

To: Durham Planning Board / From: Joshua Meyrowitz, 7 Chesley Dr / Feb 9, 2022

Please include in the Mill Plaza public record this article from Administrator Selig's *Updates* & sample citizen responses, as they see it negatively influencing the integrity of Mill Plaza site-plan review.

FRIDAY UPDATES, June 25, 2021



SOMETIMES FREEDOM OF SPEECH CAN HAVE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

– Neighborhood signage conveys negative message to UNH students.

Mr. Selig received a concerned call from Durham resident Marjorie Wolfson this week expressing concern about the many yard signs around town opposing the Mill Plaza redevelopment. She is not the first person to have brought this to his attention. Marjorie said she recently spoke with a UNH student she knows who expressed concern about the signs and their impact on students at the University. The UNH student, and apparently many other students this person knows as well, interpret the signs as conveying that UNH students are not wanted, not welcome, and are not part of Durham at all. The student and her friends feel intimidated straying off campus into any neighborhoods with them up. The student conveyed that she believes residents think students are not “community friendly.” The student indicated that at the end of the semester and this summer, as the signs have gone up, she and her friends basically stopped going downtown. They go elsewhere to shop and do business. They don’t feel a part of or connection to the Town.

Marjorie noted the many, many ways in which students enhance the Town of Durham. While some students do behave poorly or make poor choices, she indicated this is a minority of them, and that the vast majority of students are responsible residents/members of the community. Marjorie suggested Mr. Selig put something in the Friday Updates this week to bring the unintended impact of these signs to the attention of the community because many people who display them probably have no idea of the message they convey to students, with whom the Town has worked over many years to develop productive and inclusive partnerships.

Our local Durham business community is also aware of the value of fostering a positive relationship with students attending the University of New Hampshire who live, support, and vote in Durham.

From: LaPolice, Mary <Mary.LaPolice@nike.com>

Sent: Friday, June 25, 2021 4:38 PM

To: tselig@ci.durham.nh.us; administrator@ci.durham.nh.us.

Cc: kedwards@ci.durham.nh.us; mbehrendt@ci.durham.nh.us; rtaintor@ci.durham.nh.us; jberry@ci.durham.nh.us

Subject: Friday Updates - Lawn Signs

Dear Mr. Selig,

I would like to address what I consider the Tone Deaf nature in today's Friday Updates regarding the following:

**SOMETIMES FREEDOM OF SPEECH CAN HAVE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES –
Neighborhood signage conveys negative message to UNH students**

While Ms. Wolfson has a right to her opinion and her speech, I do not feel it warranted the admonishing type of input in Friday Updates that it received. I can personally attest that the Plaza lawn signs are a *desperate and passionate* way to gain *awareness* of an issue we as a citizenry are ALL deeply concerned for so many reasons, that affects our finances and our quality of life here in Durham. To imply otherwise and make it seem like a “personal attack” in such a long write up is very frustrating to me. Is the intention to have us feel guilty and take down our signs?? In addition to the on-line petition that is reaching up to 1000 names of Durham residents who are opposing the current Plaza plan, I and others have found NO residents who are actually FOR the current plan. It's uncanny that Durham continues to press forward on a plan that is 100% opposed by all taxpayers, actually I'm sure it's more like unprecedented in fact, that an issue does not have two sides? Except maybe one from the absentee New York City Developers who know none of us. I won't go into all of the arguments against the Plaza from our perspective in this email for now. They have been well documented over the years.

But to me, the acquaintance of Ms. Wolfson's is the opinion of one student and a few of her friends. Now we're worried about students' feelings, but are they paying property taxes and are they negatively affected by Student Private Dorms the way we are? I've heard from the majority of my neighbors who live in proximity to campus say “they never go downtown” in order to avoid students AND because they get the goods and services from offices and retailers that are NOT in Durham. The one place we do go, the Plaza, is slated to demolish a building that houses our bank, dry cleaners, doctors, and other businesses that are not guaranteed to just rent inside a student building. If they do, I guarantee residents will not want to walk inside their student lobby to use a bank. I and others have also heard a Planning Board member during an in-person meeting in 2019 say they also “never go downtown” during a conversation about the shopping cart stalls in the Plaza.

