

Public Remarks to the Conservation Commission  
November 22, 2021

Good evening. I am Dennis Meadows. I live in Durham.

I have come before you several times in recent years to describe three projects.

I proposed buying the unprotected northern half of the pasture that provides a beautiful gateway to Durham as you come into the town from Newmarket along Route 108. That has been acquired. Durham residents are using it now as the site for a new community garden.

I proposed acquiring 25 acres of land from the Oyster River School Board and building a pedestrian bridge to it across the Oyster River from the center of town. That land now belongs to Durham, and with your help the bridge was completed early this year. Durham residents are now using it to access the Orchard Drive neighborhood and to enjoy the miles of walking trails on many hundreds of acres of protected land extending down to Doe Farm.

Tonight I am coming to propose another project which would multiply greatly the benefits of what we have already accomplished. Don't worry, this time I am not asking for your money only for your political support. I will describe the possibility for completing a magnificent walking path through the center of Durham.

As a result of past conservation efforts in Durham, our town has nearly completed a path that extends over 6 miles from Moat Island on the Doe Farm to Packers Falls Road next to the Spruce Hole Conservation Area.

Figure 1 illustrates this trail. Figure 2 shows the Kenny Rotner Bridge across which the trail passes.

It is an impressive accomplishment. Compare with what has been done in Dover. Their master plan called for new green areas, and they have been working since the mid 1990s to build their community trail along the Cocheco River. Our trail has been assembled within the past few years. Dover's trail is about 4 miles long. Durham's would be 50% longer. The Town of Dover has spent over \$600,000 to construct their trail. Ours needs

very little additional investment to complete - it only requires that Colonial Durham Associates honor the principles they agreed to in their 2015 Settlement Agreement with the town.

As you know that agreement stated:

1.d. The Revised Application will provide for proposed buildings and vehicular roads outside of the shoreline and wetlands buffers ...

1.f. The Revised Application will have increased natural buffer along the southern property line adjacent to the College Brook;

The Conservation Commission has steadfastly supported those principles.

The minutes of your January 4, 2021 meeting state:

the Conservation Commision recommends that the Mill Plaza redevelopment be re-designed to restore a 75-foot vegetative wetland buffer devoid of impervious surfaces

However the agreement was signed long ago, and most of the Council members who ratified it are no longer in office. Thus CDA has not steadfastly supported those principles. Figure 3 shows CDA's current proposal for the buffer.

If CDA's new project encroaches on the buffer, Durham will lose forever the opportunity to finish the trail. If CDA honors its agreement we can construct a buffer park along the Plaza parking area that links central Durham to the town's natural areas. It would be a natural asset unique in the Northeast. It would give Durham a beautiful natural area in the center of town, provide a crucial environmental buffer for the Brook, shield the faculty neighborhood from sight of the Plaza activities, and muffle the noise.

And it would lay the foundation for collaboration with the University. Several weeks ago a UNH official wrote Todd Selig to mention the possibility of UNH collaborating with Durham to restore and protect an important segment of the Brook. The university is starting to create a new Master Plan that will guide its capital investment decisions over the next decade. In the process it will revisit its 2004 Master Plan which discussed

resurrecting College Brook where it now flows through a culvert beneath the parking lot west of Mill Road, known as C Lot.  
That plan stated in part:

Creation of the sciences quadrangle and the eventual displacement of C Lot provide an opportunity to daylight and restore major sections of College Brook. ....This approach will improve storm water management, eliminating periodic flooding.

Figure 4 shows a plan of projects that UNH is already undertaking to restore College Brook where it flows through the ravine. Figure 5 shows possible landscaping for a segment of the Brook near the Memorial Union Building.

CDA has mentioned that they might offer \$25,000 to Durham if we permit them to intrude on the buffer. I believe the brook is worth more than that. Tonight I am formally offering you \$35,000. I personally guarantee Durham will receive that amount in support of its buffer restoration, if it can persuade CDA to comply with your resolution, vacate the buffer, and allow us to complete the trail and buffer park.

