

To: The Members of the Planning Board, Michael Behrendt, Todd Selig

From Kay Morgan, 16 Valentine Hill Rd.

Date: March 17, 2022

I have attended two site walks into the Church Hill Forest, the first in May, 2021 and the most recent in January, 2022. I continue to hold a strong negative opinion regarding the development of a parking lot on this steeply sloped urban forest which borders the Historic District.

Of greatest importance to me is the degradation of an environment which currently serves as a cooling island in the heat and a place where 70 and 80 year old trees, absorbing carbon dioxide, rim the perimeter. A small pocket wetland at the lower end of the property is glossed over in the letter from the developer's attorney (2/18/22) as "not being impacted" by the 1100 tons of fill, or the channeling of stormwater from the center of the parking lot directly down through the site where, even if it misses THAT wetland pocket, it will leach into it and into Chesley Marsh farther down the slope and into College Brook.

Over the years, we have witnessed the gradual death of Mill Pond as stormwater run-off, filled with sand and salt and pollutants from the Mill Plaza and the University parking lot across from the plaza, have drained into College Brook. The Town is now faced with restoration of the riverscape along the Oyster River after the Mill Pond dam is removed, and it seems to me that one of the key factors in that restoration has to involve improving water quality in the nearby watershed as well as farther afield. This proposed development will only exacerbate the degradation of the watershed at this critical moment.

I find it astonishing that after two years of requests for a three-dimensional rendering of what this parking lot will look like, and Mr Sievert saying quite clearly at the May site walk that it wouldn't be hard to do that, we have seen only the small side view flat on a piece of paper, which doesn't give anything but a cursory idea of how the parking lot will be integrated into its surroundings. I'm convinced that if we all could see just what this is going to look like, there is no chance that the Planning Board would approve it.

The natural amphitheater of this parcel is going to be filled to raise the southwest corner to 18 feet above the current grade. No amount of "woodland buffer" (which is now reduced to 50 - 70 feet) is going to hide this sore thumb sticking out of the end of what used to be a forested area. Fourteen foot light poles and a guard rail rising above that, and a six-foot retaining wall holding a grassy slope in place will give the overall effect of a viewshed next-door to a Turnpike overpass.

The attorney for the Toomerf's indicates that the design is practically perfect for this piece of land because the parking lot will mimic the slope that is currently there by gently elevating each side of the impervious surface so that stormwater will flow into the center of the parking lot. This is clearly an attempt to put lipstick on a pig.

The side of the parking lot near Smith Park Lane will be lifted 5 feet above the current grade, and the side closest to Chesley Marsh/Mill Plaza will be raised 18 feet. This is hardly a "surface" parking lot in the ordinary sense of the word. Nor is it a parking lot "at grade," which explains why Tim Murphy attempted in an email in April, 2021 to suggest to Mr. Behrendt that perhaps the Planning Board could revise that definition to suit their parking lot. That revision didn't occur, but it suggests that even the applicant knows that this proposal flies in the face of the requirements for "surface parking."

As far back as the Tech review minutes of 11/5/19, and continuing through various Planner's reviews, the issues surrounding the steep slope of this property have been raised by Mr. Behrendt, and disregarded by the Planning Board and the applicant. Here are some quotes:

11/5/19: Mr. Behrendt: "with the difference in grades [from top to bottom] we could have separate access to parking at grade and parking in a deck, from Mill Road and Main Street respectively".... My brackets.

Mr Behrendt: "**Some kind of 3 dimensional visual would be helpful to see how visible the parking lot would be from neighboring properties.**" (My bold)

11//13/19: Mr. Behrendt: "Mike Sievert will submit a longitudinal cross section of the site from Main Street toward the rear of the parcel (and preferably beyond) to give a sense of the existing and finished grades. **The elevation drops off dramatically from Main Street so the grading plan will be important. Will there be a retaining wall?**" (My bold)

Site walk 11/25/19: Mr. Sievert: "At about the middle of the lot, going from front to back, the grade of the parking lot will be about eight feet above the existing grade. The finished grade at the bottom of the lot will be about 12 - 16 feet above the existing grade."

Planner's review 12/11/19: Mr. Behrendt: "Mike Sievert will submit a longitudinal cross section of the site from Main Street toward the rear of the parcel (and preferably beyond) to give a sense of the existing and finished grades. **The elevation drops off dramatically from Main Street so the grading plan will be important.**" (My bold)

Mr. Behrendt: Visibility. "We will need more information to see how visible the parking lot would be from neighboring residences. It should be screened/buffered from those

properties. *A simple model showing the site and neighboring properties to scale would be helpful in understanding the potential impact.*” (MB’s italics)(My bold)

Planner’s review: 11/18/20: Mr. Behrendt: Visibility. **“We will need more information to see how visible the parking lot would be from neighboring residences.** The landscaping plan includes significant evergreen plantings around the periphery of the lot. The lot must be screened from neighboring residential properties.” (My bold)

Planner’s review: 12/16/20: Mr. Behrendt: Visibility. **“We will need more information to see how visible the parking lot would be from neighboring residences.** The landscaping plan includes significant evergreen plantings around the periphery of the lot. The lot must be screened from neighboring residential properties. What additional information or renderings would be helpful to see how the parking lot will be visible from neighboring properties? Annmarie Harris, a resident of the Faculty Road neighborhood, asked at the site walk about viewing the property from Chesley Drive. However, the board determined to hold the walk on the subject lot.” (My bold)

Anyone can read the Planner’s Reviews online, but has the Planning Board read and discussed them? As a devoted follower of the Planning Board meetings on this project, I can safely say that these reviews seem to fall on deaf ears. Now we’re at the end of this process and where is the 3D model requested in 2019? Where are the answers to the concerns raised by the Town Planner? (And these reviews are just the tip of the iceberg).

This projects stands to alter forever the character of the downtown and should be denied on multiple Conditional Use criteria.