



124 Cushing Road | Newmarket, NH 03857
Off: 603-659-0199 | Cell: 603-770-3410
Email: Valerie@GreatBayNH.com

Holly Neiweem

13 Old Landing Road
Durham, NH 03824

holly.neiweem@gmail.com

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RE: 14 Schoolhouse Lane, Durham

Dear Ms. Neiweem,

In response to your question regarding the potential impact on your property value from the proposed redevelopment of the abutting vacant lot located at 14 Schoolhouse Lane, Durham NH into a 4-unit apartment building, my findings are as follows:

The parcel proposed for redevelopment would be considered a transitional location between the primarily multi-family rental properties along Schoolhouse Lane out to Rt. 108 and the directly abutting low impact residential properties along Old Landing Road. As such, the abutting property is located between two distinctly different neighborhoods:

- (1) multi-family and commercial uses located along Schoolhouse Lane and Rt. 108 and
- (2) traditional single family and duplex residential properties with existing or permittable accessory apartments directly abutting the parcel along Old Landing Road.

Given the multi-family uses along Schoolhouse Lane and the high intensity of traffic associated with the Tideline and Three Chimney's Inn operations, I do not believe the proposed use would be detrimental to abutting and nearby properties identified in neighborhood 1. However, I do believe the proposed development could impact abutting properties in the Old Landing Road neighborhood. There would no longer be an orderly transition in uses between the two distinctly different neighborhoods. Additionally, there could be unintended consequences in granting the variance by setting a precedent in permitting multi-family conversions to other abutting properties between Schoolhouse Lane and Old Landing Road properties, resulting in further diminishing of value of those properties.

In order to assess impacts to value, factors such as views, noise and use are reviewed.

VIEW IMPACTS. It would be difficult to argue that granting the variance will have any additional impact on abutting property values solely on size and mass of a structure. The lot could support a 30' high, 7,920 square-foot single-family structure with an accessory dwelling without requiring a variance or any type of site plan review by the Town Planning Board. Such a structure would certainly increase the value of surrounding single family homes and may give cause for abutting single family property owners to make improvements which would also increase their property values. However, this would not be the case for a property abutting a large multi-family apartment building. So while the structures may be the same size and mass, it becomes the type and use of the structure which will potentially impact abutting property values.

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NOISE and USE IMPACTS. The noise created from a 4-unit apartment building vs. the permitted uses in the RA district would impact the property value of the abutting non-multi-family homes especially considering the market for apartments in Durham is primarily geared towards student housing. The in-town location will be particularly of interest to the student market and the large parking area proposed for the building would be conducive to encouraging large outdoor gatherings like what occurs at other in-town multi-family apartment buildings with large parking areas. It is understandable the applicant is seeking to have their property become more consistent with the Schoolhouse Lane neighborhood, however, the unintended consequences of developing the property to multi-family with potentially 2-3 unrelated persons per unit which will typically have high turnover of tenants vs. developing the lot with one of the permitted uses or permitted structures is more likely than not to have a detrimental impact on the abutting Old Landing Road residential properties. The perception of noise impacts and lack of an invested interest in the property by its occupants would be a concern to potential buyers of the Old Landing Road homes and therefore, result in a lower price when compared to limiting the development of the lot to a permitted use in the RA zone. By example, in the recent sale of 6A& 6B Old Piscataqua Road, it was anticipated the 2 condominiums would receive multiple offers and sell at a price much higher than asking given the general supply and demand conditions at that time (and which still exist). While there was a vegetative buffer between the 2-unit condominium building and the Jackson Landing skating rink, buyers objected to the perceived noise impacts associated with the use of the skating rink. The properties sold for less than what was originally projected. All other things being equal, a single-family home in a restricted residential zone which abuts another single-family lot will be more marketable and sell for a higher price than one which abuts a property with a multi-family apartment building, particularly if the primary market for apartments is student housing.

Additional thoughts to consider: I suggest you ask the Zoning Administrator about the feasibility of constructing a 3-story apartment building which would meet the 30' height regulation. It would appear they would need to construct a flat roof building and also relocate the location to account for the topography of the lot or construct retaining walls to meet the maximum 30' height regulation. As to relief from density, you may want to raise the issue of using steep slopes in density calculations. The applicant may need a further density reduction than what is stated in the application. Once the variance is granted the Planning Board may not be able to address that issue. Also, there is a seasonal vegetative buffer to your property along the steep slope between the proposed development area and your boundary. I did not see anything in the application which specifically states the buffer will remain or be enhanced to create a year-round visual buffer. If this is not a condition of approval for a variance it could have a detrimental impact on your property value and may be beyond the purview of the Planning Board to regulate.

As stated in our prior conversation, I am not a licensed appraiser. The above is my professional opinion as a licensed real estate broker specializing in the sale of Durham area real estate since 1993. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Valerie R. Shelton

Valerie R. Shelton, Owner-Principal | GRI, CBR
Licensed N.H. Real Estate Broker #042415

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