

To: Durham Planning Board

From: Judith Spang, Wiswall Road

Re: Landscaping of Peak Development

Date: November 10, 2014

Dear Planning Board members,

Ever since its completion, I have been greatly distressed at the appearance of the Peak Development on the beautiful agricultural scenery of Mast Road. If there is an iconic vista of agriculture in our town, it is surely the Tecce fields on one side and Moore fields on the other. (It doesn't seem so long ago that townspeople waged a vigorous battle to save the Moore fields from being destroyed for athletic fields!!)

I and other Durham residents ask, "What happened that the Town of Durham could allow such a visual travesty here?" Our regulations dictate that an intrusive difference between uses in the downtown area requires screening. It is unfortunate that this high density urban-looking development, dropped so incongruously into the agricultural fields on Mast Road, could not have been required to do the same.....starting with keeping the wooded area already on the site.

The ineffectual line of immature trees along the retaining wall have decades to go before they might screen the view. But even then, being planted below the wall, they will never grow tall enough to cover the view of the buildings above. Plantings closer to the buildings, both along the fence and nearer to the structures, are needed. More screening of the wall itself is needed. Trees and other screening of the buildings from Mast Road should have been in the plan, too.

It appears that there is now an opportunity to do something about this. Without saying so, it appears that Peak is willing to trade more effective landscaping with an increase in the number of permitted bedrooms in its project.

Many in Durham feel that the town has maxed out the number of student accommodations that are financially viable. This is a matter of the private marketplace to decide, and to act accordingly. The concern of residents and decision-makers alike is the number of students that the town can accommodate. I'm sure that Peak will argue that the development is outside the downtown, so the increase in beds is of less consequence. If the Planning Board should agree with Peak, it should then consider that these beds would generate a significant financial benefit to the property owners: Peak should be expected to invest a substantial amount in ameliorating the project's assault on the aesthetics of Mast Road.

However, whether or not the additional beds are approved, it is important that Peak seizes this opportunity to prove to both Durham and future investors that they are a student housing company that actually has the expertise and community mindedness to harmoniously integrate their "mini city" into its landscape on Mast Road.

To reiterate, I cannot overemphasize the significance of this issue. Surprisingly often, I hear the word "heartbreaking" from those who drive Mast Road. Durham deserves much better.

Respectfully,

Judith Spang,

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