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To: [Karen Edwards](#)
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Subject: Comments for Planning Board re: proposed parking lot at 19-21 Main St
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As a resident of Durham, I have a number of concerns regarding the proposal to expand the parking lot at 19-21 Main St. In my remarks I have divided these comments into several categories: the scale of the project, potential impacts to nearby properties, concerns about snow removal, miscellaneous comments, and thoughts about the relationship or lack thereof to the proposed redevelopment of the adjacent Mill Road Plaza property. Thank you for your consideration.

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1. Scale of the proposed project

The present owners of the subject property propose to expand the available parking at that location from the present 43 spaces to 185 spaces, which is more than quadruple the number of spaces available at present. The existing parking is of a reasonable size to provide parking for tenants of the residential units in four buildings on the property plus an additional building, with the same owners, located directly across the street from the subject property, and to allow parking by the owners and/or their contractors for the purpose of conducting maintenance and repair activities to the buildings and grounds. The proposed parking area would also cater to people living at other locations in or around Durham who would prefer to lease parking spaces located near the central business district and University. The proposal thus represents a substantial change in use, from activities related to the provision of rental housing to the provision of commercial parking.

When a preliminary version of this project was before the planning board a year ago, Mr. Carden Welsh, then the Town Council representative on the Planning Board, noted that to the best of the Town Council's knowledge there was no short- or intermediate-term need for additional parking for customers or employees of downtown business. Thus the demand for additional parking would be from tenants of other residential properties in and around downtown, many of which do not provide parking for residents. I do not doubt the owners' claims that there is some demand for additional parking. I would like to see the evidence that this demand from existing buildings is sufficient to justify the construction of the proposed number of additional spaces. Unleased parking spaces are a liability, not an asset, as the owners would have to pay for the maintenance of the entire lot regardless of the extent of use, and many of those costs are fixed costs.

In order to construct the proposed parking lot, the applicants would add fill to raise the elevation of the affected area of the property by up to about 20 feet, and construct the retaining wall that would be needed to maintain the slope at the edges of the proposed area, which is much steeper than the angle of repose, plus about three feet of height to serve as a guard rail. Despite the inclusion of a 100 foot buffer strip, a wall of this scale is likely to dominate the views from neighboring properties on Chesley Drive and Smith Park Lane. Earlier this month I had occasion to drive along Route 108 past River Woods, which has a retaining wall of similar color and construction to the proposed wall, and observed that even at the setback distance from Route 108 the wall was obvious and does not blend in with wooded surroundings.

The amount of fill required will present challenges to the construction schedule I envision the owners wanting for this project, which would involve a window of slightly longer than three months: most activities starting following UNH commencement (normally the Saturday of the weekend before Memorial Day; some site prep work could begin earlier than this) and construction being completed prior to the first day of classes (normally the Monday before Labor Day). To get a back-of-the-envelope estimate, I calculated the volume of a wedge 200 feet wide by 150 feet long by 20 feet deep (the actual length is somewhat longer, but the full 20 foot depth would not be required at the edges of the volume, so my estimate should be reasonably close to the actual requirement), which is 300,000 cubic feet of fill, or about 11,000 cubic yards. At 11 cubic yards per dump truck load, this would require one thousand truckloads, which at a rate of 24 loads per day (three per hour over an eight hour workday or two per hour over a 12 hour workday) would require fully two months to deliver if the work is performed on non-holiday

weekdays. As the only vehicle access to the property is via a driveway that will be reconstructed as part of the project, I expect that the delivery of fill will interfere with the reconstruction of said driveway.

2. Potential impacts to neighboring properties

In addition to the large retaining wall noted above, the conversion of the currently wooded area behind the existing parking lot to additional parking is likely to have impacts on nearby properties. The biggest concerns here are noise and light pollution. The noise would arise from cars arriving and departing the lot at all hours, and occupants of those vehicles entering and exiting the vehicles, as well as engaging in possibly loud conversation. The expansion of the parking area would bring much of this noise closer to neighboring properties. In addition, because of the large elevation gain, there is a substantial risk that even downward directed lighting will be directed down the slope toward neighboring properties rather than simply down onto the parking lot. Although the owners plan for a 100 foot wooded buffer area, I noted during the site walk that several neighboring properties on Chesley Drive and Smith Park Lane were easily visible from where the base of the retaining wall would be, and I expect that with an additional 20 feet of elevation at that location several more houses on Chesley Drive and Faculty Road would be visible from the rear edge of the parking area.

3. Snow removal

As far as I have been able to determine, the current site plans provide no location suitable for the temporary storage of snow. At the site walk the applicants stated an intent to use a snow melting system embedded in the parking surface. There are three scenarios that the applicants need to consider: (a) a snowfall sufficiently rapid to overwhelm the system, (b) temporary unavailability of the system due to a storm-related power outage, and (c) the possibility that the system will be damaged in the course of the fill settling underneath the parking lot. How will snow be removed from the parking lot under these scenarios?

4. Miscellaneous comments

The proposed parking lot would replace approximately one acre of wooded area with an impervious surface in the already-stressed College Brook watershed. Thus there is a need to ensure that stormwater runoff issues are adequately addressed.

5. The relationship, or lack thereof, to the Mill Road Plaza redevelopment proposal

Although the Planning Board has insisted that this project is separate from the proposed redevelopment of the Mill Road Plaza, there remains a widespread perception among Durham residents that the two projects are related, in that this proposal would potentially satisfy Hannaford's objection to the current Mill Road Plaza proposal and that the student housing that would be constructed as part of the latter project would satisfy the demand for the additional parking proposed here. In fairness, I will note that Toomerfs have done a significantly better job than Colonial Durham Associates of maintaining the appearance that the projects are separate: the current plan for this project explicitly provides no connection to the adjacent Plaza property, whereas multiple documents submitted by CDA have explicitly included some version of this proposed parking lot.

Ultimately, if the Planning Board continues to insist that the two projects are separate, it follows that this project must be evaluated under the assumption that the Mill Road Plaza redevelopment will not happen, and conversely, the Mill Road Plaza application must be evaluated under the assumption that this project will not move forward. If either project is dependent in any way on the other, then the two projects are not fully independent, and the Planning Board should recognize the relationship.