

“White Appraisal” (WA)

*“opinion letter” on impact of 2020 Mill Plaza Site Plan
on property values of “adjacent properties”*

Quotes, Questions, & Corrections

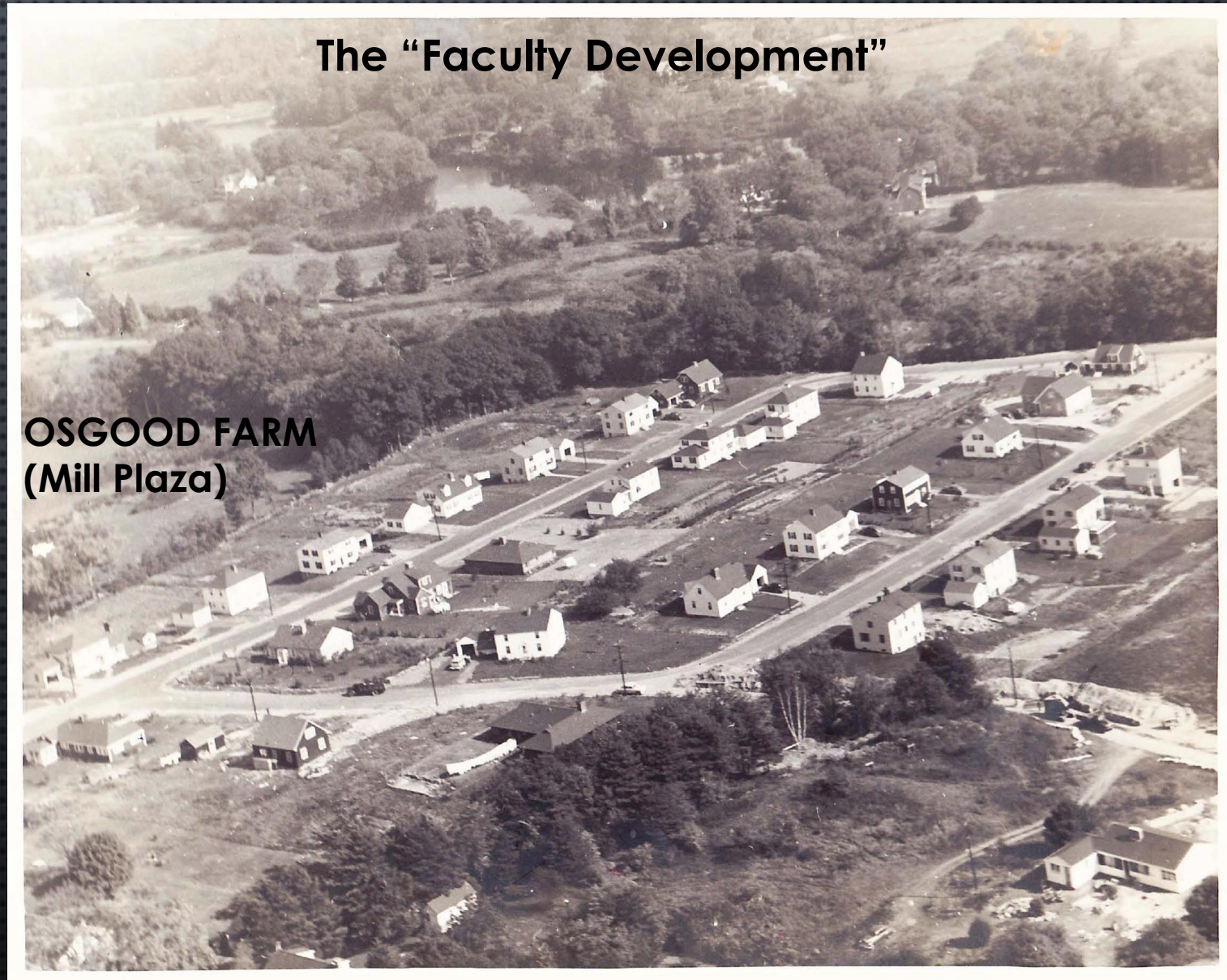
By Joshua Meyrowitz, 7 Chesley Dr, Durham, NH
(abutter to Mill Plaza)

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*Adapted from “Public Comment” at June 24, 2020 Public Hearing
(underlined colored text indicates a hot link)*

Mr. White seemed to struggle to make a **convincing** positive case for CDA's ill-conceived "Shopping Plaza Re-Development" – which is actually a student-dormitory project in the heart of Durham, nestled up against Durham's largest and longest-established single-family downtown neighborhood.

Thus, I critique the stunted and stretched CONTENT of the White Appraisal (WA), rather than Mr. White personally.



WA: “I have viewed the subject property along with the surrounding neighborhoods.” (p. 1)



QUESTION: Which of the “surrounding neighborhoods” within a half-mile walking distance from the Plaza were “viewed” by WA?

In 2017, CDA identified the Plaza’s “Surrounding Neighborhoods,” the homes that are within a half-mile walking distance of Mill Plaza.

Boundaries Define a “Neighborhood”

The Faculty Neighborhood (*most impacted by Plaza changes*) is defined by Mill Road, the winding Oyster River & Mill Pond, Church Hill, & **the Mill Plaza**



These surrounding boundaries protect the neighborhood from large-scale student life. The housing-free Plaza has long been a buffer from student noise, traffic, trash, etc. Destroy that buffer, and you undermine the integrity – and very definition – of this “family neighborhood.”

WA: “For the subject property, there are three potential factors that could directly impact the market value of the abutting properties.... noise, view and use....” (p. 3)

WA: “The **noise from delivery trucks and automobiles** accelerating and braking would **likely remain somewhat similar**. The noise from car and delivery vehicle doors shutting would likely be reduced as the number of open parking spaces is being reduced.” (p. 3)

Q: What about **added delivery truck noise** for online purchases by 258 new residents?

Q: What about **added hours** of vehicle noise (accelerating, braking, engine revving, doors slamming, honking, alarms) from 24-hour living on site that now quiets down after 10 pm?



WA: “The **noise from people talking would likely increase** as there will be up to 258 new residents located on the parcel.... [but] **speaking voices make much less noise than vehicles accelerating and braking, and...most of the single family homes are not located within speaking voice range**, the overall noise change...would likely be minimal.” (pp. 3-4)

Q: Has WA listened to groups of college students at night? Do they merely “speak” & “talk” softly?