Did Ms. Wolfson happen to also talk to the scores of UNH Students who have NO problem going downtown at all and to stand in **long lines** that can stretch down the sidewalk at Libby's and Scorpios from each, down to the curve toward Mill road trying to get in to drink? Few townspeople go to Libby's after 5:00 pm during the peak because they're not going to deal with a line of 100 or

more students in scantily clad attire waiting to get in, nor even try to be on the other side of the street if we can help it, because it feels like a violation quite frankly, of our peace and ability to enjoy Main Street for a stroll.

This strong show of lawn signs the very first truly concerted effort by Residents since Dudley got rid of off shore oil drilling in NH in the 70's, and to once and for all claim back the very small section of town that represents our residency in the heart of town, seeing as we share the rest of the entire town with Students and student housing packed into every nook and cranny. This opposition is NOT just the few outspoken martyrs that it may seem. It's 100's more people behind the scenes or more. We were pushing for awareness in that we are not feeling heard at all by the Town or the Planning Board for numerous reasons and examples. I have taken great offense to the nature of both this attacking article in Friday updates as well as the admonishing tone of a prior week's accusation or airing of grievances on behalf of the Planning Board with no juxtaposition points.

So I ask then in light of one's personal feelings this has apparently turned into, do the **Resident's "feelings,"** especially those of us living in such proximity to Plaza, get taken into consideration by Students for the following:

Congestion & Disregard: I personally have had to slam on my brakes multiple times in the Plaza parking lot to avoid being hit by speeding college students cutting parking aisle corners, texting or generally not caring or paying attention. I've had to stop walking almost every time I exit or enter the Pharmacy or Hannaford when groups of UNH students, who are all looking at their phones or talking, walking in close clusters or shoulder to shoulder and have no respect or courtesy to step aside and wait for a resident to exit. I once saw a group of students almost walk up the back of an older gentleman shuffling out the door of Hannaford. They not only didn't stop or slow down, by the time they looked up, they had literally almost walked into the back of his heels. Another constant is UNH Students walking out into crosswalks and jaywalking right in front of cars figuring it's our job to stop, but it's very dangerous. It's normal to hear students in mopeds usually riding double, motorcycles, and cars loudly gunning exhaust thru our main roads around town.

Neighborhood Parties off campus especially during Covid, sometimes LITERALLY in our backyards. This is not the exception! This is the **norm**. Our school children and all residents go about our business on a warm day and every possible piece of land and popular off-campus rental houses are packed out in the open, in scantily clad outfitted students, openly drinking and yelling, often sitting in various pieces of indoor furniture placed on the lawn and when the sun starts to set, the lawn is left with solo cups and turned over chairs and trash. This includes loud music, yelling, and boisterousness (sometimes looking for honking as cars drive by) I've called the UNH cops, they say to call the Durham cops, I've called Durham cops, they say to call UNH Cops. Driving onto Woodman Ave several times from Madbury, I've had to put on my brakes for errant balls and frisbees that come suddenly across the road from the student apartment on the left. And this all pales in comparison to Homecoming, Move In Day and Move Out Day, in a non-Covid year where we many of us stay in our houses or leave town.

We had instances of flagrant abuse of Durham Covid-19 protocols as well with off campus parties, no masks, no social distancing, putting the whole town in danger of Covid as they use our business and restaurants and making my non-drinking on campus student have to lock down in the dorms away from friends and class for 2 weeks while the parties kept doing exactly what they were doing before.

Littering and Trash refuse: Scattered around the edges of bordering neighborhoods to campus you'll find beer cans, bottles, trash and upon move out, dumpsters are overflowing with trash and furniture and some that's even left on the street in front of houses

Property denigration. Absentee landlords seem to do little to upgrade and beautify their properties that sit very close to residents if not next door. Excess parking, dilapidated steps, painting, and general dingy. I also personally know of "boarding house" situations that go unscathed by town zoning issues.

Property Taxes: We pay some of the highest property taxes in the state and yet we do not offer many family friendly activities or services that other towns do. Dover has many festivals and events throughout the year as does Portsmouth. Once something gets cancelled such as junk week, it never seems to come back. When I grew up in Durham, the Memorial Day parade was for every kid in town to decorate bikes and participate and then there was a carnival held at the Middle School with games and food etc., to name just one. When my son was young, we had Wayne from Maine and Summer Puppet series next to the bank at the Plaza.

