

To: The Town of Durham Planning Board

Date: February 2, 2022

Re: Mill Plaza Redevelopment Project

Dear Members of the Durham Planning Board,

In 2014, we wrote a letter to the Planning Board expressing disappointment with the proposed plans for the redevelopment of the Mill Plaza Property. This letter was signed by 154 residents of Durham. Sadly, after 8 years of deliberation, lawsuits, and new designs, the current proposal before you remains unmoved in its neglect of this critical opportunity to enhance our community through the creation of a vibrant town center.

Echoing the clear recommendations of the 2008 Mill Plaza Study, our letter in 2014 asserted that any redevelopment of the Mill Plaza incorporate 5 key elements to be of net benefit to the community: 1) Incorporation of community and civic space for gathering; 2) Mixed use development that isn't dominated by student housing; 3) Improved connectivity between Mill Plaza, Main Street, and surrounding neighborhoods via enhanced pedestrian and bike paths; 4) A de-emphasized parking lot; and 5) Protection and enhancement of College Brook.

While we understand that at this point no major changes to the design will likely be considered, we hope the Planning Board will consider advocating for at least the following two elements:

1. **Improved connectivity** between the Plaza, Main Street, and surrounding neighborhoods by including safe bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure (the current plan does not appear to include a bike lane or more than one bike rack). How might we encourage safe foot and bicycle traffic for our children who commute to the Middle and High Schools?
2. **Protection and enhancement of College Brook.** The current plan infringes on the required minimum 75-foot buffer, including the entrance to the plaza which should be moved. We have an opportunity to create a beautiful community green space along the College Brook (see proposal by resident Dennis Meadows for more details) while also restoring a degraded waterway.

Please see the attached letter from 2014 with more details and signatures from other residents who joined us in expressing a desire to see Mill Plaza redeveloped with the future of community in mind.

Thank you for the countless hours you've already devoted to thinking about this project. We appreciate your consideration and your service to our community.

Sincerely,
Erin Hardie Hale and Iago Hale
74 Mill Rd.

To: The Town of Durham Planning Board
Date: October 22, 2014
Re: Proposed Mill Plaza Redevelopment Project

As homeowners and year-round residents of Durham, we are dismayed by the proposed design for the redevelopment of Mill Plaza. As the thoughtful 2008 Mill Plaza Study demonstrates, many opportunities exist to increase the commercial activity of the plaza while at the same time activating the space and serving the broader community by addressing current shortcomings of both our downtown and the current plaza configuration. We recognize the critical need for continued development in our downtown, and we submit that such development must own up to its civic responsibility.

The following is a short list of things we believe should be incorporated in the redesign of Mill Plaza that are conspicuously absent in this current proposal:

1. Community space – We strongly agree with the statement from the 2008 Mill Plaza Study that “A redeveloped Plaza property should serve as a ‘Village Center’ that stands as an example for future downtown development and provides residents a ‘sense of place’. By this we mean year-round community space – indoor and outdoor areas where people linger to meet and talk to their friends, shop, and enjoy all of the seasons.” In contrast to this recommendation, the proposed plan cuts out the little green space that currently exists, creates no new pedestrian space, and provides no civic gathering space.

Because of a lack of civic space in our downtown, we are a community that assembles in the median of our main street for town events. One of the only outdoor gathering places for families is Kaleidascoop, a destination that is for all intents and purposes in a shadeless parking lot. We are a town in desperate need of a Village Center, and the logical site for such a center is Mill Plaza.

Commercial development and the creation of civic spaces are not mutually exclusive pursuits; examples of this abound (see Project for Public Spaces website <http://www.pps.org/>). The 2008 Mill Plaza Study itself offers numerous examples of ways in which simple design features like pedestrian plazas, walkways, seating, fountains, green spaces, small play areas, etc. can enhance the commercial aspects of development while serving important community needs.

2. Mixed use - We’d like to see mixed-use development that is not just a euphemism for more student housing. While we agree that our town needs a more diverse and expanded tax base, we are concerned about the pending glut of student housing. We also sympathize with abutters about the likely quality of life impacts of living next door to a large student housing complex. For us, mixed use means mixed commercial activity, flexible civic space, and housing for families, workers, seniors, low-income residents, etc.

3. Connectivity – Almost all of the designs that came out of the 2008 Mill Plaza Study concluded that connecting Mill Plaza more strongly with Main Street (physically and architecturally) was an important design feature both for enhancing the commercial core as well as contributing to a visually cohesive downtown. Such connectivity is absent in the current proposal. We would like to see not only increased access to Main Street but also enhanced pedestrian and bike paths along the brook with linkages to residential neighborhoods and UNH.

