

To: The Durham, NH Planning Board
From: Dennis Meadows, 34 Laurel Lane, Durham
Date: January 6, 2022
Re: Fifteen Years and Counting

What explains the drastic difference in the Planning Board's (PB) review of construction proposals from Colonial Durham Associates (CDA) and from the RiverWoods Group (RW)?

Although the RW proposal would turn out to cost more than twice as much as the one proposed by CDA and involve far more residents, it was built and fully occupied 26 months after the proposal was first presented to the PB. In stark contrast, CDA is still mired in public hearings over 15 years after plaza owner John Pinto encouraged the town "to develop the design specifications so that we (CDA) may then determine how best to participate to achieve the implementation of the vision of the Town leadership."

Obviously, the two proposals diverge in many ways. But my review of the DCAT archives of Planning Board meetings showed several significant differences that may illustrate why CDA's proposal has not progressed far.

#1 RW proposed a project permitted by right in Durham's zoning code. CDA is proposing a project that is explicitly not permitted, unless it receives four Conditional Use Permit approvals.

#2 RW has a strong business incentive to enhance and sustain the quality of life in Durham. CDA's business success depends mainly on the university not on the town. Its rental income will be relatively unaffected by a deterioration in Durham's central core. RW has, for example paid for construction of new sidewalks outside its campus. CDA apparently proposes nothing unless it is required to fulfill its minimum Settlement Agreement commitments or to maximize the amount of rental income it will return to its owners.

#3 RW's project provides on-site parking for all its residents. CDA has proposed using a system of license plate scanners supporting an enforcement system that will compel its residents to park elsewhere in Durham.

#4 RW expects to operate in Durham for decades. CDA can sell its property and depart on short notice, as seen with other student housing projects in Durham.

#5 RW responded quickly and constructively to all the Conservation Commission suggestions. CDA has refused to accept the key recommendation of the Commission. It continues to use the College Brook buffer as a way to reduce the costs of snow removal, deteriorating the buffer apparently in violation of state statutes and its own agreement to protect the environment of College Brook.

#6 RW addresses Durham's future needs. The US Census Bureau estimates that those aged over 60 will rise rapidly to over 26% of New Hampshire's population by 2030. CDA is oriented to the past - to a demographic that is declining. Even *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the nation's university trade magazine, has written a special report entitled, "The Looming Enrollment Crisis."

#7 RW brings to Durham people and income that support the types of restaurants, shops, and cultural venues we want for the future of the town, as Master Plans have envisioned for decades. What sort of business development will the current CDA project advance?

#8 RW's project is consistent with Durham's Master Plan objectives. The CDA initiative is widely viewed as violating them. Perhaps for that reason it has encountered almost universal criticism of its proposal by long-term residents of the town.

Home prices in town are rising quickly. The demand for units at RiverWoods-Durham was unprecedented. Durham remains an attractive community.

We can easily afford to wait for a better proposal that meets our zoning code regulations and helps fulfill the objectives of our Master Plan.