Safety: While Durham is considered a safe community, each week or month the Police reports come out, the healthy arrest list is not indicative of primary residents but mostly of unruly and drunken students. We've also had more than one gun complaint at off student campus housing in recent years. Over the years there have also been peeping tom incidents and one house on Mill road close to campus sold because the then resident had to endure and drunken student mistakenly enter their house and crawl into one of the beds!!

I have first-hand knowledge of students being surprised about my neighborhood when they hear that "people actually live here other than students?" I once had a student selling coupons for Dominoes in the Faculty Neighborhood come to my door and tell me she thought the entire neighborhood was only student off-campus housing.

So before we as a whole citizenry of very concerned and confused residents are admonished in Friday Updates, saying we're not respecting the feelings of Students (?), please reconsider this and any other admonishing tones that we've seen in Friday updates without considering both sides.

Thank you for your consideration,
Mary LaPolice
Life-long Durham Resident

On Jun 26, 2021, at 12:05 AM, Tom Haines <thomaswhaines@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Todd,

You and I had a productive exchange early in the year during the period in which you were considering changes to Wagon Hill. I'd written to share some opinions, and you wrote a very thoughtful reply. Thanks for that.

I'm writing now to let you know that the item about plaza yard signs in today's Friday Updates struck me as bizarre.

Hundreds of residents have given thoughtful consideration to the development proposal and, concerned that the planning board may not enforce existing ordinances, have taken a long-celebrated step: peaceful, public expression of opinion. I have read very little in Friday Updates that attempts to explore the perspective of the many, many taxpayers in this town who have posted such signs in their yards.

Yet today's item amplifies a hearsay account of one student, which apparently represents other comments of other students. (I teach journalism at UNH and had many discussions with students about the plaza plan this Spring, when yard signs were already posted, and none - none - expressed any sense of alienation from residents expressing their opinions.) The headline is downright Soviet: "Sometimes Freedom of Speech Can Have Unintended Consequences". Really?

In this case, the freedom of speech exercised by using the Friday Updates for a thinly veiled political message, attempting to send a chilling effect to the residents of the town, may indeed have unintended consequences.

My suggestion is a deeper discussion of this issue in the next Friday Updates, perhaps with an apology for having used the platform in this way.

I don't write all of this to be combative. I appreciate your leadership of the town. But I think this was a significant error that could undermine the faith that many town residents have in town officials.

Thanks for reading.

Cheers, Tom Haines
42 Oyster River Road

To: Todd Selig

Date: June 30, 2021

From: Kay Morgan

It was with great disappointment that I read your blurb in the June 25th Friday Updates in which you take on the issue of “unintended consequences of free speech.” Indeed, thankfully we have freedom of speech and those of us who are opponents of the Mill Plaza development plan have chosen to exercise it in several ways: public speaking, petition, letters and signage. Certainly intimidation of students was not the intent of the signs, rather, they were meant to make townspeople aware of the ongoing effort to re-develop the plaza and, with a few words in a small space, convey our point of view.

I liken your role in the production of Friday Updates as much like that of a classroom teacher i.e. you are an authority figure who has to inform but not persuade. Otherwise, it may seem that you are putting your thumb on the scale either in favor or against these development projects (and I’ll include the Church Hill Parking Lot here, too). You may well be in favor, but in my opinion it is inappropriate to use your bully pulpit to....well....bully the opposition.

I wondered if you were suggesting that we should gather up our signs or stop our opposition because one individual contacted you and shared second-hand information from some unknown students (or student) who apparently misinterpreted the meaning of the signs. If I call you, would you consider highlighting some of our concerns regarding the Mill Plaza and help us explain the meaning of the signs in a Friday Updates?

The previous week (June 18th) in Friday Updates, you wrote an ode to the Planning Board, reminding all of us of their tireless service. Many of us who have spoken at meetings have, indeed, thanked them for their service and acknowledged that public comments are often contentious and the issues involved are difficult. You somewhat disingenuously, in my view, indicate that “there is opposition (whether from a half dozen neighbors or from a broader part of the community.)” In actuality, more than 150 signs are scattered throughout the town, and the petition, initially signed by 670 residents, and which has attracted a significant number of additional signers, reveals the broad impact of the complex projects you reference on ALL residents of Durham, not just “a half dozen.”