4. De-emphasize the parking lot – Vibrant community space doesn't happen on the edges of parking lots. Durham needs a Mill Plaza that is not primarily a paved lot (as it is now) but rather a dynamic mixed-use space that also provides adequate parking. Again, the 2008 Mill Plaza Study contains numerous examples for how to do that: below-ground parking, separate parking structures, peripheral parking. The proposed plan not only maintains the parking lot mentality of the current plaza but relies on an exemption of 428 parking spaces that then fall on the rest of the downtown to provide.

5. Protect and enhance College Brook – Echoing the recommendation of the 2008 Mill Plaza Study, “the redevelopment should work to protect and restore the brook and its buffer's natural functions on the site. This would add value to the Plaza, reassure residential neighbors, and set an example for good environmental stewardship.” The current proposal does not appear to take this recommendation into consideration. Opportunities to protect and restore the brook go hand-in-hand with some of the design issues highlighted above, such as placement of green spaces and buffers, location of parking, surfacing materials, etc. There is a wealth of experience and expertise at UNH that could be tapped to assist in this aspect of the plaza design.

Despite our criticism of this particular proposal, we are wholeheartedly in favor of redeveloping Mill Plaza in a way that enhances our community. We sincerely appreciate the effort that went into the 2008 Mill Plaza Study and feel that any redevelopment plan should honor those findings.

Respectfully signed,

1	Mark Abramczyk	31 Garden Lane
2	Alison Adamczyk	74 Madbury Road
3	Amanda Anderson	2 Emerson Road
4	Kenneth K. Anderson	16 Garden Lane
5	A. Dwight Baldwin	6 Fairchild Drive
6	Mary Bencks	7 York Drive
7	Carol Birch	17 Garden Lane
8	Frank Birch	17 Garden Lane
9	Margaret Boettcher	18 Garden Lane

10	Heidi Bogle	4 Groghan Lane
11	Scott Bogle	4 Groghan Lane
12	Chrisanne Borner	10 Newmarket Road
13	Kelly Brant	42 Mill Pond Road
14	Kirk Brote	2 Chesley Drive
15	Kirstie Brote	2 Chesley Drive
16	David Buck	42 Woodman Road
17	Bruce Campbell	7 Rocky Lane
18	Mary-Lou Campbell	7 Rocky Lane
19	Gale Carey	49 Oyster River Road
20	John E. Carroll	54 Canney Road
21	John Caulfield	8 Woodside Drive
22	Mary Caulfield	8 Woodside Drive
23	Malin Clyde	29 Orchard Drive
24	Karen Crowley	48 Mill Pond Road
25	Joanne Curran-Celentano	3 Davis Avenue
26	Yanhong Dai	46 Woodridge Rd
27	Matthew DeAngelis	171 Packers Falls Road
28	Paula Diamond-Bier	211 Wednesday Hill Road
29	Barbara Dill	170 Packers Falls Rd
30	Dudley Dudley	Woodman Road
31	Kathryn D. Ellis	26 Coe Drive
32	Lorna Ellis	7 Orchard Drive
33	Bob Ely	177 Durham Point Road
34	Heidi Ely	177 Durham Point Road
35	Elle Ferris	17 Valentine Hill Road
36	Neal Ferris	24 Woodridge Road
37	Elaine Fink	11 Fellows Lane
38	Stephen Fink	11 Fellows Lane
39	Sally Ford	433 Bay Rd.
40	Susan Friedrich	171 Packers Falls Road
41	Kevin Gardner	1 Stevens Way
42	David Goldsmith	17 Denbow Road
43	Frank Graf	360 Durham Point Road
44	Joan Graf	360 Durham Point Road
45	Michelle Grenier	2 Adams Circle
46	Richard Gsottschneider	280 Durham Point Road
47	Erin Hale	74 Mill Road
48	Iago Hale	74 Mill Road
49	Eleanor Harrison-Buck	42 Woodman Road
50	Cristina Healey	2 Hoitt Drive
51	Kevin Healey	2 Hoitt Drive
52	Steve Hobbs	17 Ffrost Drive

