

From: [Eric Lund](#)
To: [Karen Edwards](#); [Michael Behrendt](#)
Subject: 19-21 Main St: further comments
Date: Thursday, April 14, 2022 7:03:57 PM

Dear members of the Planning Board:

The Planning Board, on advice of town attorney Laura Spector-Morgan, has always maintained that the proposed parking lot at 19-21 Main Street has been a separate project from the Mill Road Plaza redevelopment, and now that the conditional use application for the latter has been denied, the applicants and the Planning Board now have the opportunity to show that this position is justified. Nevertheless, the failure of the Mill Road Plaza project to advance has some consequences on this project, and the Planning Board needs to take full account of this situation. I have some thoughts on the situation to bring to the attention of the Planning Board.

1. Traffic study

The traffic study that was presented for this project was explicitly based on the assumption that the spaces would be leased to tenants (mostly students) of apartments in the downtown area, and the Mill Road Plaza was explicitly mentioned as a location where many of these students would live. Like any other model, the model used for the traffic study will produce nonsense if the assumptions fed into the model are faulty. The assumption that the vehicles to be parked in the proposed parking lot would remain there for most of the semester, only being moved for weekends and holidays, was always questionable. Furthermore, letters the applicants have shown from students wishing to lease parking spaces for vehicles they need to get to off-campus jobs or training programs contradict this assumption. Now that we know that these spaces will not be needed for residential tenants of the Mill Road Plaza, the assumption is further called into question, and the Planning Board should require a traffic study with more realistic assumptions about how frequently the cars would be moved.

2. Tradeoffs: Wants are not needs

I concur with the thrust of the letter submitted by Janice Aviza on 13 April 2022 regarding the distinction between needs and wants when it comes to parking. Any potential tenant of a downtown apartment is legally an adult (the few UNH students who are not at least 18 would either live in dorms or commute from their parents' house) and therefore should be aware that downtown apartments generally do not include parking for tenants' vehicles. As Mrs. Aviza correctly notes, there are many other apartment buildings in Durham that do offer parking to their tenants, and furthermore, several such buildings are located within a few minutes' walk of downtown. An adult who actually needs to have a car should reasonably be expected to understand that she can get a living space with parking included in a location that is only slightly less convenient than downtown, and students who do not already understand this should be expected to learn it. As for owners and employees of downtown businesses, the Town has been making efforts to make additional parking available, with the lot at 66 Main St. having come on line during the time this application has been pending.

Another question which must be asked is what proportion of students can actually afford cars. Everybody needs to pay for food, and those who wish to live indoors must pay rent. In addition, students need to pay tuition, and UNH is notorious for having the highest in-state tuition rate of any state university system in the US. Cars are a considerable additional expense, not just for gas but capital costs, maintenance, and insurance. Last month a city planner/engineer using the pseudonym CityNerd posted a 12.5-minute YouTube video on this topic, "The All-In Cost of Car Dependence 2022: How Driving Wrecks Your Finances (Without You Noticing)" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2rI-5ZFW1E>). The bottom line is that most college students cannot afford to keep cars. Since the majority of students are able to find jobs either on campus or in one of the downtown businesses, relatively few students actually need cars. So a parking lot catering to students who wish to live downtown and want or need to own cars would benefit only a minority of students.

3. Urban fabric: Parking lots are not destinations

In general, few people actually want to go to parking lots. A parking lot is a place for drivers to store their cars

temporarily while they are going to the places they actually want to go. A parking lot is unlikely to be the highest and best use of real estate, especially centrally located properties such as the subject property. A building on the site could provide either housing, which is in short supply not just in Durham but statewide, or spaces for shops or offices that customers might want to visit, and would further benefit the town by providing more assessed value than a simple parking lot. A large expanse of asphalt will also contribute to the urban heat island problem, producing an external impact on abutting properties and the neighborhood above and beyond what a by-right use in a building, which would likely be designed to absorb less heat during summer, would yield.

Thank you for your consideration.

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Opinions are my own and not necessarily shared by others on Town Council