

April 8, 2021(a)

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.

**Topic of this letter: DEMAND vs NEED | private vs public good**

Dear Members of the Board,

I am writing in response to the slew of letters submitted by Toomerfs to substantiate the claim that their proposed construction of 180 parking spaces addresses a NEED.

I cannot say it strongly enough: DEMAND does not equate to NEED.

Let's not let the temporary pandemic and the desires of nonpermanent residents drive decisions that have consequences that affect our community for decades.

While the Board is presented with a specific application, it may strongly encourage the applicant to modify the application—in any number of ways, as it has done with other development applications. **I would again suggest that the proposal for 180 spaces is extreme, if not appropriate, for this site and that the Board urge the applicant to “pull back.”** Do not forget that this is a conditional use application and that, as always, our land use regulation criteria only set minimum standards.

What Durham NEEDS is to support policies, developments, and infrastructure that encourage non-vehicular uses and benefits to the community at large, not only to private developers or to nonpermanent residents.

What Durham NEEDS is to stop undermining UNH Transportation's attempts to support the UNH goal of a walkable campus, in part through reducing traffic congestion by providing bike facilities and a convenient bus system.

As I said at a recent Planning Board public hearing: UNH believes that we have entered a vicious cycle. As more students use private vehicles, bus service demand declines; as bus service demand declines, more students use private vehicles, setting up traffic congestion that interferes with regular traffic flow and emergency response vehicles.

UNH has determined that students are willing to pay premiums for parking downtown, regardless of pricing. That advantage accrues to private property owners, not the larger community, which pays the lost opportunity costs for economic development that would have generated jobs and provide services of interest.

Private parking is a lucrative business.

As of today, according to information on the UNH website listing off-campus parking options at private lots, Toomerfs partner Peter Murphy currently rents 10 spaces at 19 Main Street at \$1,200 an academic year.

<https://www.unh.edu/transportation/parking/permits/off-campus-parking>

The proposed project would accommodate 180 spaces. At \$1,200 a pop, that adds up to \$216,000—per year—for the property owners.

On the other hand, Durham's Business Manager Gail Jablonski recently estimated that the financial benefit to residents could be along the lines of \$5.00 (five dollars) per household:

**From:** Gail Jablonski <gjablonski@ci.durham.nh.us>

**Subject: RE: query | tax revenues | Main Street #19 - impact on property values and fiscal impact**

**Date:** February 25, 2021 at 10:51:40 AM EST

**To:** RobinM <melodyofharpists@gmail.com>, Jim Rice <jrice@ci.durham.nh.us>

**Cc:** Michael Behrendt <mbehrendt@ci.durham.nh.us>

Hi Robin –

Yes the TOTAL incremental revenue would be in the \$38,000 to \$47,000 range (Total valuation/1,000 x tax rate).

Jim has calculated the mean and median assessed values as follows:

Mean = \$358,300

Median = \$342,100

So using \$350,000 it is a savings of less than \$5.00 per household.

Gail

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Yes, this is private property. But the “highest and best use” of this iconic downtown property appears to accrue to the property owner at the cost of razing a hillside urban woodland adjacent to our historic district and residential neighborhood that provides both a setting for Church Hill historic buildings and churches and buffering, both visual and aural, to the adjacent residential neighborhood.

The larger community also pays the cost of greater traffic congestion, contributing to another vicious cycle: Fewer permanent residents shopping or eating downtown, resulting in loss of social capital, e.g., ad hoc community interactions.

Durham NEEDS to support a sustainable community -- sustainable from an environmental/ climate change perspective. Fewer student cars in downtown and good parking management helps residents. That is why the Planning Board -- just a few years ago -- agreed to waive required parking for the developments that now house over 1,000 students. Those students signed leases KNOWING that onsite parking was limited or nonexistent.

Maybe Durham NEEDS to work more closely with UNH and private developers to increase availability and convenience of ride-sharing or car-sharing options such as Zipcar.

Maybe Durham NEEDS to consider zoning that requires downtown developers to provide a certain amount of onsite below-grade/basement parking to support their residential tenants (but not to \*count\* as a commercial use).

Maybe Durham NEEDS to address the challenges of our downtown one-way traffic loop, which often thwarts bicyclists headed west to the UNH campus and endangers even hardy bicyclist commuters during afternoon rush hour.

Durham may NEED to provide more parking to support its downtown businesses. Let's use our limited downtown commercially-zoned land for a broader, enduring and farther-reaching purpose.

Regards,

-- Robin