Q: Did WA assess **added amount & hours** of voice noise (yelps, hoots, screams, etc.) if 258 student tenants **and their visitors** inhabit a site next to family homes?

Q: Did WA assess the different psychological & physiological reaction of neighborhood children and adults to hearing a car door close versus hearing people screaming?



Q: Did WA speak to Plaza abutters on acoustics of the site and hearing voices?

John Mince, Faculty Road,... an immediate abutter.... if both Rite Aid and Hannaford were being moved, he'd buy the champagne. He said there had been a colorful presentation this evening, but...it was important to remember that the trees wouldn't look like that way for a long time.... [He added the presentation had used a very wide angle lens, stretching out the open space portrayed.] **He also noted that if someone stepped outside of Bella's [Restaurant] and was speaking, he could hear every word, and... [one proposed new building] was 3 times closer to him than Bella's was.**

The full minutes for the June 14, 2017, Planning Board meeting can be read [here](#):

WA: “[M]ajor potential....additional noises would be emitted from....music playing, large outside gatherings, parties or even criminal activities.” (p. 4)

WA: “One mitigating factor...modern apartment units that will have central heat and air-conditioning.... The central HVAC would **greatly reduce the need to open windows** which largely keeps the noise within the building.” (p. 4)

Q: Is WA familiar with ANY student housing where windows can be opened, and yet stay closed to keep in noise?

CORRECTION to WA: “We recently went to pick up curbside takeout from the Hop & Grind restaurant...in... Madbury Commons...and, despite the fact that school is not in session....there were several college students screaming out of the windows to other college students gathered below, using profanity and typical college student language.” – [Ward Family, 6-24-20](#)



WA: “Safewise, a safety and home security-focused website, in 2019 identified Durham, the home of UNH, as the **10th safest college in the country.**” (p. 4)

Q: How is Durham’s crime safety record related to claimed lack of student noise?



Cinco de Mayo gathering ([VIDEO UNH 2014](#))

Q: Did WA research Durham residents' experience with proximity to student living?

As reported by **Monica Chiu**, 14 Burnham Ave, in 2016 & 2017:

The proposed placement of student housing on the south end of the property is in violation of the town's conditional use agreement; such housing must be built on the north end of the Plaza.

*As we experienced during the 2014 Cinco de Mayo celebration (and as occurs often during weekend college parties, beginning on Thursday evenings), many college students cannot control themselves, drunk or not. **College-aged men students whistled and catcalled to my then-13-year-old daughter and her friends, some even younger than 13; others threw objects at the school buses....***

The full resubmitted letter (originally from February 6, 2016) is posted [here](#).

Freed from parental & other constraints, many college students “act out”....

College Students Screaming for Stress Relief

“They scrEAAAAAMMMMMMMMM!!! It’s a long-standing tradition at...schools across the country.... The ‘primal scream,’ as it’s often called, is one of many creative ways college students are finding to blow off steam during one of the most stressful times they've faced in their young adult lives.” —NBC News

Littering

“There is widespread, visual evidence of the littering that occurs in the off-campus neighborhoods where many students live. Take a stroll after a busy weekend..., and the streets seem to have more trash than cars on them....”

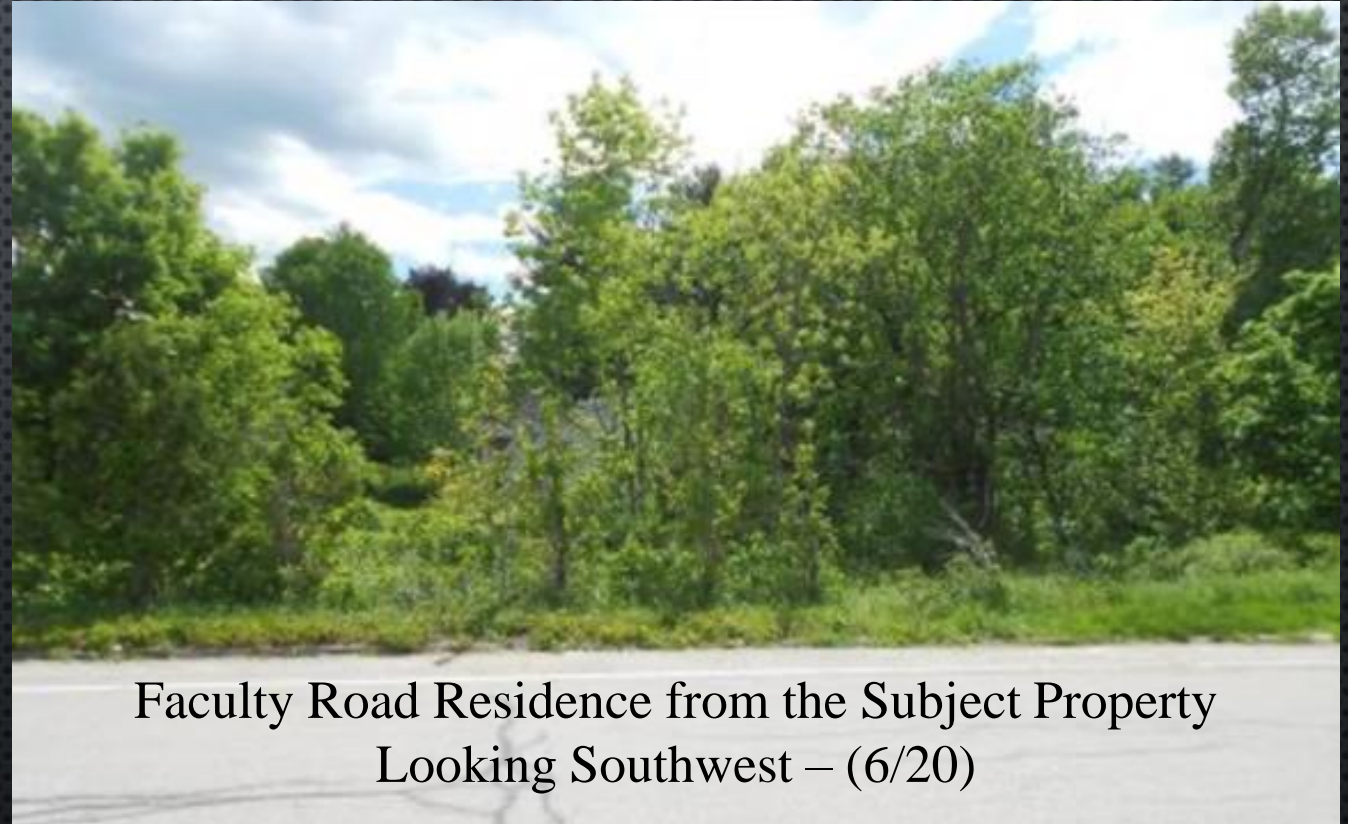
“The age group 11 to 34, which includes the vast majority of college students, are most likely to litter as pedestrians or motorists.... You live here year-round, only for a wave of students to trash the streets every semester....disposable containers of alcohol and cups being strewn about the street after a long night.” *The Daily Tarum*

