

July 12, 2022

Dear Members of the Planning Board:

Thank you for volunteering and dedicating your time to the 19-21 Main Street application and others. I realize it is often a thankless task. The current application is for a fairly simple concept – a parking lot – and so it was surprising that your discussion on June 22 revealed a lack of consensus as to what kind of parking would take place there.

More than a year after the application was submitted there seems to be confusion as to what kind of parking and for whom. Several conflicting statements were made on this topic during your June 22 meeting. Some members of the board see the lot as providing long-term parking only for students, while others see the lot as one that could be used by merchants or employees of downtown businesses who commute to Durham on a routine basis (i.e. short-term). Some view the proposed use as accessory while others note the use would be primary. These differences are troubling. It might be helpful for Town Planner Behrendt provide the Board with a Fact Sheet that eliminates areas of misunderstanding and brings inconsistent interpretations of what is being proposed into alignment.

It would seem that the type of parking lot – long-term vs short-term, residential vs non-residential, student vs non-student, primary vs. accessory, etc. – should be defined before you run through the conditional use criteria and before denial or approval of the application before you. Approving a parking lot without knowing what kind of parking it will provide is tantamount to approving a dam without knowing how much water it can hold. Moreover, **you cannot possibly address the proposed parking lot's impacts in your Conditional Use analysis without first defining exactly how the lot will be used.**

You will recall that this 19-21 Main Street proposal was brought forward in order to address deficient parking for the ill-fated Mill Plaza development proposal for an adjacent parcel of land. The excessive scale of the proposed Church Hill parking lot reflects that fact. Now that the Mill Plaza proposal has been rejected by this Board, the proposal before you at 19-21 Main Street – and its scale -- is without any justification.

Much of the confusion regarding the proposed parking lot may stem from the fact that it has no adjoining or identifiable use. When a proposed parking lot is to support a shopping center, church, corporate enterprise, the use of that lot, related traffic flows and impacts become easier to predict. Who this proposed lot would benefit and how frequently it would be used remains extremely vague!

The proposed lot is inconsistent with the established objective of a walkable downtown (explicit in Durham's Master Plan) and against the previously adopted policy of building residential units *without* accessory parking (see the Orion application and others). As one of you noted, your role as members of a quasi-judicial board is to adhere to Durham's regulations and objectives rather than undermine them.

Putting aside the overwhelming opposition to this conditional use application from residents and putting aside the environmental concerns raised by the scale of this proposal, the Achilles' heel of this project appears to be the traffic jams on Main Street that are likely to result when cars seek to enter or exit the large lot. The projected traffic flow, like the flow of water over a dam, is important to quantify and understand.

I agree with member Hotchkiss and others who have noted that it makes no sense to have long-term "storage" parking in this location, which is just steps from the downtown center. And even the most pro-development members of the Planning Board seem to acknowledge that short-term parking is not a viable use of this parcel, given the traffic problems that frequent entry and exit from the lot would create. The conclusion that I reach is that this parcel is inappropriate for a parking lot of this scale.

If I were in your shoes, I would **revisit the subject of exactly what kind of parking is being proposed and define it now rather than later**. If you are unable to revisit the type of parking, you should reject this vague application.

Regards and thanks,

Matt Kom onchak

7 Melcher St.

Portsmouth, NH 03801