

January 7, 2020

Planning Board
8 Newmarket Road
Durham, NH 03824

RE: XII. *Public Hearing - 19-21 Main Street – Parking Lot. Preliminary design review for site plan and conditional use for parking lot on four lots and reconfiguration of the entrance. The owner is in discussions with Colonial Durham Associates for a possible parking arrangement for Mill Plaza. Toomerphs, LLC c/o Pete Murphy, property owner. Mike Sievert, engineer. Map 5, Lots 1-9, 1-10, 1-15, and 1-16. Church Hill District. Recommended action: Public hearing and discussion.*

Dear Members of the Board,

In addition to the concerns I expressed in my letter of December 11 about the **loss of the ecosystem services** currently provided by the currently-wooded lot (an “urban forest”), please note:

1) **Risk of flooding Chesley Drive**—Resident John Parry, an urban forester, gave a presentation to the Planning Board on March 22, 2017, titled “Best Practices for Trees in Durham.” He noted that “A Forest Service study indicated that 100 mature trees catch about 540,000 gallons of rainfall in a year.”

Can a stormwater management plan sufficiently “mimic” the transpiration of the trees on 19 Main Street that would be lost to this proposed parking lot, which would replace permeable soils and leaves with impermeable asphalt—let alone the infiltration capability of the soil and fallen leaves?

We know that College Brook frequently overflows its banks and is likely to do so even more frequently. (See photo on page two, dated April 6, 2007, showing the flooded yard of Brookside Common, upstream from Chesley Drive.) Experts such as UNH’s Cameron Wake have documented that in our region incidents of so-called 100-year-flooding have increased. Climate change is here, and today we still have options to help mitigate its impacts rather than continue “business as usual.”

2) **Induced demand**—Who is to say that car owners who currently park farther from the center of town—for example, at UNH’s West Edge lot, rather than those now taking downtown spaces would not prefer to lease on Church Hill? Or that parking space demand would not rise to meet supply? We could certainly see a parallel to this phenomenon:

...adding new roadway capacity also creates new demand for those lanes or roads, maintaining a similar rate of congestion, if not worsening it. Economists call this phenomenon induced demand: When you provide more of something, or provide it for a cheaper price, people are more likely to use it.
[“CityLab University: Induced Demand.” September 6, 2018.
<<https://www.citylab.com/transportation/2018/09/citylab-university-induced-demand/569455/>>

3) **Cui bono**—Which brings us to the question: Who benefits? As Dennis Meadows argues in his letter of November 12, this proposal would not *solve* a perceived parking problem for the community but would instead increase the already-large number of parking spaces leased primarily to students. The likely primary beneficiaries would be the property owner and drivers who may only wish to have a car nearby rather than actually need one, e.g., to commute to work.

4) **Pollyanna-ism**—Whether cars will remain in place or be moved frequently is a matter of pure speculation. Unless the Town’s drone has been deployed to surveil our downtown parking lots (unbeknownst to us all), we have no data. On the other hand, we have all observed the eastern exodus of cars through downtown Durham at the close of Thursdays and how drivers speed up as

they approach Church Hill. Common sense tells us that there will be an impact on congestion. (Note: Traffic models may not account for driver psychology, let alone differentiate among driver demographics, e.g., students headed to their parents' homes to do laundry on the weekend.) And most of the Mill Plaza's approximately 100 leased spaces empty out on weekends, as well.

5) **Highest and best use**—At the last public hearing on this matter a resident stated that a parking lot would be the "highest and best use of this property." In the absence of a professional appraisal of the property, common sense argues one should take that statement with (at least) a grain of salt.

Sincerely yours,

Robin Mower

Image below: College Brook below Mill Plaza; photo showing flooded brook April 4, 2007