That piece of writing similarly cast those who oppose in a bad light or stated another way, you paint the Planning Board as victims and imply a negative cast to the people raising the questions. Maybe my feeling about this is an “unintended consequence” of these consecutive weeks of you airing these “concerns.” Maybe you intend to lionize each of the town commissions and boards in subsequent Friday Updates. I will gladly withdraw my criticism if such is the case. Otherwise, I think Friday Updates is a fine method of keeping all of us apprised of town policies, town events, available jobs and kudos to town employees who have received promotions or honors. I don’t think it is the place for presenting your own perceptions of current controversies or the views of individual residents.

On the other hand, in the way of “unintended consequences,” thank you for the prominent display this week of the various messages the signs convey. Hundreds of our fellow community members who may not have paid any attention to them will, I hope, read them carefully and perhaps be inclined to raise their voices at future public hearings.

Kay Morgan
16 Valentine Hill Rd.

July 1 2021

To: Todd Selig

From: Joshua Meyrowitz

Re: Beyond Hearsay

Dear Todd,

As you know, I hold great affection and respect for you. And in keeping with the directness at the heart of our many years of fruitful interactions, I write to share my raw shock, along with that of most of my neighbors (both long-term residents and UNH students), over your June 25 *Friday Updates* hearsay column. It was, sadly, the main topic of conversation at the Saturday Block Party, and I'm told at Zumba classes, and more. I think I've received over 40 emails about it, including questions about whom to contact for getting the lawn signs! (I'm told by the "sign guys" that the stock is currently depleted.) I write quickly, with no time for refining.

Yes, *some* people get upset about almost everything. Yet, in my experience there are more Durham residents agitated over the "Black Lives Matter" & "Gay Pride" signs than by the Plaza lawn signs. (Indeed, even one very liberal mutual friend of ours admitted to me just this week to initially seeing those signs as biased and exclusionary against her white, heterosexual self – until she reflected on the deeper history of bias and exclusion.) Will you also publish a column on the unintended consequences of those troublesome BLM and Pride "free-speech" signs? I would guess that if you were even to respond to such not-well-thought-out complaints about those signs, you would attempt to foster dialogue to explain the fuller context, such that "Black Lives Matter" is an abbreviation of "Black Lives Should *Also* Matter" in the way that white lives seem to matter automatically, and so forth. Where was that wise leadership instinct on the Plaza issue?

Although it's true that most UNH students have not been following the 6.5 years of Mill Plaza review and have not watched Planning Board meetings or read the 220+ [Citizen Comments](#) on the plan since June 2018 (relatively few residents overall have done that!), those are things that you ought to be at least generally familiar with. Indeed, you've been copied on some of the letters (e.g. by proud lawn-sign displayer [Kathy Collins 1-21-21](#)) and have been sent summaries by me and others of the many issues/problems/zoning violations with the Plaza plan that do not seem to be taken seriously yet by the Planning Board. Thus, you in particular, ought to know that the Plaza lawn signs are NOT about attacking students, but about protecting the core of our community from terrible environmentally, economically, and socially exploitative plans. All as UNH is closing residence halls. All as UNH is anticipating thousands of fewer students for at least a generation, as the head of the Board of Trustees has recently publicly stated, and as I presented to the Town Council in a condensed version of [Planning for a 'Post-](#)

[Enrollment Cliff' Durham](#) (presented more fully to the Planning Board).

And if you hear of residents, of whatever status, misunderstanding the signs, which you've admitted have to convey complex concerns in a few largely printed words readable from a passing car, your role ought to be to help inform those who care enough to be upset, rather than to spread misunderstandings and stimulate divisive stances.

I and others wonder how you could have posted such a column without ever having previously reported on Dr. Nate Swanson's Mill Plaza Citizens Petition, [Citizen Petition 5-19-21](#), which I forwarded to you, for your reference, in searchable form the day after he presented it to the Planning Board on May 19. (Twenty of the names were from your small street, distant from the Plaza, where I'm told about half of the homes also ordered the lawn signs!). How could you have published that report about one unnamed upset student without ever reporting on a summary of the concerns expressed by scores of residents over the time of the Mill Plaza review? Where was your summary of the views of the 150+ households with lawn-sign displays?