53	Lynn Holmes	10 Meserve Road
54	Aaron Hubbell	8 Bayview Road
55	Jim Jelmberg	29 Park Court
56	Johanne Jelmberg	29 Park Court
57	Steve Jones	8 Madbury Court
58	Linda Kalnejais	18 Garden Lane
59	Ellen Karelitz	113 Madbury Rd
60	Andrew Kun	22 Faculty Road
61	Jennifer Kun	22 Faculty Road
62	Kie Kuwabara	4 Griffiths Drive
63	Michael Lambert	2 Foss Farm Road
64	Nancy Lambert	17 Faculty Road
65	John Lannamann	156 Packers Falls Road
66	Mary R. LaPolice	7 Magrath Road
67	Matthew R. LaPolice	7 Magrath Road
68	Martin Lee	17 Faculty Road
69	Matthew Legge	4 Chesley Drive
70	Yvonne Legge	4 Chesley Drive
71	Adina Linden	6 Hoitt Drive
72	Al Linden	6 Hoitt Drive
73	Brian Locke	14 Burnham Avenue
74	Suzy Loder	38 Oyster River Road
75	John J. Lowy	17 Thompson Lane
76	Anita Mathur	15 Oyster River Road
77	Deborah Hirsch Mayer	19 Garden Lane
78	Diane McCann	27 Oyster Road
79	Frank McCann	27 Oyster Road
80	Catherine Meeking	2 Foss Farm Road
81	Joshua Meyrowitz	7 Chesley Drive
82	Linette Miles	5 Hoitt Drive
83	Jane Miller	48 Edgewood Road
84	John Mince	23 Faculty Road
85	Rose Mince	23 Faculty Road
86	Nancy Miner	4 Wood Road
87	Eberhard Moebius	13 Sunnyside Drive
88	Hannelore Moebius	13 Sunnyside Drive
89	Zelda Moore	4 Stevens Way
90	Katherine Morgan	16 Valentine Road
91	Judith Moyer	43 Bagdad Road
92	Chip Neal	11 Riverview Road
93	Nell Neal	11 Riverview Road
94	Ernie Nichols	23 Woodridge Road
95	Beth Olshansky	122 Packers Falls Road

96	Jennifer Pavlik	4 Pinecrest Lane
97	Robert Pavlik	4 Pinecrest Lane
98	Christine Pilar	26 Newmarket Road
99	Erika Place	29 Mill Pond Road
100	Brad Pokorny	8 Burnham Avenue
101	Ruwa Pokorny	8 Burnham Avenue
102	Jennifer Pribble	8 Bayview Road
103	Brinda Ramaswamy	6 Willey Road
104	Bill Ransome	14 Oyster River Road
105	Elizabeth Stine Ransome	14 Oyster River Road
106	Rick Renner	28 Newmarket Road
107	Susie Renner	28 Newmarket Road
108	Marie Rogers	15 Thompson Lane
109	Meche Romoser	6 Adams Circle
110	Emma Rous	50 Adams Point Road
111	Walter Rous	50 Adams Point Road
112	Kate Ruml	47 Mill Road
113	Betsy Sandberg	49 Durham Point Road
114	Malcolm Sandberg	15 Langley Road
115	Nancy Sandberg	15 Langley Road
116	Cindy Schram	30 Woodman Road
117	Tom Schram	30 Woodman Road
118	Jayson Seaman	46 Bagdad Road
119	Kim Sekera	46 Bagdad Road
120	Sarah W. Sherman	179 Packers Falls Road
121	Bettina Sietz	37 Mill Pond Road
122	David Sietz	37 Mill Pond Road
123	Daniel Smith	17 Orchard Drive
124	Emily Smith	17 Orchard Drive
125	Henry M. Smith	93 Packers Falls Road
126	Karen Smith	45 Woodman Road
127	Lesley Smith	31 Garden Lane
128	Ekaterina Sowers	32 Oyster River Road
129	Carol Spadaro	10 Newmarket Road
130	Nancy Starks-Cheney	12 Britton Lane
131	Molly Steele	17 Denbow Road
132	Amy Sterndale	60 Mill Road
133	Donald Sutherland	25 Faculty Road
134	Ellie Sutherland	25 Faculty Road
135	Nate Swanson	51 Mill Road
136	Rachel Swanson	51 Mill Road
137	Nate Trauntvein	15 Griffiths Drive
138	Diane Tregea	14 Faculty Road

139	Timothy Tregea	14 Faculty Road
140	Theresa Walker	62 Bennett Road
141	Nancy Webb	23 Woodridge Road
142	Thomas Weber	6 Willey Road
143	Tom Weber	6 Willey Road
144	Ann Welsh	3 Fairchild Drive
145	Carden Welsh	3 Fairchild Drive
146	Doug Wheeler	27 Mill Road
147	Katie Wheeler	27 Mill Road
148	Laura Williams	20 Ambler Way
149	Michael Williams	20 Ambler Way
150	Diane Woods	21 Garden Lane
151	Steve Wourgiotis	15 Oyster River Road
152	Dan Wright	4 Griffiths Drive
153	Joanne Young	342 Lee Hook Road
154	Jichun Zhang	46 Woodridge Rd