

## For January 11, 2017 Public Hearing on Town Council-Initiated Amendments

Dear Members of the Durham Planning Board,

I am writing in support of the Town Council-initiated amendments that eliminate student housing as part of a Mixed Use option downtown and provide a new use: Mixed Use with office/retail below and elderly housing above. The TC voted unanimously to move these amendments forward to the PB.

First, I think it is important to note that we have experienced tremendous redevelopment of our downtown in the last few years, creating approximately 1000 new beds downtown. As you are aware, an additional 330 more beds are currently under consideration. Add this to the 1000+ beds we have recently added west of campus, and I believe that we have maxed out on the demand given UNH's flat enrollment projections. (This is based on Councilor Lawson's student housing inventory and analysis of demand a few years back.) Does Durham want to continue to load our downtown with more and more students, which not only impacts the kinds of businesses we attract downtown but also jeopardizes the viability of the recently constructed student housing complexes west of campus. In my view, continuing to build beyond the demand threatens to diminish the viability of the large student housing developments to the west and with that the promised tax benefit of these mega housing complexes. (Please recall that the reason we approved them was for the tax benefit.)

Second, a healthy community is one that offers diversity of housing and businesses. Right now, our downtown is very lopsided which is reflected in the market-driven businesses that choose to come to Durham. How many pizza places, bars, and now vape shops do we need? The amendments before you promise to bring more diversity to the downtown in both residences and businesses. If we continue down the current path, even at 600 sq. feet per occupant, we are likely to continue to draw more and more student-oriented redevelopment downtown. Imagine, for instance, student couples doubling up in larger student apartments to help pay the rent (even if technically not permitted).

Some wonder whether seniors would even want to live along Main Street given all the students? But do not forget that should the current proposal at the Mill Plaza not proceed due to denial of variance requests or other factors, many residents believe that Mill Plaza would also be an ideal location for senior housing.

When the Planning Board discusses this amendment, I hope you will keep in mind that according to RSA 672:1, the duties of the Planning Board are to consider the health, safety, and welfare of the *entire* community and accordingly the appropriate and wise use of land. The Planning Board should make decisions based upon what is good for the *entire community* as opposed to a few individual property owners.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Olshansky