I try to avoid going down the Facebook rabbit holes, but in scanning online reactions to your *Friday Updates* last night, I came across this succinct one by "[Larry Graykin](#)—**Easy solution: If the town leaders listen to the valid concerns about the plaza plan that are being expressed by many residents, and are responsive, then there will be no need for the signs.**" Exactly! Similarly, many of us have said or written to the Planning Board that if they would only show more indications of having read and heard our comments, we would have less need to write and speak. In this one-pager, on the [flaws on the submitted Fiscal-Impact Analysis](#), as presented in over 20 linked resident and attorney letters, I even wrote "**Please give us a sign that we have been heard!**" No response other than to, again, vote against an independent FIA, with none of the previously promised (and I believe legally required) public input at a Public Hearing. What signals have you been sending to the Planning Board with your *Friday Updates* and your "stand back" quotes in recent *Foster's* articles?

Those of us who lived through the propaganda leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq see a parallel here in your *Friday Updates*. Fox News and the White House falsely claimed that the "No War on Iraq" signs were attacks on the troops, many of whom were also against being sent to kill and possibly be killed. That's not a model of action and strategy I would have previously associated with you.

As Town Administrator you ought to know that the students who *are* familiar with the broad outlines of the pending plaza plan (similar to the troops who read accurate information, including my "[Web of Lies](#)" publications still posted online, about WMD lies) are as against the pending plaza plan as the vast majority of long-term Durham residents are.

Did you think before June 25 to first to check how many of the growing number of petition signers are current UNH students or recent graduates? Did you explore how many of the lawn signs are displayed by UNH students? Did you check to see whether UNH students have also written comments on the petition and online about how, they too, do not want to see the core of Durham damaged and what they would like to see instead? Have you now seen the posting by UNH students online that are in synchrony with the signs?

During the pandemic, when my gym was closed, I turned to walking and biking around Durham as alternative exercise. And I had many socially distanced interactions with neighbors. To avoid “unnamed sources,” I’ll note that among the many people I met were UNH students Dana Saxby, June Cranmer, and Jake Verneris. The latter two invited me to their socially distant front lawn graduation celebration at 33 Garden Lane at the end of May 2020. They surprised me by describing how they chose to live in the Faculty Neighborhood because it was mostly quiet and distant from mass student housing, that they would never want to live in Plaza housing, that they wanted a better shopping plaza but certainly not what was being proposed. They predicted, along with long-term residents, that 258 proposed plaza tenants and their guests would not only re-orient the Plaza away from being a community shopping plaza (and stop a better plan), but also roam through the cherished wooded/stone walled path from the rear of the Plaza, over the pedestrian bridge, and into the neighborhood at night. And they saw that as damaging the neighborhood they purposely chose to live in. Indeed, Jake Verneris offered to come to the next Planning Board meeting to share those views of his and his peers. (At this moment, I’m not sure how to reach him when those comments, in light of your intervention, would be more relevant.)

In short, even UNH undergrads seem to have a better sense of the lessons detailed in the extensive literature that now exists on college town zoning than has been reflected in Planning Board review and your communications about the Plaza. As you ought to know, a former UNH professor of geography, Blake Gumprecht, wrote the first major book to detail the unique characteristics of college towns in the United States, [The American College Town](#), 2008. The book was awarded the American Association of Geographers’ J. B. Jackson Prize, the most prestigious book prize in American geography. Among the many positive reviews was the one by *Architecture Boston*, which said that the book “should be required reading for the many architects and planners in Greater Boston.” As Dr. Gumprecht describes in a key section in his “Town vs. Gown” book chapter called **Erosion of Single-Family Neighborhoods**, “student behavioral issues cannot be divorced from the geography of housing in college towns” (p. 312). As he and other researchers of college town have documented, college-town zoning matters.

As one just-graduated UNH student, Shawn Latulippe, wrote on Facebook last night: “I think if they turned that part of mill plaza into either a new shopping area or eating spots

with more green space it could be really beautiful and residents wouldn't have to worry about trash or noise from students partying there. Also I think most students don't want to trash nice places and college brook but when they're drunk it's definitely more likely they'll do it without thinking haha." And there was this from [Aspynn Kutz](#), "As a UNH student who lives sandwiched between two unruly frat houses, the signs make sense."

As you may know, former Planning Board member Jennifer Pribble was so upset about the evolving plans for Mill Plaza that, even after moving to Jackson, NH, she [wrote](#) to the Planning Board in July 2020 to say: "It is my opinion that a walkable and usable retail area with public gathering spaces is of utmost importance for both town folks and college students. It's in the mixing of those two groups in positive ways that makes Durham a unique place to live. It's the interactions at the ice cream shops and walking trails or restaurants that matter. Throwing another high density student housing project in the middle of the largest retail spaces will shift the balance.... You could probably find a large % of students who would prefer better downtown services than more housing."