White Appraisal Perspective Is “Inside Out”

In terms of assessing the impact of the Plaza site plan on the neighborhood

WA looks from **inside the Plaza** outward toward the “surrounding neighborhoods”

CORRECTION: WA refers to the Plaza as the report’s “subject property,” but the subject of the WA appraisal was supposed to be the adjacent neighborhood homes, as impacted by the pending proposal for adding large-scale student housing to the Faculty Neighborhood.



Faculty Road Residence from the Subject Property
Looking Southwest – (6/20)

WA should be looking at Plaza (as is **and as proposed**) from surrounding properties

WA: “Because of...increased height of...new buildings, the property may be more visible from those properties that currently have some view of the subject property and they may become viewable from several other nearby parcels that currently don’t have any view of the property. However, it is noted that **the proposed buildings will not exceed the height of some of the new Main Street buildings.** Additionally, the terrain for the subject property is well below that of Main Street.” (p. 5)

Q: Did WA assess the impact of new, very tall buildings being **hundreds of feet CLOSER** to many adjoining homes and **taller than most existing trees?**



WA: “I have viewed...subject property along with...surrounding neighborhoods.” (p. 1)

3 views of current Building Two

Faculty Rd #15 view of Building 2



Rear Foot/Bike view of Bldg 2



View of Bldg 2 from 7 Chesley Dr



Q: Because looking *from* the Plaza outward does not give one a sense of the “surrounding neighborhoods,” **did WA tour, view, and photograph from *within* surrounding neighborhoods?**

Q: Did WA study the existing Plaza **FROM** the adjoining Faculty Neighborhood?

Q: Did WA seek and evaluate renderings of the proposed Plaza buildings as they would appear **FROM** the adjoining Faculty Neighborhood?

Q: Which streets in the **Faculty Neighborhood** did WA view & photograph?



Q: Did WA see how Neighborhood streets relate to Plaza sights & sounds?



Q: Did WA see how Neighborhood streets relate to front & rear Plaza entrances?



Q: Did WA see how Plaza is key boundary that defines Durham's largest Family Neighborhood – and how the Plaza functions as buffer from large-scale student life?

Q: Did WA tour & photograph Plaza from abutting Brookside Commons (BC), which functionally merged with the Faculty Neighborhood 35 years ago?

The Plaza is somewhat obscured from BC only when the leaves are on the trees



Q: Did WA study how the **proposed** multi-story buildings could negatively impact Brookside Commons condo values with new student dormitories looming over this adjacent senior-housing property all year, blocking views and sunlight while adding traffic, noise, litter, etc.

WA: “Landscape buffers will be located along all four sides of the development.” (p. 2) “Any other...development...might not install an extensive landscape buffer as currently proposed.” (p. 5)



Q: How could any new “buffer” behind proposed Bldg C compensate for blasting away 17,415 sf (*plus* cubic ft) of dense, natural landscaping on wooded rear bluff?



Q: How would the destruction of the wooded hillside behind current Building 2 change the view of Mill Plaza & overall greenscape from Brookside Commons?

WA: “I have viewed the subject property along with the surrounding neighborhoods.” (p 1)

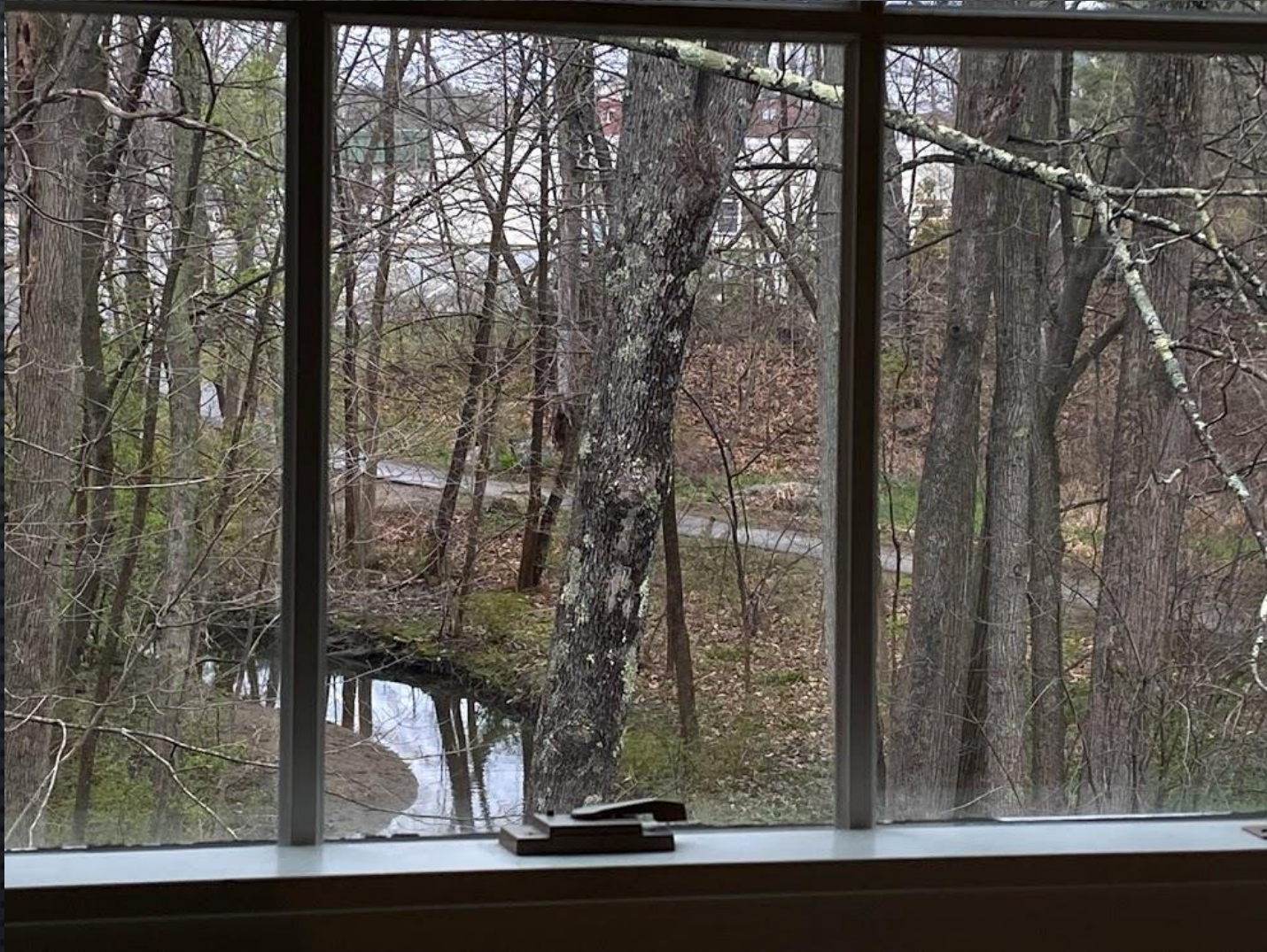
Q: Did WA tour & photograph Church Hill Apartment complex on Mill Pond Rd (and facing the Mill Pond), which abuts Chesley Drive (rear foot/bike Plaza entrance)?

