

An Open Letter to the Durham Planning Board, June 2, 2022

We write as a group of long-term members of the Community Church of Durham, the entity that gives the Church Hill District its name.

We stand in strong collective opposition to the idea of destroying Church Hill Woods to put in a large commercial parking lot. Although we live in a variety of locations, we all care about what the area surrounding our church and the center of Durham look and feel, sound and smell, like.

The current proposal for Church Hill Woods does not respect the nature and purpose of the Church Hill District as it has been defined since its formation in 2006:

“The purpose of the Church Hill District is to preserve and enhance the historic character of this area by allowing for multiple land uses including professional offices, limited retail uses, and senior housing.... New development should maintain the character of the area....” – **Durham Zoning Ordinance, 175-44 (p. 72)**

“Among the five zones in the Core Commercial area, Church Hill has the most distinct character and is thus most sensitive to inappropriate development.” – **Durham Architectural Design Standards (p. 8)**

The proposed imposing and aesthetically unpleasant parking lot, which would grossly alter the natural topography of The Hill, is very much out-of-character for the Church Hill District. Indeed, it would be a prime example of “inappropriate development” for Church Hill.

Church Hill Woods is an ecologically sensitive area that is uphill from a flood zone and the terribly impaired College Brook. No engineered stormwater system can match what a forest can do over centuries. Among other parking-lot pollutants, snow-melting salt cannot be mitigated. That on its own should be enough for the project to fail Conditional Use, apart from all the other obvious negative external impacts for the surrounding environment and homes (added noise, light/glare, traffic, fumes, added summer heat, hours of activity, out-of-scale development).

Please respect our Zoning, reject the terrible parking lot idea, and limit developments on Church Hill to what is *permitted* in the zone. Something really beautiful and appropriate – and respectful of the topography and the character of the District – could be built on that property.

Thank you.

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Regarding protecting Church Hill Woods from inappropriate development

Respectfully submitted by the following 44
long-term members of the Community Church of Durham

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