

November 6, 2023

Michael Behrendt
Durham Town Planner
8 Newmarket Road
Durham, NH 03824

Dear Mr. Behrendt and members of the Durham Planning Board,

On Friday, October 27, 2023, I received notice of the project presentation (which was held on October 25) and a public hearing about the conditional use application of 81 Dover Rd in Durham, to allow for Arts in Reach programming. I would like to express my concerns about the proposed conditional use of 81 Dover Rd.

As an educator and a fan of the arts, I fully support the mission of Arts in Reach and understand its need. However, as one of the immediate abutters and based on the information I was able to glean from the application and supporting documents, I have some strong concerns that I hope the Planning Board will take into consideration.

First, the classification as a community center does not seem to fit the definition that the town lays out: COMMUNITY CENTER – A building that accommodates recreational, educational, entertainment, and/or cultural activities primarily for use by residents of a subdivision or by residents of the community-at-large. It appears that this is not a facility for a subdivision or the community at large, but rather an educational/recreational facility for a very specific and chosen group of participants from specific demographics.

Furthermore, it is stated that a site plan is likely unnecessary to evaluate the conditional use, because the structures (house and barn) are existing and no extensive site changes would be needed. However, in the absence of a submitted site plan to evaluate the conditional use and the limited information that I have, it seems to me that the submission of a site plan now will give Arts in Reach clear information about approved hours of operation, activities allowed, etc. This may then determine whether they will want to move forward with the purchase of 81 Dover Road (if approval is granted).

I am particularly concerned about the following:

Traffic: Dover Road is an extremely busy road, with cars typically going far above the 35-mph speed limit. Whenever I need to turn into my driveway, I am very nervous about the traffic, as I have encountered many near hits (I will also not allow any visitor to back out of my driveway, because it is simply too dangerous). Having vans, private cars or even school buses stop there will only increase the danger, both for drivers and the students (it is my understanding that only approximately 50% of the students use the van). Furthermore, living across from the Durham police station, I see on a daily basis that people often don't yield to the police cars when the officers use their lights and (sometimes) sirens. Having increased traffic around the police station, with potentially school buses stop to load/unload students, could very well delay the police's arrival at an emergency. At the very least, I would strongly recommend that a traffic and speed analysis be done before the town makes any decision on the conditional use, particularly since

the last analysis seems to date back to 2015. A lot has changed since then, i.e., the Riverwoods Retirement Community that was built on Dover Rd.

Stormwater Management and Septic: The proposal states that “Arts In Reach is working with an engineer and abutting property owner(s) to ensure adequate and reasonable stormwater management measures on the property.” To this date, I have not received any consultation or information. As an abutting property owner, I should be included. The stormwater goes through my property, and in the last couple of years the level has risen dramatically. Having 12-35 people (students and staff) at any given time in the house/barn at 81 Dover Rd makes me very nervous about the wetlands behind and next to my house, and the impacts it would have on my property.

Impact on Quality of Life: The proposed location (next door) will have a dramatic adverse impact on my lifestyle. Arts in Reach hopes to eventually serve two groups of 8-15 students simultaneously, so there is a distinct possibility that there would be 30 students (plus staff) next door at the same time. They want to offer programs (including performing arts) after school, during school vacations, on Saturdays (twice per month), full-time during the summer, and potentially a few evenings per year. Even with a 6- or 7-foot fence this means traffic, car fumes, noise, and loss of privacy and peace. I already lost a lot of privacy when the current owner (without any communication) took down many very tall trees and bushes. As a result, I lost my privacy on that side, and my house is exposed to much more sun and wind. I can now see the house on the other side of 81 Dover Rd.

My home is my sanctuary and I work remotely two days per week, spread out over the week. I sit on my back porch (very close to the barn on 81 Dover Rd) or work in my yard as much as the weather allows. During the summer, I basically live on my porch, which I fear I would no longer be able to do in peace. I currently have a wide variety of wildlife come through my yard and past my back porch – something that I enjoy immensely and gives me a great sense of peace. Based on the information that I have, I fear that this will no longer happen, and it will degrade my view and privacy.

Property Value: in the application it is stated that the use will not cause or contribute to a significant decline in property value of adjacent properties. I am not sure how this conclusion was reached, but I would argue that this use will absolutely decrease the value of at least the two abutting properties and will make it less desirable for any future buyers. I am currently in contact with a realtor and some property appraisers to learn more based on their experience and expertise.

Lastly, the applicant states that the house and barn will need to be renovated. The buildings just went through a very extensive renovation. I hope that Durham acknowledges that in the current housing crisis in the area, priority should be given to single families looking for a home rather than allowing businesses to swoop up something that is already in scarcity.

It is my understanding that there will be a site visit on November 8 at 5 pm. I would like to invite the Planning Board members to also visit my property to get a better understanding of the implications that this proposed use of 81 Dover Rd likely would have for me.

At the very least, I would like to see a site plan to be submitted before a determination on the conditional use is made. This would bring transparency to the public and would allow for any stipulations /changes to be made.

As much as I support all the great things that Arts in Reach does, I do not think that 81 Dover Rd is the right location.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Meijer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ms. Leonie Meijer
85 Dover Rd
Durham, NH 03824