

December 10, 2020

Dear Planning Board,

I recognize that your job is challenging and requires a great deal of your time and want to take this opportunity to thank you. I don't envy you the difficult decisions you have to make on behalf of our community.

What follows are comments I made in January about the proposed parking lot on Main Street. I am re-submitting these comments as it is my understanding that the parking lot proposal before you now is considered a new project, and my previous comments do not apply. I have two main concerns regarding the proposal to develop a parking lot on the wooded Church Hill Site, and those concerns are not addressed by the new proposal.

My first concern is that as a community, we have failed to protect College Brook both in terms of water quality and quantity. The poor water quality of College Brook has been well-documented by many a UNH student over the years. The storm runoff that comes from the Mill Plaza site in particular is almost entirely unfiltered and the pollutants enter College Brook directly. This runoff is laden with the kind of pollutants that cars and pets leave on parking lot surfaces.

The other problem College Brook faces is that it is very flashy. Because so much of its once undeveloped watershed has been replaced by impervious surfaces, the quantity of water entering the Brook during storms is great because there is no forest floor or grassland to absorb it as it crosses asphalt. High water floods our neighborhood trail that leads to the Mill Plaza, erodes the stream banks and impacts shoreland habitat. High water also flushes more pollutants and soil into the Brook. This parking lot proposal before you, if realized, will replace a forested hillside in the College Brook watershed with impervious asphalt and concrete and the subsequent impact to water quality and quantity will clearly and inevitably be another blow to College Brook. There is not an engineering solution that will be as effective as the trees on this lot in protecting the brook.

The impacts will be felt beyond College Brook to the Mill Pond, the Oyster River and Great Bay. The Towns' Master Plan summarizes well the problem before us: "Surface water, stormwater, and wastewater within the Great Bay watershed flow into the bay and thus directly impact the water quality of the estuary and its tributaries. Over the last decades, the increase in impervious surfaces due to development has contributed to water quality degradation in Great Bay. Both public and private actions are needed to reduce pollution entering the bay and to support the health of valuable aquatic and shoreland wildlife habitat." To this I would simply add that it is difficult to see how the proposed parking lot supports these values articulated in the Master Plan, and I question how the replacement of forest with asphalt could possibly not exacerbate the water quality problem in the already-compromised College Brook and Great Bay watersheds. It seems to me that the area of impervious surface introduced by a 185-space parking lot would certainly have an adverse impact and therefore does not meet the conditional use requirements.

My second concern is about the impact of the parking lot on the Faculty neighborhood. For those of us who live adjacent to the commercial district, small patches of urban forests are critical to buffering our neighborhood from the noise, light pollution and view of the commercial area and to preserving our quality of life. Our forested buffer preserves our sense of living in a New England town, despite having

the expansive parking lot and ugly buildings of the Mill Plaza as our neighbor. When I look out our back windows, I see the forested hillside that this proposal will turn into a huge concrete and asphalt parking lot with an enormous retaining wall hovering over our neighborhood. I don't suggest that the good of the Town should come second to my personal sense of aesthetics, but the impact on our property and on our Faculty Road neighbors will be significant and it will be worse for our neighbors on Chesley Dr.

I can't help but think that we all feel a loss when a forest becomes a parking lot. As our planet faces existential threats because of so many human decisions both big and small, it is hard to imagine that converting one of the remaining patches of forest downtown into a parking lot will make this a better community. It seems like the kind of decision we made before we knew better, but now we know better. Now we know that these sorts of seemingly small-scale decisions are contributing to an increasingly impaired Great Bay and increasingly uninhabitable planet, I ask you why would we keep making that kind of decision?

Thank you.

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