

February 11, 2015

Dear Chairman Wolfe and Members of the Board:

I am writing with regard to the current proposal to subdivide the Mill Pond Center property. My understanding is that the proposal (recently amended to provide for a two-lot subdivision rather than three-lot) is currently in the design review stage and that after tonight's public hearing the Board could decide to close the design review. Also, I understand that while whatever plan emerges at the end of the design review is not binding in any subsequent formal application, it is, however, recognized as a significant guidance document in the planning process.

I assume that the Board will hear or has been hearing concerns regarding the potential location of a new house lot in the historic district. I trust that the Board and the HDC will address those concerns. My comments are directed at another aspect of the design review and its potential impact on our community.

My request is that the Board give careful consideration to the preservation and potential future uses of the existing house and barn. The planner's recommendations dated 1-14-15 include a provision in item #34 recommending that "the applicant should abandon all or most variances and prior approvals that have been given, so that this site permits only single family uses." (I have not seen online any amendment to that recommendation.) As you know, prior to the sale of the property to Seacoast Rep, the Mill Pond Center for the Arts provided the Town and surrounding area with a unique and beautiful setting for arts and environmental education, performance, and gatherings (and I would point out that, during several periods of time, the property accommodated both community programming and an owner-occupied residence). I think it would be a shame to preclude or substantially limit the possibility of such activities being resumed in the future and I sincerely hope that Board decisions made as part of the current design review do not head us in that direction.

Thank you for your consideration and for all the hard work you do on behalf of the Town of Durham.

Best wishes,  
Amanda Merrill  
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