Durham could assume responsibility for creating and maintaining the park, using that money to help create a walking path through a beautiful small park, linking the north and south segments of the long trail and giving residents a peaceful, beautiful, traffic-free area to meet and talk.

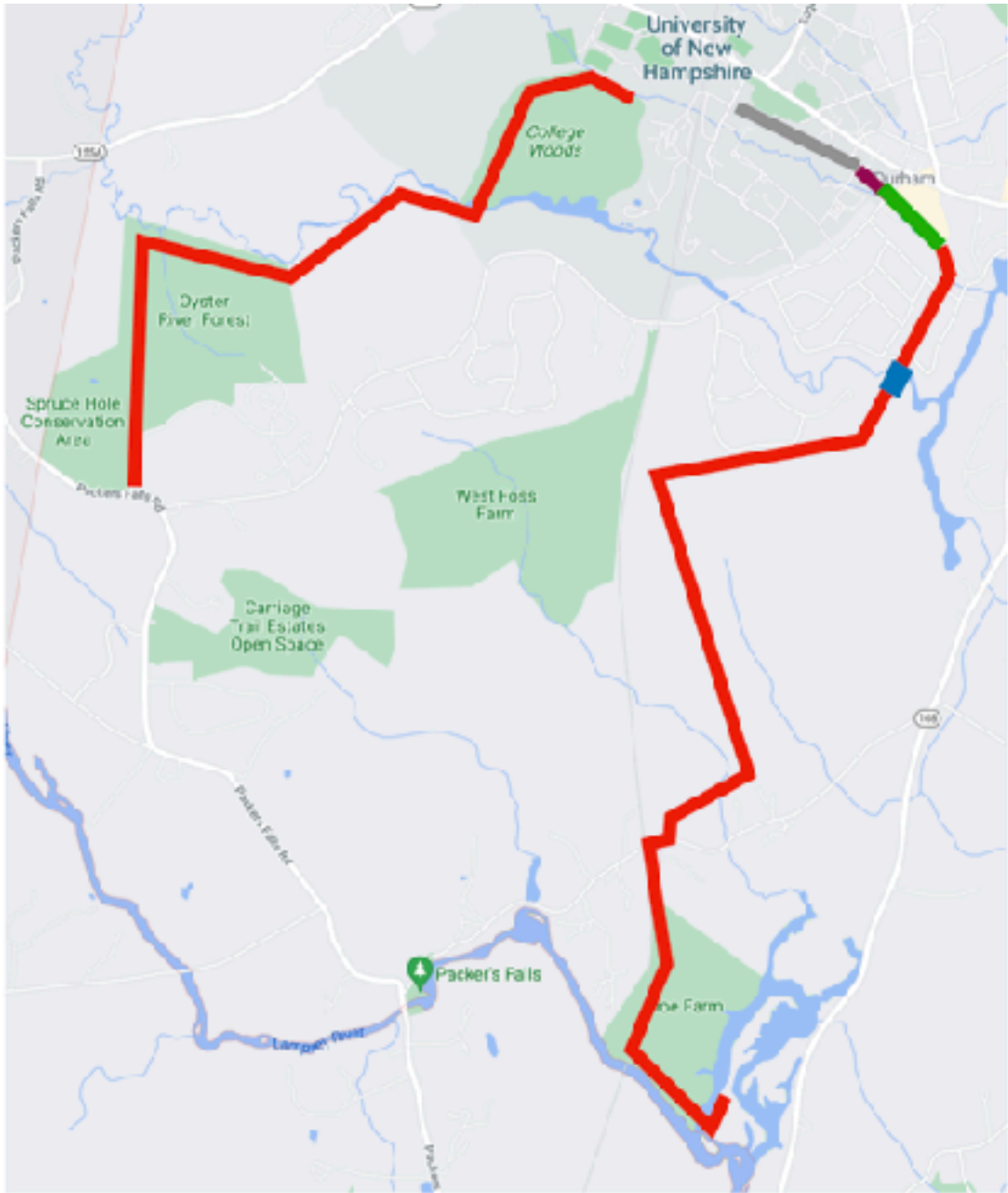
This is not a controversial proposal. Every study has recognized the value of preserving the buffer. Virtually no one - no citizen, no analyst, no committee has ever advocated for compromising the brook. So let us not permit it to happen solely for the profit of an out-of-state developer.