On Mill Pond Rd, abutting Chesley Drive



When Church Hill residents walk to the Plaza, they go down Chesley Drive past the College Brook Foot Bridge and the Chesley Marsh (see next page)

WA: “I have viewed...subject property along with...surrounding neighborhoods.” (p. 1)



Q: Did WA describe & render what **proposed structures** – much closer and much taller – would look like from Chesley Dr homes, paths, bridge, marsh?



WA: "I have viewed...subject property along with...surrounding neighborhoods." (p. 1)

Q: Did WA tour & photograph wooded/stonewalled path from Thompson at Faculty to Chesley Marsh and foot/bike route from Chesley Dr into rear of Plaza?

This is the favorite route for neighborhood schoolchildren to walk to/from school



Q: Did WA assess impact on neighborhood of massive multi-story Bldg C looming over the beloved "magic path" and Chesley Marsh?

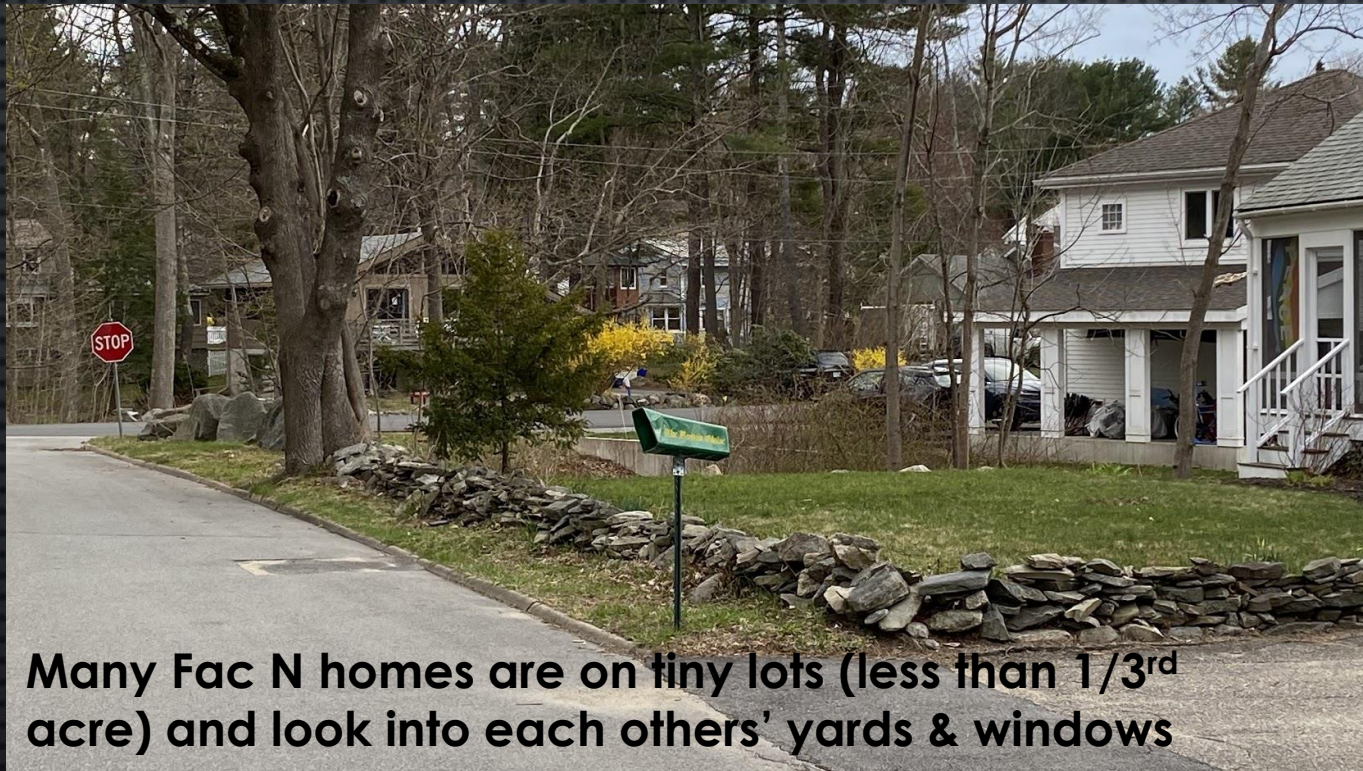
Massive structure, 250 ft closer to Neighborhood Path/Bridge/Marsh than current Bldg 2



Q: Did WA study/assess renderings of massive new Bldg C at edge of neighborhood?



