

April 12, 2022

TO: Durham NH Planning Board

RE: 19-21 Main Street

Dear Members of the Board,

At the March 23 Planning Board meeting regarding this project, the applicant's attorney pointed out that there are only three parties who are actual abutters to the project. He stated that, therefore, the rest of the citizenry doesn't have legal standing. – implying, apparently, that the great abundance of letters you've received from concerned and informed citizens who are opposed to the project should be swatted away- -because those writers are not direct abutters.

Really?????

If a developer is before your board asking for dispensation from zoning regulations in our town, residents of Durham are entitled to speak up and offer their input. Why else do Public Hearings entertain--- “Public Comments?”

Just the huge numbers of residents who continue to communicate our opposition to this plan is an indication of how invested we are in the life and future of our downtown—no matter where within the town we live. . . And this is the reason residents are following this unpopular proposal as closely and tenaciously as we are. . ( Wouldn't it be so much easier NOT to??. . )

If you look around our downtown now, you will see that its vibrancy is withering. The percentage of vacant commercial space is considerable. Some spaces have been empty for YEARS. Others are occupied, . . then empty, . . then occupied, . . then empty. It is alarming; it's a terrible look for a town. And it's discouraging for permanent residents to see. An unsightly, dramatically backfilled car storage yard will do nothing to bring vitality to our town center. Quite the opposite. More and more residents will take their business to other towns. . . as some residents have written to you that they already do.

Planning Boards, in their wisdom, can override a zoning criterion or two ---IF the proposed project is an obvious net positive for the town. As well, they are also charged with adhering to zoning, and denying requests for overrides of the criteria if the proposal is ultimately a negative for the town.

This project is decidedly not a positive for our town --or for the Faculty neighborhood. It is all wrong for the future and vibrancy of Durham, and I ask you to deny Conditional Use permits in this case.

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Also, at the same March 23 meeting, Messrs. Murphy and their attorney continued to offer, as evidence for the “need” for a naked parking mountain, a letter from a student who has contracted for a Main Street apartment for next year, and now writes that she would like to have a parking space nearby.

Well, seriously, give a personal requirement like that, shouldn't she have chosen a different rental environment? —one whose particular amenities include parking? There are several right here in Durham that would suit that need—not to mention neighboring towns.

I will repeat what I said in an earlier letter that, when the downtown apartments were built—in relatively recent years, (and not necessarily to unanimous enthusiasm among residents)-- they were intentionally built without the particular amenity of parking. Their appeal, instead, was their proximity to campus and to town, in a village setting.

So, again, the wish for parking after signing for an apartment that does not offer parking is no reason for Durham to set aside our zoning codes to allow this incongruous parking mesa in the middle of town

As the saying goes: “A lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on mine.”

AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH???:

I am amazed that the applicants STILL, after so, so many requests, cannot bring themselves to show the board, what their project will look like from the Faculty Road side.

It's pathetic how they bob and weave on this issue. The last submission was a picture of a woodsy hillside with (if you look closely) a couple of dark-colored cars peeping out from the woodlands--- woodlands which, b/t/w, would no longer exist. No light poles depicted, no fencing depicted. No reality, whatsoever. A placation that should be rejected.

The applicant came to what they probably hoped would be the end of the Public Hearing on this matter (March 23) with STILL no true renderings. They continue to obfuscate, and it's insulting to you, and to the town. If they were proud of what it's going to look like, wouldn't we have seen a true picture in the last two years?

As another citizen wrote,. . . and I had been thinking the exact same phraseology: ". . . I guess there just is not enough lipstick" for this pig. And the applicant apparently knows it.

Please insist upon a true depiction of the Faculty side of this proposal. Otherwise, you are agreeing to accept a Pig in a Poke.

Thank you very much for reading.

Janice Aviza  
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