

March 10, 2021

Planning Board  
8 Newmarket Road  
Durham, NH 03824

RE: 19-21 Main Street – Parking Lot. Formal application for site plan and conditional use for parking lot on four lots and reconfiguration of the entrance. Toomerfs, LLC c/o Pete Murphy and Tim Murphy, property owners. Mike Sievert, engineer. Robbi Woodburn, Landscape Architect. Map 5, Lots 1-9, 1-10, 1-15, and 1-16. Church Hill District.

Dear Members of the Board,

This letter consists of comments I made during the public hearing tonight.

First, I'd like to acknowledge the comments of others who have focused on the big picture, public good issues such as climate change and habitat loss. These are issues of great concern to me as well, and I have spoken or written several times about the value of urban trees, beautiful or less so.

I do recognize that you must work with our land use regulations, but I also believe that the Planning Board must serve the *community's long-term interests*. So where the Board is authorized to use discretion or latitude relative to our land use regulations—as it is with a Conditional Use Permit application, it must turn to other sources of community guidance. The Master Plan and the Town Council goals are prime examples.

I'd like to make a few points to counter arguments that may be left hanging in the air. You may have heard some of these earlier, but I think they bear repeating:

- *Demand* is not the same thing as *need*. Please refer to Councilor Lawson's "Public Parking Utilization and Analysis," dated October 2017. The report concluded that downtown parking was adequate to serve our downtown businesses; given there has been no new development since then, how can one argue that there is increased *need* today?
- Induced demand will certainly be at play here; in other words, "If you build it, they will come."
- The Planning Board intentionally granted waivers for required parking for the downtown student housing projects, whose tenants surely knew before they signed leases that onsite parking was limited or nonexistent.
- Location preference enters into the parking equation, as we know both from personal experience and from UNH Transportation Policy Committee reports. Overparking merely indicates that a driver wants badly enough to park on that site, even if illegally.
- Adding more private-use parking spaces to our downtown by definition means adding more private vehicles to our downtown. The additional congestion contributes both to a vicious cycle involving reduced UNH bus service and demand for in-town private car parking and hampers accessibility to the campus by emergency responders. Both impacts are of great concern to UNH Campus

Planning, and one of the Durham Town Council goals starts with the words “Continue cooperative and collaborative efforts with UNH.”

- The project footprint *could* be reduced to allow for deeper southern and western setbacks, preferable for buffering the residential neighborhood and as a Conditional Use permit would allow the Board to require. Landscaping there could include trees that will be large at maturity and provide both shade to help offset the heat island effect of the parking lot and a visual and aural buffer. A 100-foot setback sounds generous, but for comparison, this is only the width of frontage for single-family homes on Faculty Road. During non-leafy seasons, a tall retaining wall would certainly loom in the view of pedestrians—an atypical feature of the neighborhood, to say the least.
- As for neighborhood uses as described by the applicant, I call your attention to last meeting’s testimony of Cowell Drive neighbor Susan Richman. She noted the conversion of a grassy field between Main Street and Cowell Drive into asphalt for 26 parking spaces to expand parking for 18 Main Street, also owned by the applicant, setting up the circular argument presented by the applicant regarding the “external impacts” of existing parking lots. The woods on Church Hill that mitigate the impacts of existing parking lots would not exist to mitigate the impacts either of those existing parking lots, as they do today, or of the proposed parking lot, an obvious point that yet must be made.

Sincerely yours,

Robin