At June 24, 2020 Planning Board hearing, I showed a slow-panning 28-sec video of 28 Faculty Neighborhood homes (Thompson & Valentine Hill) to illustrate why this neighborhood of crowded-together homes cherishes the wooded & stonewalled path from Thompson/Faculty to the Brook Bridge & Chesley Marsh at rear entrance to Plaza (a neighborhood treasure threatened by massive proposed Bldg C).



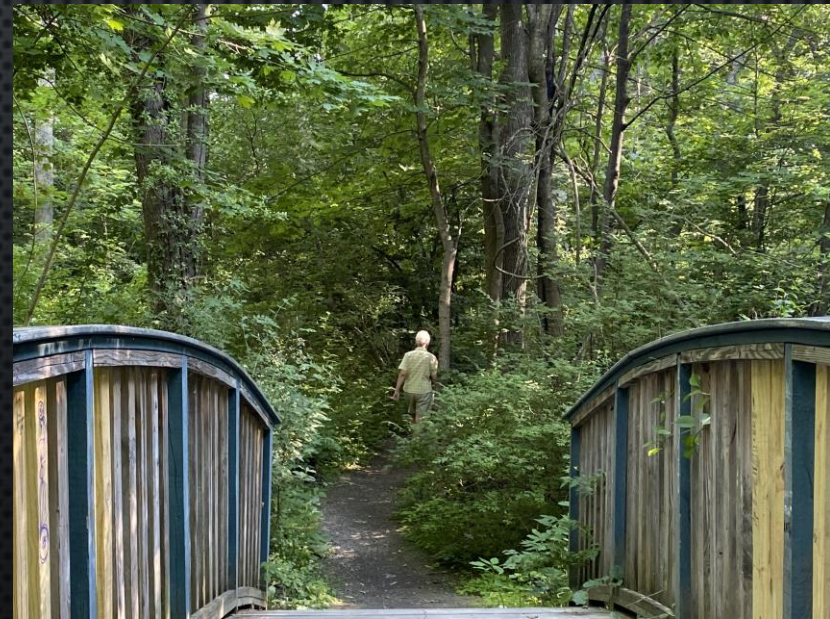


In late 1990s, the Council Chair & Rep to Planning Board stated how she (living on a 25-acre house lot) came to understand that most Faculty Neighborhood residents viewed this wooded path as a cherished **“neighborhood park”** – a rare wild area downtown that is more than 5x the size of many of the tiny neighborhood house lots.





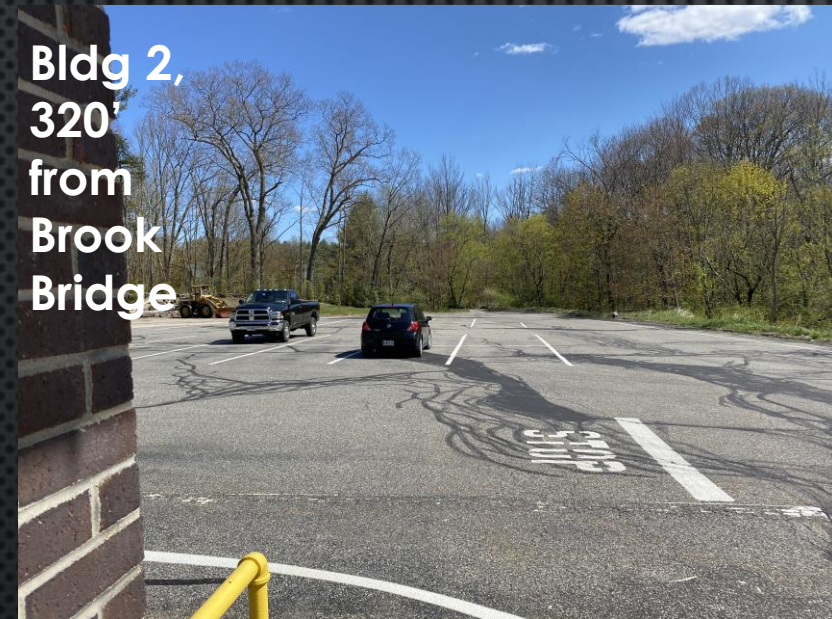
Neighborhood's "magic path"; a small but cherished patch of nature larger than most neighborhood house lots



WA: “**Landscape buffers** will be located along all four sides of the development.” (p. 2)

NOTE: The public has been stonewalled for 7 months about dimensions of buffers, BUT...

Q: How could minimal new “buffer” at Chesley Drive side of Plaza compensate for loss of 300+ feet of cushioning open space & existing natural buffering now in place?

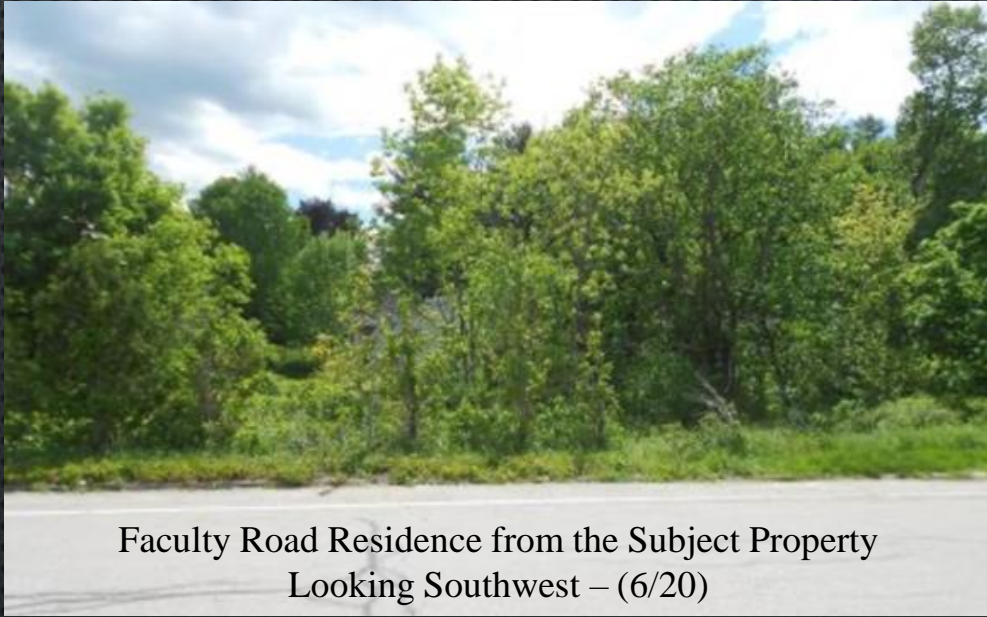


Q: Will CDA *restore* or compensate for the 9,000 sf (+ cubic ft) of Chesley-side hillside buffer illegally bulldozed in 2002?

