

First, having served on numerous Town boards and committees, I appreciate the difficult position that you have been put in regarding the issue of demolition of the current Town Hall. It is, apparently, an emotional issue for some, and an economic issue for many other Durham taxpayers.

If you feel comfortable making the decision to demolish the current Town Hall, then many of us support you in that decision and encourage you to do so. If not, then you should feel very comfortable in following the lead of Chair Stanhope and requesting the Town make the final decision. The town administrator, from day one and continually over the past year and a half, has made it clear that the purchase and renovation of the new Town Hall will not be financially solvent unless the current site is sold and used for its highest possible use – which by all accounts appears only to be a project as Mr. Mitchell proposes.

Members of the Town Council, through numerous and mostly through unanimous votes, have already agreed to the bonding of approx. \$1.8 million for the new Town Hall project. That means Durham taxpayers are already paying – so to say this is not a financial issue is just not accurate. Without the demolition of the current buildings and the sale of this lot to Mr. Mitchell, it will mean approx \$2 million more that will be bonded or in some other way paid for by the taxpayers. That makes the total cost of the new Town Hall, that ALL of us will pay for, to be just under \$4 million. That is a large financial issue for all Durham residents – and so this decision encompasses more than what you need to feel comfortable making. Council members voted for the continuation of the Town Hall project with current bonding fully aware that it would only work financially if the site was sold to Mr. Mitchell for the pharmacy use. For the Council and the Administrator to put this immense financial decision that affects ALL taxpayers for decades to come on the shoulders of the HDC is unfair and irresponsible.

Some of us have commented throughout the new Town Hall project lifecycle that it was irresponsible to get too far into the project without having a transparent payment plan in place. It was further suggested that the Council take an early leadership role to assist and inform any boards or committees involved of the potential tax implications. Neither of those things happened, and so here we are today.

Again, although I support your making a decision to demolish the buildings if you wish to do so, I have a few related facts and reminders:

- The Town Administrator is on record in the minutes of a TC meeting on 5/20/13 stating that there is “no historic value” in the current Town Hall.
- The justification from the Administrator and many Council members for the Town Hall project was because these buildings were not ADA compliant, safe, or comfortable. Just one of those examples is from TC meeting minutes of 4/16/12 in which it is noted that the administrator “spoke in detail of the inadequacies of the current town hall site.” Further justification was stated that the cost to renovate these buildings was higher than the cost for buying and renovating the bank. Given these early justifications, what is the reason to change course and retain the buildings now? What will happen to the buildings if they aren’t torn down? Will they be renovated at further unsustainable cost to the taxpayers?
- I’ve seen the recent letter from the NHDHR. Read it carefully – none of the language is based on requirements, or State RSA’s. I draw your attention to this sentence from the letter: *“As you well know, one of the purposes of the local historic district in Durham is to preserve and promote the historic, cultural, educational, economic, and general welfare of the community.”*

So even if we were to agree that there is historic value in these buildings, what are the cultural, educational, and more importantly to many of us – the economic and general welfare benefits to all residents and taxpayers of Durham by keeping these buildings intact?

The HDC in Durham, of which I have been a member, has historically been involved with the look, design, and other important aspects of building projects in Town. I haven't always agreed with the process or the individual views expressed, but I respect the commission's function. The recent work of this group with the Orion project has been touted as a success story in how stringent Town objectives can be accomplished through hard work, collaboration, and mutual trust with a developer. There is no reason to think that same process and outcome can't be done with this board and Mr. Mitchell.

That should be the focus of the HDC moving forward. Thank you very much for your efforts on this and other projects and for listening to our comments.