You could start tonight with two simple steps.

First, take a sense of the members vote expressing your committee's opinion that the Town Council should reaffirm their continuing support for the agreement they signed with CDA in 2015.

Second, initiate the creation of a committee, with members from the Conservation Committee, Planning Board, and other town groups to fill out the details of this proposal.

Figure 1: Durham Community Trail



- Existing Trail
- Kenny Rotner Bridge
- Proposed Buffer Park
- Possible C-lot Restoration
- Active UNH Ravine Restoration

Figure 2: The Kenny Rotner Bridge



Figure 3: CDA's current proposal for the College Brook buffer





Figure 4: Project to restore the UNH ravine

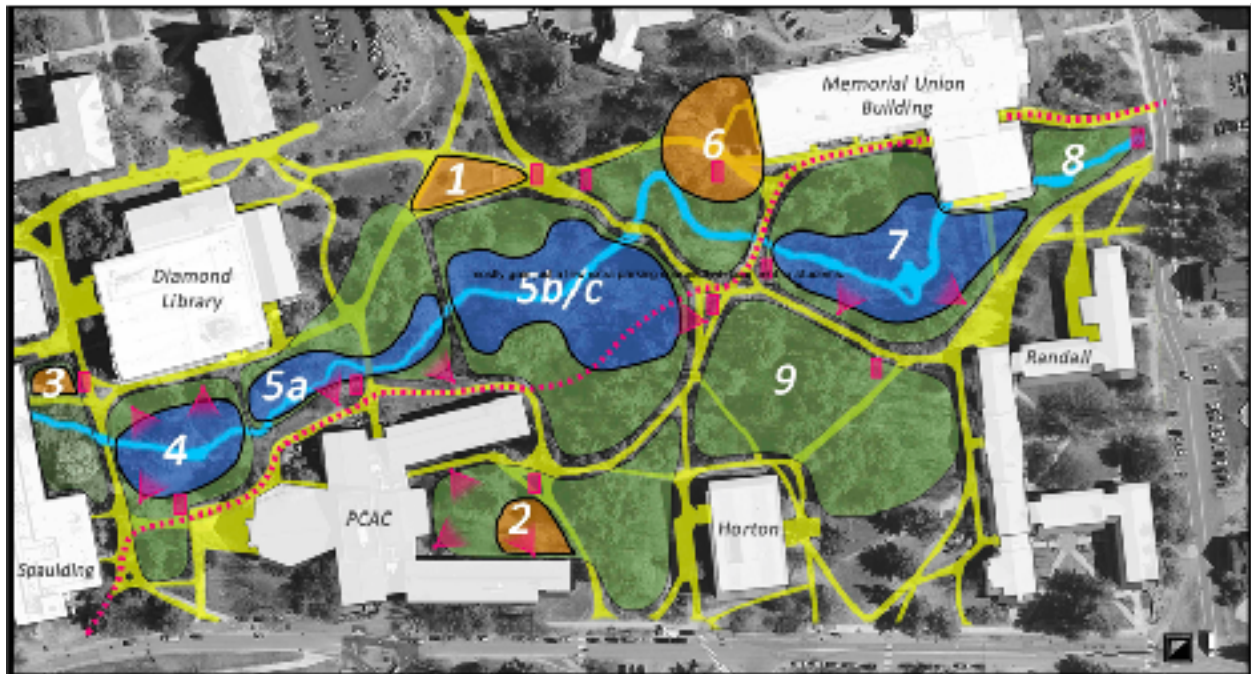


Figure 5: Possible landscaping along the UNH