The now huge literature on college towns describes the essential need to separate student nightlife zones from family neighborhoods, **even for the benefit of the "liveliest" students**, since the police tolerate violations of noise ordinances (and more) if residents are not constantly calling the police. (As I showed in videos to the Planning Board recently, the police do not quiet down students on Main Street after 10pm quiet hour; indeed, the noise is loud until about 2am, which is not that much of a problem because it's far from family homes.)

In the first scientifically designed survey of Durham opinion, Durham residents displayed wisdom that would later be documented in the now extensive literature on college town zoning requirements: "The key to success...of student housing development would be its location.... The development of new student housing would be best directed to the west of the main campus [Mill Plaza is directly east of campus] in complexes specifically designed to house students. **This would permit student housing to be separated from town resident housing so that lifestyles don't directly conflict....**" (3-9) "**Encourage the separation of future University-related housing from local resident housing.**" (6-44) Adopted as Master Plan in Nov 1993.

Where is the respect in Town publications and review processes for the input and wisdom of Durham residents, both long-term and *informed* students?

Best, Joshua
7 Chesley Drive / 868-5090

July 6, 2021

To the Planning Board Members:

There seems to be some serious misrepresentation about the opposition to the current development plan for the Mill Road Plaza in Durham.

Residents displaying the signs and signing the petition are not “against” UNH students. Indeed, UNH students are among those who have signed the petition and are displaying the signs. We are all necessary parts of the same community and share the same desire for a welcoming and respectful environment.

The opposition expressed in the black-and-white yard signs is to the specific NYC-based Colonial Durham Associates (CDA) Mill Plaza site-plan -- for its disregard for the community values codified in our land use regulations.

I understand that the Planning Board must work with these legal requirements. And the Board has the zoning tools to stop a terrible plan. Virtually no one who lives in Durham, long-term residents and UNH students alike, wants our small shopping plaza turned into noisy and crowded 3-and 4- story apartment buildings, an insufficient setback from College Brook, blasting away the thickly vegetated hillside buffer near Main Street housing, and a bulldozed adjacent Church Hill Woods made into a high-rise football-field size parking edifice for Plaza tenants’ cars.

The debate is NOT about welcoming or not welcoming students. It IS about not wanting to lose any more of our small-town character. The proposed site plan does not serve to enhance our downtown in ways that represent the values of the Durham community. It is certainly not pedestrian-friendly, for example.

How, exactly, would the plan benefit the community? And I'm not just talking about the impact on the tax base, which will be affected by a glut of student housing as UNH enrollment hits the long-anticipated “cliff” of 2025 and beyond.

I started by emphasizing that the yard signs signal opposition to the proposal itself. I agree with Malcolm Sandberg’s entreaty to the Planning Board. “It is time to close the public hearing, deliberate, and deny the CDA application as submitted.”

Sincerely,

Katie Wheeler, NH State Senate 1996-2002

Resident of 27 Mill Road, Durham since August 1967

Benjamin Domainque

39 Emerson Road / Durham, NH 03824 / January 4, 2022

Dear Members of the Durham Planning Board,

I am a Dec. 2021 UNH graduate, originally from Westford, MA, who majored in Journalism and Political Science. I have been an editor and writer for *The New Hampshire*, and my articles have also appeared in the *Concord Monitor* and other publications. You may recall my participation in the August 25, 2021 public hearing on the Mill Plaza redevelopment application.

I write now, not only with a brief summary of my opposition to the proposed Mill Plaza site plan, but also with my discouragement regarding what I witnessed of the Planning Board review process.

As I said on August 25, I ordered one of the “better-plaza-plan-needed” lawn signs in solidarity with other members of our community, who are overwhelmingly opposed to transforming the central property in Durham into what would effectively be a student-housing complex. I also signed the petition, where over 1000 residents highlighted a few of the ways in which the plaza plan violates Durham’s zoning.