Q: Did WA consider how this beloved path & neighborhood bridge might be altered into a college drinking & smoking (and more) gathering spot for 258 “new neighbors” – whose dormitories would be less than 100 feet away in Bldg C?



WA: “Faculty Road Residence [singular] from the Subject Property” (p. 56)



Faculty Road Residence from the Subject Property
Looking Southwest – (6/20)

Q: Did WA view/count *actual* number of Faculty Rd homes across from current Building 2, beyond pictured (leafed) trees?

(With no leaves, SEVEN homes on near side of Faculty Rd & more on far side are visible.)



Q: Did WA
view/photograph
how visible even
current single-
story Plaza
buildings are *from*
Faculty Rd most
of the year?

Q: Did WA portray
what Faculty Rd
views (both sides)
would be with
proposed massive
multi-story
buildings?

**Mill Plaza, current Bldg B,
from 15 Faculty Road**
(one of 2 houses cited in WA)

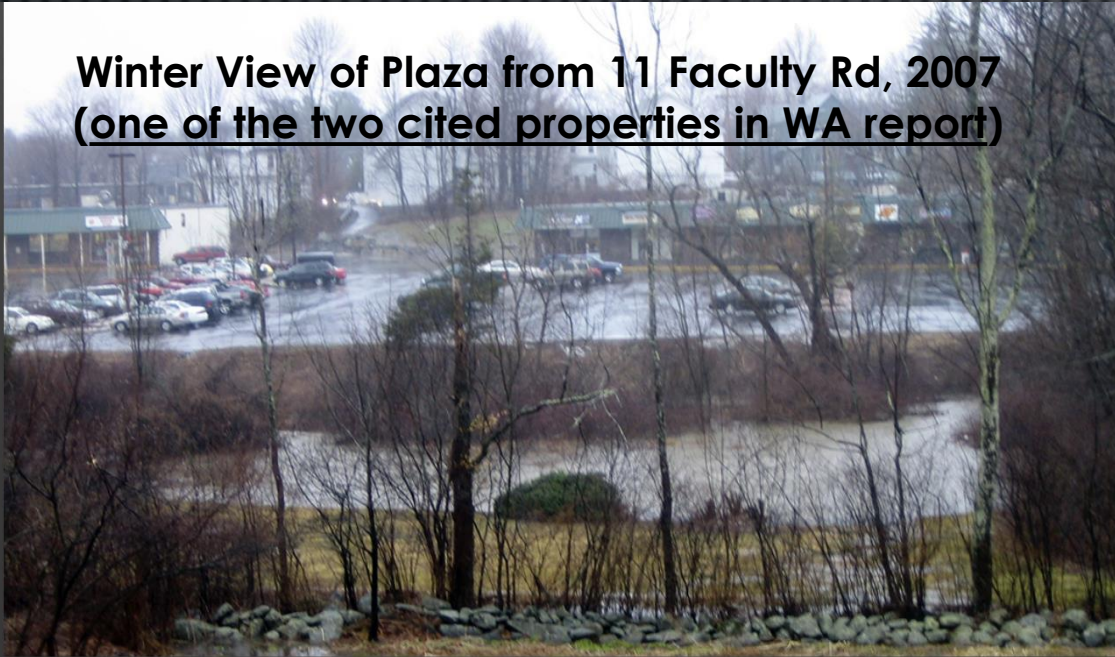


Future view of Plaza from 11 Faculty Rd? (if Buildings B & C are built)



WA: “Landscape buffers will be located along all four sides....” (p. 2)

Winter View of Plaza from 11 Faculty Rd, 2007
(one of the two cited properties in WA report)



Q: Where are plans for WA-mentioned “extensive landscape buffer” along College Brook that could offer **(long-promised but never provided)** shielding of Faculty Rd view of Plaza?

WA: “I have completed research on... the **Durham marketplace**.... constructed in the 1960s.... The northern building contains **four commercial units**.... At the present time, the overall condition...is considered to be **below average** for the area.” (p. 1)



- ❖ **Q:** How thorough/up-to-date is WA research if it does not reflect that Building A now contains only THREE commercial units (following Bella's closing over a year ago)?
- ❖ **Q:** How thorough is WA research if it refers to the “Durham Marketplace,” a store that went out of business *five years* before the WA report was written?
- ❖ **Q:** How can WA justify a “redevelopment” that leaves oldest & most “below average” building (Hannaford) on the site and blocks off places for new grocery to be built?

WA: “Building A will be upgraded with a **new façade and sloped roof areas....** The two new buildings will contain...**exterior finishes that will match** the new façade on Building A.... Upon completion...the subject’s development will be a very good condition mixed-use development...” (p. 2)

Q: How does a new façade transform “below average” overall condition to “very good”?



Route to Durham Hannaford Restrooms



**Typical Hannaford
(Outside of Durham)**

Q: What meaningful “redevelopment” leaves core of oldest & most “below average” bldg as is for coming decades?

WA: “...some people...will view the additional expansion of housing in the downtown area as a negative. If this sentiment was prevalent in Durham, then it could be possible that a stigma would exist and the values of surrounding properties would be impacted. However, the Town of Durham is generally considered to be **a welcoming progressive community**. It isn’t one that would likely discriminate against a group of people simply based on their age and or occupation (college employee or college student).” (p. 7)

Q: Why is key word “student” missing from “expansion of housing”?

