

October 16, 2019

Planning Board
8 Newmarket Road
Durham, NH 03824

RE: Proposed changes to Article XXI – Off-Street Parking and other sections of the Zoning Ordinance related to parking

Dear Members of the Board,

The very first sentence of the Master Plan's Vision and Community Character chapter, adopted by the Durham Planning Board on November 18th, 2015, states:

In 2025 and beyond, Durham is a balanced community that has successfully maintained traditional neighborhoods.

For most of us, traditional neighborhoods, at least in small New England towns, do not include parking lots or homes situated such that their views and quality of life is affected by what many would consider parking lots—and five vehicles in the front setback is tantamount to a parking lot.

As others have pointed out, the downtown neighborhoods in the Residence A zone are already targets for student housing—and parking. We know that student parking in town, as opposed to on campus property, is at a premium. This can lead to rentals of parking spaces in the neighborhoods. To be blunt, it would be unconscionable to burden further the homeowners who do not rent parking or lodging with the negative impacts of their neighbors' choices to run what is in effect a business.

Even without rentals, an excess of parking space relieves homeowners with many cars of tasks they should be willing to take on for the good of the neighborhood, i.e., moving their cars as needed.

I am not going to put the Board on the spot by asking how many of you actually know the downtown neighborhoods. But if you haven't driven or walked or biked around them, you will not have observed how small the lots are. Some are screened from either the road or each other by trees. Others are not. Some of those lost their screening when landlords removed trees to make way for more parking for their tenants, almost guaranteeing that no family will want to purchase the property should it be put on the market. Sound carries easily in some neighborhoods.

Technical point:

1) The diagram accompanying the definition of "front court" is confusing, as is the definition. The proposed language reads:

FRONT COURT – The portion of a lot in front of a house or the principal building demarcated by the front lot line, a line parallel to the front lot line running through the fully enclosed part of the building located closest to the front lot line, and sections of the two side lot lines that connect these two lines.

The referenced parallel line *could* be drawn farther back on the property. The side lot lines are either not shown or not labeled. And in fact, that parallel line is shown running *through* the open part of the building located *closest* to the front line. So while I imagine these were difficult to compose, I would suggest that both the definition and the diagram be revised.

This is a time when the community is seeking ways to build sustainability into its future. Why would we set policy that encourages even greater use of asphalt and vehicles? So I repeat what I asked at the end of my statement on September 25:

Hold the number of vehicles to “no more than three parked on a regular basis” for the Residence A zone, restore the requirement of Special Exception, and add specific criteria for Special Exception, as suggested by our Zoning Administrator.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robin Mower". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.