

23-November-2020

Dear Conservation Commission Members

I would like to thank the Commission and its members for allowing the public to participate in its site walk on 20 November. The walk was most informative, both for what it demonstrated (the extreme neglect of the College Brook watershed and its urgent need for restoration) and what it did not (the incomplete solution to that problem). It basically reinforced many letters and comments contributed to the Planning Board (and posted on its website) by concerned citizens of Durham over the past several years. These all highlight the inappropriateness of the Colonial Durham Associates' total proposal for the Mill Plaza Redevelopment.

I would urge the Conservation Commission to recommend that the Planning Board NOT approve this proposal in its present form, primarily because of the massive out-of-scale size of Proposed Building C.

- (1) Proposed Building C has by far the largest footprint of any building on the site, and is situated much closer to College Brook and residential neighborhoods than any other building on the site. Since this building houses 2 floors of student housing, a parking garage, and a drive-through bank, it will engulf these neighborhoods day and night with lots of new noise and lights.
- (2) The southern end of Proposed Building C is right on the edge of the 75-foot upland wetland protection buffer, and forces into that buffer both a big part of the 45 parking spaces adjacent to that end of the building and a retaining wall necessary to support them. If Building C were reduced in size, the parking spaces and retaining wall would be kept entirely out of the protection buffer.
- (3) In addition, Proposed Building C also forces the large, underground storm water processing facility to be entirely in the protection buffer. Again, reduce the size of Building C and this facility would be entirely OUTSIDE the protection buffer.
- (4) In theory, a "wetland protection buffer" should protect the wetland, which means the Commission should, in principle, object to ANY intrusion into that buffer.
- (5) With regard to the 25-foot shoreland buffer, Mr. Persechino, engineer with Tigre and Bond, stated that the current proposal greatly reduces impermeable intrusions into it, but there still remain such intrusions both near the parking area south of Proposed Building C and at the entrance to the Plaza from Mill Road. The Commission should recommend that those intrusions also be eliminated completely.
- (6) Mr. Persechino also pointed out that the proposed landscaping increases the permeable surface area along College Brook (although not to the full extent that would be possible if the 25-foot shoreland buffer were free of intrusions). Fair enough. What he neglected to mention were the updates he provided to Rick Taintor, who included them in the Town Planner's Memo dated 11-18-20. According to a chart and table in this memo, the "New Development Area" destroys 47,610 square feet (1.1 acres) of existing permeable surface area (mostly in the forested hill) on its north and east sides. This is needed primarily to

accommodate Proposed Building C, and the retaining walls on or near the property boundaries on those sides. This is like “stealing from Peter to pay Paul”, and should not be allowed by the Commission to justify accepting this proposal.

The solution to most of these objections is to simply reduce the size of Proposed Building C! It is undeniably too big for this site, and that creates the many problems mentioned above. I hope the Commission will NOT accept this proposal as currently presented, and will RECOMMEND to the Planning Board this simple solution to save the College Brook watershed, the forested hill, and the neighboring residential districts.

Thank you for your consideration.

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