The written comment I added to the petition conveyed this brief message: **“Speaking as a UNH student, we don’t need more student housing. We don’t want to destroy this beautiful town we have grown to call home.”**

My point was/is that everyone living in Durham – UNH students and long-term residents alike – deserves a vibrant multi-age, community-enriching downtown shopping plaza. Durham has a very small downtown, and in order to draw prospective students to UNH, keep them, and expand healthy (non-drinking) activity options for students, we need something better than turning the plaza into a functional extension of UNH dorms. I have read and listened to many Durham residents’ comments, and I agree that the current plan does little for anyone except the out-of-state owners of the plaza.

The most glaring fact to me regarding this proposed student housing is that Durham has *plenty* of housing available for students, particularly with enrollments trending downward. As reported in NH newspapers in the last few months, the Chair of USNH Board of Trustees, Joe Morone, anticipates the number of UNH students to “drop off a cliff” in just a few years. The plan for the plaza is already out of date in terms of UNH and Durham needs. And while Durham has what will soon be a vast over-abundance of student housing, Durham has very few shared multi-age community spaces for shopping, eating, gathering, which is something that the Plaza should and could be.

I understand that legally, the property owners could not deny housing to non-students based on age, but you have to understand that the proposed floor plans, which contain four bedroom/four bathrooms in each unit, are very unlikely to attract families and working adults. What apartment complexes - besides those designed with university students in mind, award each tenant their own bathroom? Though legally a separate complex from student housing, it would effectively serve as an extension of university housing because the location of the proposed plan and our demographics demand it.

Instead of something positive, the plan before you – as you’ve heard from so many others – is for massively oversized and too-tall buildings that violate wetland zoning, remove a forested hillside, and obviously add a lot of noise and late-night student activity. But what disturbed me even more on August 25 than the Board’s enthusiastic treatment of a terrible site plan was the rude mistreatment of the public input. Residents and community members were called ignorant, foolish, even deceitful. They were called anti-student bigots – something particularly upsetting (and nonsensical) to me, as a now former student!

Perhaps I’m ignorant regarding much of Durham’s political culture, but I found that meeting to be an abhorrent attack by some board members on the citizenry of Durham, simply because we were asking for a better, zoning-compliant plan. The plan as it stands now is anti-student and should be rejected.

I urge the board to respect the town’s Zoning and its community, deny the Mill Plaza plan, and hold out for a better, more community-centric proposal.

From: **Geoff Ward** <gwrward@gmail.com>

Date: Thu, Feb 3, 2022 at 6:29 PM

Subject: Re: *Re: Mill Plaza Redevelopment - following up with Geoff and Heather Ward

To: Todd Selig <tselig@ci.durham.nh.us>

Cc: Heather Byers <hsbyers@gmail.com>

Thank you Todd, I certainly hope they do. Your response has given me the opportunity to address with you something I did not want to be the focus of my letter but that has nevertheless bothered me as I have watched this process unfold since we moved to town. That issue is the way in which I have seen the planning board treat the members of the public who have spoken out against the Mill Plaza plan.

As a public servant myself I understand that I work for the residents of this State and always strive to be respectful and considerate in my interactions with private citizens, even if I ultimately disagree with their positions.

Unfortunately, my experience as a Durham resident in voicing my opposition to the Mill Plaza redevelopment has been very different. I have been deeply disappointed by the way in which I have witnessed members of the planning board treat their fellow Durham residents, myself included. The eye-rolling, arbitrary time limits imposed, dismissive statements, and outright derision expressed has been in stark contrast to the warm welcome and courtesy that I have seen applicants, including CDA, receive from the Board.

I was similarly disappointed in your approach last year, in the weekly updates, to criticize those of us who have displayed lawn signs in opposition to CDA's application. While I wanted to address it with you at the time, I was unable to find the opportunity to write you back then. Nevertheless, in the wake of your critique and accusations of discrimination against the college students, it struck me that your leadership and direction carry great weight in the town and it became clear that the planning board was taking your statements as a license to treat those who oppose this plan with open hostility.

I hope as this process continues you will reflect on your responsibility to the residents of this town, and work with the planning board to foster a process that is inclusive and welcoming to residents expressing their concerns about proposed development changes that will fundamentally alter the character of the town that they love and call home.

Thanks,

Geoff

On Thu, Feb 3, 2022 at 5:19 PM Todd Selig <tselig@ci.durham.nh.us> wrote:

Dear Geoff and Heather,

Thank you very much for copying us on your letter to the Planning Board. I know the members of the board will take into consideration your feedback as well as information submitted by all parties as part of their review of the pending application.... [message truncated]