

June 2, 2022

Re: 19-21 Main Street

Dear Members of the Durham Planning Board,

I listened with great interest to your recent workshop discussions regarding past projects. I appreciated the admission by Michael Behrendt that not asking for renderings of the proposed Lodges Project *from all sides* was an unfortunate error on the part of the Town. Even yesterday, as I drove up Mast Road heading north, I cringed at the ugly, out-of-character, out-of-scale buildings which seem to crop up along one of our formerly cherished pastoral gateways. I still mourn the loss of that formerly expansive bucolic viewshed of open fields surrounded by woods prior to arriving at the former apple orchard. It was an experience that soothed the soul. No longer. Now it has the opposite effect.

I hope we can learn from these past oversights. PLEASE *require* realistic images of what the 19-21 parking mound will look like, particularly from the south. But also, we need a close-up view. We have no idea of what this mammoth structure will look like. Given the mass of the proposal, we should also request a 3-D model, one to scale that includes surrounding properties.

As I continued on my drive west of campus, I was reminded of the hundreds of beds, actually over 1100, and equal number of parking spaces available for students west-of-campus: The Lodges, Capstone, River's Edge, and the Perry Bryant building along Mast Road. By design, these projects were approved to move students and their cars *away* from our downtown. The student housing projects that were subsequently approved downtown were purposely approved without parking to honor both our own and UNH's Master Plan (goals being to reduce the number of student cars and to keep them away from downtown). Those students who need to bring cars to UNH have an abundance of choices of housing that comes with parking. Furthermore, I do not see anywhere in our Master Plan the goal of using what little commercial space we have remaining in our tiny downtown for a large student parking lot. The idea is preposterous.

Contrary to what the developers claim, the proposed plan is not a right-to-build issue. There are many by-right uses available to these property owners that would be aligned with the Church Hill District, our Zoning, and Site Plan Regulations, and would enhance, not detract from, our downtown. This is not one of them. The current proposal is for a *conditional* use and clearly does not meet the required conditions for approval nor our Site Plan Regulations. A thoughtfully-designed senior housing building built into the hillside so as to avoid the mega-fill is one example of a project that would meet our Zoning and Site Plan Regulations. The point is that there are other options for the property owners to make good on their investment.

Although you cannot deny a proposal based primarily on our Master Plan goals, between the CU Criteria and our Site Plan Regulations, you have plenty of good and rightful justification for rejecting this out-of-scale, out-of-character, contrary-to-our-zoning-and-site-plan-regulations project. There is no need to drag out this application review any further. Please deny this plan.

Beth Olshansky  
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