



State of New Hampshire

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONCORD

Tuesday, July 12, 2022

Durham Planning Board
c/o Michael Behrendt (via email)
Durham, NH 03824

Dear Durham Planning Board members,

I write to you today as a 20 year member of the New Hampshire House, but also as the chairman of the Strafford County Delegation. In that role I have a special responsibility to give heed to significant developments in the county which are brought to my attention. One such is the subject of my letter to you now: the proposed construction of a parking facility on the Church Hill in Durham.

As a former UNH faculty member, I have had yearslong occasion to use facilities at the Mill Road Plaza; and I am very familiar with central Durham. I have been requested by several Durham residents to monitor the issue of the proposed redevelopment of the Mill Plaza; and several legislative issues have been raised with me, as well.

I am also quite familiar with the College Brook issue; and that is what occasions my letter to you today. While many of the questions involving the Mill Plaza project are of an economic or code-based nature, the College Brook is fundamentally different; and your responsibilities in this regard are fundamentally different, as well. Here, your basic charge, as a Planning Board, to promote the general welfare, to protect public health and safety and to prevent injury to the environment is central, crucial, and overriding.

The College Brook is a critical and vital drainage element in central Durham, and it is an important environmental factor, for good or ill, as well. It is already degraded from years of neglect and abuse; and the impact of the proposed conversion of the Church Hill to a parking lot would, in my opinion, have a very negative impact on the status and viability of the Brook. Allowing this "development" to go forward violates your mandate to protect the public interest, and especially the environment.

Currently, the Church Hill serves as a significant environmental asset to Durham. Turning it into a parking facility, especially by adding a projected 14,000 yd.³ of fill is, in and of itself, a massive assault on the neighborhood and environment. The construction phase alone is likely to seriously further degrade the College Brook; and this heavily polluted water empties directly into the Oyster River. Shortly thereafter, it flows into the Great Bay, already endangered from other man-made impacts. The estuary is one of New Hampshire's crown jewels. It deserves your best stewardship.

I urge you, in the strongest terms, to reject this unwise proposal.

Sincerely,
Rep. Peter B. Schmidt