All this, *and* we can walk or bike downtown, buy groceries, meet a friend for coffee, get cash at an ATM, and take advantage of restaurants and other businesses, without having to get into a car. Our children walk to the middle and high schools, often passing through the Plaza on their way to Madbury Rd. We have residents who grew up in this neighborhood, left to attend college and begin their professional lives and families, and then returned to occupy their childhood homes or purchase homes near their parents who still live here, because this place is so special.

Over the years, the neighborhood has changed somewhat. We've been pleased to become a tad more ethnically and racially diverse, more and more neighbors have built additions, adding second floors, decks, porches, porticos, extra parking spaces, and rental apartments. Often small apartments within or attached to homes in the neighborhood have been rented to students whom we see trekking to and from campus, knapsacks on their backs.

In recent years, more single-family houses have become student rentals. We have had problems with some (thankfully, not all) houses where students have crammed multiple cars into small driveways,

driven down our roads at unreasonable speeds, held large and exceedingly noisy parties, and celebrated good weather by congregating on roofs and blasting music, audible from blocks away. Sadly, it is now not uncommon to find discarded beer cans, liquor bottles, pieces of clothing, and at least once, discarded condoms, littering the pavement and some of our yards on the streets where these student houses are, particularly after parties on their properties. Many nights during the spring and fall, my daughter whose bedroom windows face the side of our yard and the street, has been woken up in the very early hours of the morning by student revelers leaving a party. They tend to walk in the middle of the street, talking boisterously without realizing how easily their voices carry. Once, many years ago, there was a knock at our front door at 2:00 AM. I was up; there were lights on. I was taken aback but decided to investigate. Peeping out from behind the shades in our living room, I saw a bespectacled, young Asian man standing at our front door. Very cautiously, I cracked the door open and asked what he wanted. He said he was lost and didn't know how to get back to his room on campus. I pointed him in the right direction and hoped that he would find his way without coming to any harm. I wonder if he realized what time it was.

While some years have been worse than others in terms of party houses, the life in the neighborhood has become noticeably more problematic in those periods when houses were occupied by students who have not been considerate neighbors. Their large gatherings, drinking, noise, and litter might not stand out or cause problems in areas of town that cater to student housing, but in our residential neighborhood, they pose a disturbing, unwelcome intrusion and negatively impact our quality of life.

As others have pointed out repeatedly, the lights and noise created by students living in the Plaza will most directly impinge on the residents of the Brookside Apartments and those people who live on Faculty Rd. Given how noise travels (we often hear sounds from the UNH football games which are played across campus from our neighborhood), I have little doubt that even three blocks down Garden Lane, my home and those near me will also be affected by noise from the Plaza. Perhaps even more disturbing is the prospect of many, many more students traveling to and from the Plaza to parties, or simply to visit friends, in our neighborhood, and the resulting increase in noise and litter. I walk in our neighborhood virtually every day, often after dark, and I worry that I will feel less safe doing so if there is a substantial increase in traffic, particularly if passers-by on foot, skateboards, motorcycles, or in cars are inebriated or high.

One treasured feature of our neighborhood that is at high risk for desecration is the wooded path between Faculty Rd. (entrance across from Thompson Lane) and Chesley Drive. How I love walking this small stretch of forest when going to the Plaza or simply out for a stroll. I know that walking on earth instead of asphalt roads and sidewalks is good for my well-being. I take in the sight and feel of roots and rocks underfoot while noting the changes in leaves, branches, and sometimes flowering plants. At one end of the path is a wooden footbridge which is also a treat to traverse and sometimes I pause to look at College Brook. Sometimes I'm saddened to see drink cans and empty bags of chips or candy strewn along the bridge and if I have a bag, I will sometimes pick them up to bring home to discard or recycle. This delightful oasis doesn't stand a chance if students are housed in the Plaza. The path will become a heavily used path of egress to exit the Plaza on foot to meet up on Faculty Rd. with Uber

drivers or friends providing transportation by cars that are not allowed into the Plaza. The bridge will likely become a place for student residents to hang out and be “decorated” by discarded litter from food, drink, cigarette butts, and masks. The litter would be bad enough. Will I feel comfortable walking past a group of students who may be rowdy, high, or inebriated? Will middle schoolers and high school students feel safe? Will they be safe?

If we didn't have Conditional Use Criteria in our zoning ordinances, I would need to rely solely on your compassion to protect the well-being of my neighborhood and neighbors. Fortunately, we do have criteria. And those criteria state that external impacts must be taken into consideration: *The external impacts of the proposed use on abutting properties and the neighborhood shall be no greater than the impacts of adjacent existing uses or other uses permitted in the zone. This shall include, but not be limited to, traffic, noise, odors, vibrations, dust, fumes, hours of operation, and exterior lighting and glare. In addition, the location, nature, design, and height of the structure and its appurtenances, its scale with reference to its surroundings, and the nature and intensity of the use, shall not have an adverse effect on the surrounding environment nor discourage the appropriate and orderly development and use of land and buildings in the neighborhood.*

Who could doubt that the proposal by CDA to build monstrously tall buildings housing 258 students, along with hoped for retail development in the form of restaurants and other businesses attracting additional traffic in and out of the Plaza, would not create increased noise, litter, glare, and likely every other characteristic listed in the criteria quoted above?

My neighbors and I also worry that our property values will be adversely affected by this proposed project. Criteria #6 states: *The proposed use will not cause or contribute to a significant decline in property values of adjacent properties.* The impact of the project on the property values of the immediate abutters and of the homes in Faculty Neighborhood has not been studied adequately; this criterion therefore also cannot be considered to have been met.

This letter addresses concerns about the impact of this project on the Faculty Neighborhood – a fraction of the substantial failings of this project as currently proposed. Please consider it along with the many other comments made by my fellow Durham citizens that address other issues of concern.

Sincerely,

Deborah Hirsch Mayer

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Durham, NH