Q: What does being a “welcoming progressive community” have to do with senior citizens and families with young children not wanting to live next to rowdy & “misbehaving” college students?

Two UNH students arrested for Madbury Commons stabbing
Swastikas and the N-word graffiti found at UNH
Durham police deal with students not adhering to COVID-19 guidelines



Q: Regarding only “some people” viewing student housing in Mill Plaza as negative, can anyone find even 10% of members of the adjacent neighborhood (of about 400 adults) who would **support** this project?

WA: “There will **not be any exterior balcony, deck or roof areas that will be accessible by the occupants of the building.** The apartment units will have Juliette balconies that will be non-accessible. In addition, Buildings B and C will have outdoor atriums and green roof areas that will be non-accessible by the residents.” (p. 2)

Q: Is WA saying that the 95-foot deep parking/garage (& bank drive-thru) access deck will somehow not be reachable by college-student tenants?
(Who’s that riding pictured bicycle on paving at top of 13’ retaining wall?)

Q: Is WA saying that students will be under house arrest/quarantine and not allowed to move through the **Plaza parking lot (a big “deck” of its own)**, as they go to and from their apartments?

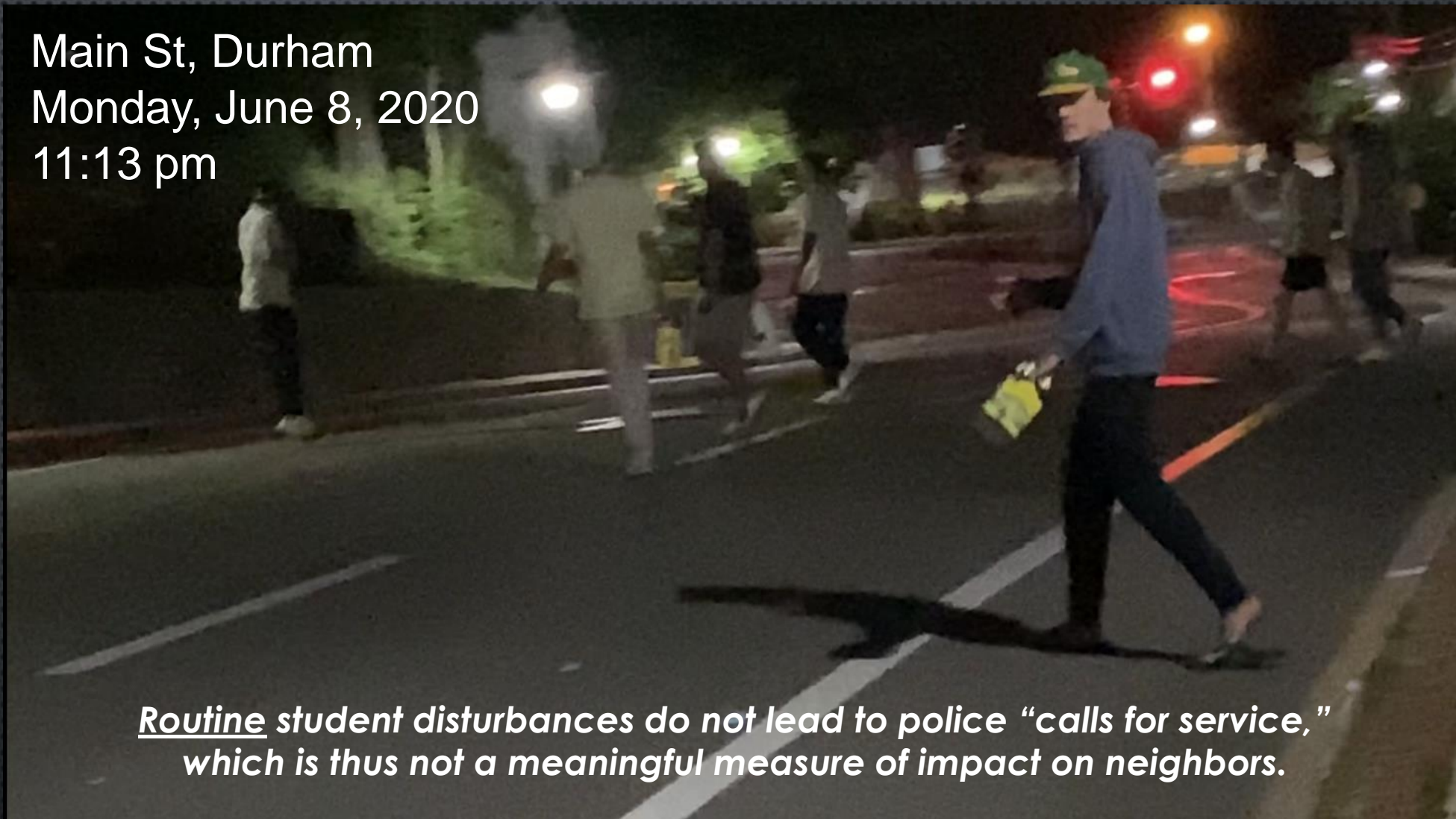


Not a weekend night; not when UNH in session:

7 students came up right behind me on sidewalk (no social distancing, no masks), then jaywalked.

One student came up within 2 feet of me & cursed at me.

Main St, Durham
Monday, June 8, 2020
11:13 pm



Routine student disturbances do not lead to police “calls for service,” which is thus not a meaningful measure of impact on neighbors.

If the project is approved, 258 college students and their visitors will be moving to and from their Plaza dorms within close distance to family homes. If they are loud (or if they curse at neighbors, as these students did at me), there would be insufficient time to have police intervene to stop the noise and cursing.

WA: "...Durham is generally considered to be a welcoming progressive community. It isn't one that would likely discriminate...simply based on their age and or occupation (college employee or college student)." (p. 7)

CORRECTION: WA reveals ignorance of Durham history, planning, and zoning. UNH's college students may be our children or may be like them and/or they may behave the way we did, or would, in college, yet Durham has long determined that the lifestyle typical at that stage of life is not compatible with family-neighborhood lifestyle.

