

To: Michael Behrendt
From: Susan Deese and Louis Piestrak, 35 Garden Lane
Date: January 21, 2021
Subj: Church Hill Parking Proposal

It is with real sorrow that we learn about the return of a terrible plan for the iconic Church Hill woods property. That property is just about the last area in downtown Durham that still has trees. We residents of the Faculty Neighborhood appreciate living close to the university and the Central Business District. But we also cherish whatever buffers exist (and those that can be *added*) to keep our neighborhood a defined and bounded neighborhood.

Any proposal for weakening and destroying natural buffers the neighborhood has long had from student life (and the light, noise, traffic, fumes of cars) goes against decades of Durham's stated long-term goals. It also goes against the clear criteria for Conditional Use zoning. Therefore, this plan should be rejected out of hand.

We are really saddened that Durham would consider changing the nature of the Church Hill property for a gain of a massive parking structure at the far end of the shopping district. If allowed to go through, this plan would increase both pedestrian traffic and vehicle traffic on Main Street. Entering town from Rte 108 would become much more difficult. Moreover, one of the only saving graces of the earlier, still generally awful Mill Plaza plans was the claim that it would NOT increase the number of student cars downtown. Now, the Church Hill plan explicitly states that the parking expansion would serve the (proposed) tenants of Mill Plaza. And if you are being truly honest, you know that will become student housing.

It is already frustrating to constantly have to sit in one's car while a slow stream of students wanders through the crosswalks, or, as is often the case, cross out of the crosswalks. Bringing more student cars into downtown can only make our Town noisier and more crowded. If the foot and vehicle traffic increase any further, I think the business district will become a ghost town. People will do everything they can to avoid the area.

Durham has made a big push to claim that it is ahead of the typical curve on sustainability. Recently, I've seen a number of articles saying that the best hope for fighting climate change is to plant MORE trees. Destroying one of the last downtown forests to create parking spaces sounds like a mad plan from the 1950s. Please embrace more up-to-date thinking and protect the Church Hill forest from destruction. Thank you for your attention.