

April 29, 2020

Planning Board
8 Newmarket Road
Durham, NH 03824

RE: *Public Hearing - 74 Main Street – Mixed-Use Building. Design review site plan application for new 31,000 square foot five-story mixed use building (at corner of Main Street and Pettee Brook Lane). Douglas Clark, c/o Clark Properties, LLC, owner. Zachary Smith, c/o Bergmeyer, architect. Map 2, Lot 14-1. Central Business District. Recommended action*

Greetings,

I'm glad to see a development proposal that reflects, at least in spirit, a recommendation from the 2009 B. Dennis Town Design charrette in the "Durham Commercial Core Strategic Plan." I appreciate the vision of the owner to tackle this challenging site and his willingness to include underground parking. I am also willing to move away from the traditional New England architectural vernacular.

Height and mass: perhaps needed, but what would be the impact?

I would much rather see four stories here, and I would support the five stories proposed *for this location*, but I would not support a change to the zoning ordinance to allow five stories by right, or even by Conditional Use, along Main Street. Maintaining human scale and access to sunlight is important to me, and, I imagine, to others.

This location serves as a transition from UNH to downtown Durham. It has an openness appropriate to the setting of a large building. I believe community support could persuade the Zoning Board to grant a variance *for this specific project*. It is a unique parcel, and the public interest includes dense infill with both housing for non-student populations and additional high quality commercial space.

A substantial structure is needed to anchor this location—to provide balance to both Holloway Commons and the other massed institutional structures of UNH and to serve as the entrance to our small downtown. As designed, the building is handsome but may be more appropriate to a larger town or small city.

So I appreciate Lorne Parnell's (?) comment that this design is appropriate for a town that plans to grow. So the Board should have a discussion about what the Master Plan suggests we want for our future downtown in general—how built out, how high and where?—and specifically, given the threats to a continued university operation as we have known it.

Again, I appreciate the owner's vision, but do others envision the need for "dramatic meeting spaces" in Durham?

Also, what happens when the one-story Aroma Joe's and People's United Bank buildings are developed—as they should be? Would even three-story building replacements fit in

well with the proposed massive five-story building? Could some computer modeling be provided to the Board and public to show that scenario?

Basically, how will the Board work toward a future downtown Durham that holds together both visually and functionally, that provides access to services that benefit the community and encourages pedestrians to enjoy the experiencing of accessing those services?

How would this building move us toward that goal?

Amount of glass and birds

If I had my druthers, I would live with expanses of glass. But I also love birds, and the loss of nearly a third of North American birds since 1970 makes me heartsick.

So I have a request: If this project proceeds, could the development team please cover the glass with UV-reflecting surfaces, as noted below?

Researchers have also discovered that "...collisions [between birds and buildings] can be reduced by covering glass with UV-reflecting surfaces (with reflectance of 20–40% of the 300–400 nm wavelength), hanging objects in front of windows, or placing objects or patterns on the glass exterior (with 10-cm and 5-cm separation between vertical and horizontal objects, respectively) (Klem 1990, Klem & Saenger 2013).

<<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev-ecolsys-112414-054133>>

Background, for your convenience: Durham Commercial Core Strategic Plan excerpts

As some of us have noted over the years—and it is worth stating the obvious—the amount of Durham land available for commercial development, particularly in our downtown, is small, indeed very small, compared to neighboring towns. Therefore, we must probably build higher than some are comfortable with. That does not mean losing touch with the need to provide human scale wherever possible. (Please see Doug Bencks' suggestion about increasing the setback for the proposed design.)

(See page 9 of Section B of the Plan, which may be viewed at <<https://www.ci.durham.nh.us/planning/durham-commercial-core-strategic-plan-or-b-dennis-plan>> See section B. I also recommend reviewing the minutes of the Planning Board meeting of March 10, 2010, at which Bill Dennis presented his draft report.)

Section D of the Plan, "Applying the Current Code to the Illustrative Plan," includes the following observation relevant to Doug Clark's proposal:

"Height limits of 30 feet in the retail/commercial districts (§175-54), with the possibility of another story in mixed use buildings, does not provide for either a fifth story envisioned in portions of the Strategic Plan, nor sensitivity about where and when it may be appropriate to site taller structures."

Similarly, page 3 of Section C includes a relevant illustration and caption (see below).

"This rendering shows the western gateway to Durham's downtown. To the left is a new green that works as a modified roundabout, with one-way traffic slowed down to make pedestrian crossing safe. This green can serve as a distinctive feature of Durham, making both

a clear separation from the University, but also common ground. The new buildings shown in this view would [allow] slightly more density in exchange for guarantees of quality and mixed use. The white building on the right side with the pediment is the Ocean Bank building with a new facade added to the existing building. Beyond that is a four story hotel/residential building with retail and a restaurant on the ground floor."



This rendering shows the western gateway to Durham's downtown. To the left is a new green that works as a modified roundabout, with one-way traffic slowed down to make pedestrian crossing safe. This green can serve as a distinctive feature of Durham, making both a clear separation from the University, but also common ground. The new buildings shown in this view would be encouraged by a form-based code, allowing slightly more density in exchange for guarantees of quality and mixed use. The white building on the right side with the pediment is the Ocean Bank building with a new facade added to the existing building. Beyond that is a four story hotel/residential building with retail and a restaurant on the ground floor.

Sincerely yours,

Robin Mower