Durham's Master Plan (based on scientific opinion survey by Rist-Frost Associates): "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 in complexes specifically designed to house students." (3-9)

"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, November 3, 1993

WA seems not to know that:

Housing in the Plaza is by “Conditional-Use Only” – by “*broad consensus*”
in response to “what residents were asking for” following the addition of 2,430+ “student beds” to Durham after 2008 – and with explicit intent to limit the density of downtown student housing, which was seen as reaching or surpassing its tolerable and sustainable limits

See: [Oct 21, 2013—Town Council, minutes](#); [Nov 13, 2013—Planning Board minutes](#)
[Dec 2 & 16, 2013—Town Council First Reading, Public Hearing, & Passing Ordinance 2013-10](#)
TC Dec 2 & 16 minutes [here](#) & [here](#); resulting in: [ORDINANCE #2013-10 OF DURHAM, NEW HAMPSHIRE](#)

CORRECTION to WA: By careful design and strong Durham resident desire (and now by enforceable Zoning): Mill Plaza housing must not add negative effects to the adjoining neighborhood, e.g., “traffic, noise, odors, vibrations, dust, fumes, hours of operation, and exterior lighting and glare” (all associated with mass student housing!) beyond “impacts of adjacent existing uses or other uses permitted in the zone.”

Q: What in Durham’s Central zone does or could bring more negative impacts to the adjoining neighborhood than what has been proposed for Mill Plaza? – a site that has always been a buffer from large-scale student living on campus and beyond.

[*Full Article VII: Conditional Use Permits \(PDF\)*](#)

WA: “Hypothetically, there are **some uses, such as a sexually orientated business, a commercial building with toxic materials that could be an explosion hazard, a medical marijuana distribution facility or a nightclub or bar that would obviously be undesirable uses for a nearby single family residence.** Any of these uses would be so egregious that the surrounding neighborhood and the adjacent properties could experience market resistance or have a stigma....” (p. 7)

Q: Since research suggests that college-student behavior is characterized by experimentation with sex , drugs, & alcohol, loud music, etc. (*without* the limited business hours of WA-cited alternatives), is this WA argument meant to be satire?

Q: In any case, how can “it could be even worse!” possibly be a strong supportive argument for a proposal that will damage the very definition of the adjacent “family neighborhood” and negatively transform Durham’s central downtown site for the next 50 or 100 years?

Q: Moreover, if ***hypothetically worse comparisons*** make a case ***for*** the current plan, then, certainly, much ***better*** plans for a real downtown “shopping center” argue forcefully ***against*** the current plan?

FIVE-POINT POSITIVE VISION FOR REDEVELOPED MILL PLAZA

Signed by 154 Residents in letter to Planning Board, October 2014

EXCERPTS from a short list of things...that are conspicuously absent in this current proposal:

- 1. COMMUNITY SPACE** – ...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.”... 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** - ...mixed commercial activity, flexible civic space, and housing for families, workers, seniors, low-income residents, etc.
- 3. CONNECTIVITY** – 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** – 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.
- 5. PROTECT AND ENHANCE COLLEGE BROOK** – “...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.”...

“Despite our criticism of this particular proposal, we are wholeheartedly in favor of redeveloping Mill Plaza in a way that enhances our community.”

Hannaford's new parent company promises upscale stores



Ahold Delhaize brings European touch to US
But not yet to Durham, NH

Q: Where on the “redeveloped” site would a new store be able to be built if Ahold offers it?

Durham resident petition to Hannaford for an expanded store on the Mill Plaza site, July 2017

WA: “The recently constructed **Madbury Commons** development is the most **similar** of the five listed developments to the proposed subject property.... new modern mixed-use or student housing developments...major impact on reducing the crime numbers and especially noise complaints.” (p. 4)



CORRECTION to WA: “Madbury Commons is a development in the heart of downtown Durham, not placed within the limits of a residential neighborhood.”

Q: “I would ask about the comparisons between Mill Plaza and Madbury Commons: How many are impacted by both developments. I do not see single family homes lining the borders of Madbury Commons, especially any that compare to the amount of homes in the Faculty Neighborhood?”

“The only people impacted by the students in Madbury Commons are the students of Madbury Commons.”

Sean & Heather Curran 6-23-20

Major Question: Can Mr. White, CDA, Mr. Taintor, or any Planning Board or Town Council member or any other Durham Town Official identify *any* other “Shopping Plaza Redevelopment” in New Hampshire that matches key aspects of this proposal:

- ❖ Locking in what WA admits is a “below average” half-century old grocery story building (with no place in Plaza to move to with an upgraded store for at least decades to come);
- ❖ Adding student dormitories within a stone’s throw (literally) of single-family homes and a cherished neighborhood wooded path and bridge; and
- ❖ Violating well thought out Master Plan goals & clear Conditional-Use Zoning that were explicitly fashioned to stop college-student dormitories from being built adjacent to family homes?

To Review

WA: “I have viewed the subject property along with the surrounding neighborhoods.” (p. 1)

UNANSWERED

QUESTION: What would be the “noise, view, use” impacts of Mill Plaza 2020 Site Plan on the property values of those “surrounding neighborhoods” within a half-mile walking (& hearing) distance from the Plaza?



Unanswered Question: Impact on Definition of “Faculty Neighborhood”

The Faculty Neighborhood is defined by its boundaries:

Mill Road, the winding Oyster River & Mill Pond, Church Hill, & ***the Mill Plaza***



258 “new neighbors” would add one college student for every household in the Faculty Neighborhood and increase its adult population by 60-80%, completely altering Neighborhood character. **Q: What would be the long-term impact on property values and lifestyles in the Neighborhood as a result?**

The surrounding boundaries protect the neighborhood from large-scale student life. The housing-free Plaza has long been a buffer from student noise, traffic, trash, etc. ***Damage that buffer and you damage the integrity of Durham’s largest family neighborhood.***

UNANSWERED

QUESTION: What would become of the beloved path (used by kids to/from school) & the bridge (used now for resident transit & leisure) if 258 “new neighbors?” – whose dormitories would be less than 100 feet away in Bldg C – are looking for spots for drinking and smoking and more?



“White Appraisal” (WA)

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on property values of “adjacent properties”*

Quotes, Questions, & Corrections

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Short videos shown at Planning Board hearing available on request*