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May 5, 2022  
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*“Don’t it always seem to go  
That you don’t know what you’ve got  
‘Til it’s gone  
They paved paradise  
And put up a parking lot”*

*~Joni Mitchell, 1970*

Dear Mr. Behrendt and Members of the Durham Planning Board,

My name is Mary LaPolice, I am a multi-generational, very longtime resident of Durham. I grew up here went to Oyster River and UNH and currently reside in the Faculty Neighborhood.

I am respectfully asking the Board to consider denying the current idea to tear down the Urban Forest Trees on Church Hill, in favor of a proposed parking lot in the middle of our beloved town.

For Arbor Day on May 2, 2022, Durham celebrated by planting 3 public shade trees near 66 Main Street. A glorious act!

According to Tree City USA State Summary as of 2020, on the [arborday.org](http://arborday.org) website, Durham, NH is the longest running community in the state to celebrate its Tree City membership at 43 years then, seemingly 45 now. The website also states Durham has spent \$3.5 million dollars on Urban Forest Management. As of 2020, Durham had reported planting just 382 trees in the 43 years, an average of 11 a year, a noble effort.

However, in my opinion the irony even perhaps hypocrisy, of all those environmentally important steps is the consideration to remove the only large group of tree buffer, considered an urban forest, left standing in our town center. Many of these trees are reportedly over 80 years old or more.

Please refer to Richard Hallett’s expert opinion letter on Forestry written to the Board on March 17, 2022. Mr. Hallett states among many other things, *“...it is worth elaborating on the ability of trees and greenspace to mitigate stormwater. Currently, cities across the country are spending billions of dollars to install green stormwater infrastructure. Durham has the gift of a small, forested ecosystem that is currently functioning as green stormwater infrastructure perfectly placed in its center. Its current functionality can’t be replicated after the site is altered and paved.”*

The UNH campus is considered a “walking” campus by design, to mitigate traffic and encourage safety and aesthetics. Students with cars live off campus or apply for a spot in the designated commuter A-Lot. This system is working. Please consider whether we need such an inevitable spot for student parking right next to an elderly home and abutting a residential neighborhood. The notion that we’d need that many spots at such an elevation, only for businesses seems far-fetched. It’s not centrally located to any of the academic buildings either. If you have not ever been to The Gables Apartment parking lot at night like I have, on a weekend, during the school year, I encourage you to do so. It’s a chaotic scene of motorcycles coming in and out, students haphazardly running and walking in and thru spaces, cars speeding thru the main entrance, parking violations, and the obligatory drunken and loud behavior. But it’s The Gables, on the edge of campus and therefore, ok? I implore you to consider such a scenario in the middle of Durham’s town, near residential and historic areas.

Speaking of far-fetched, I know this may seem such as, but in my dreamworld I’d like to see Durham purchase the land from the Toomerfs group, with preservation tactics in mind, similar to Wagon Hill, or to create a more park like community spot that doesn’t involve destroying that old growth trees.

Thank you for your consideration. I know this next point could be considered argumentative, but I cannot help mentioning that of all the Durham people I’ve spoken to over this issue, and it’s been many, I’ve heard absolutely no one agree that a parking lot plan (without updated images even,) is a good or welcome idea. This is not a mixed opinion such as the Mill Pond Dam issue.

Best Regards,

Mary R LaPolice  
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