

March 8, 2017

Re: The Amendments

Dear Members of the Durham Planning Board,

The Planning Board is used to spending a bulk of its time processing development proposals. While this is challenging work, there are guidelines and regulations to follow. It is not nearly as challenging as the hard work of PLANNING.

We are at a critical crossroads. According to Jim Lawson's analysis:

- 1) our supply of unrelated housing has already met the demand,
- 2) allowing more unrelated housing downtown threatens the fiscal well-being of *our entire community*.

As someone who registers students to vote every year, I can attest to the fact that those students who live at The Lodges and The Cottages are hoping to move downtown in the future. They want to be closer to campus and "the weekend action." More student housing downtown (beyond the 330 more beds likely to be built at The Plaza), will push us well over the top in terms of oversupply. Now add 440 more (projected by Jim Lawson), and we will have added 770 more beds downtown. This has the potential of draining 770 students out of The Lodges and The Cottages. Please keep in mind that both those projects were approved by the PB after submitting a fiscal impact analysis demonstrating a positive fiscal impact for the community. We would not have approved them otherwise.

If those complexes begin to empty out, their assessed value decreases and thus the tax revenue they bring to the community also decreases. Unlikely these housing complexes will fill up with families because what parents in their right mind want their children to live in a housing

project full of poor role models for their children. Secondly, what adults would want to live there? We know from the experiment at The Grange, adults living with students does not work well. And should unaware families decide to move out to these developments, Jim's analysis states that it takes only adding 27 new students to our schools to negate *any positive fiscal impact*. What are we doing???

WE HAVE A BIG PROBLEM AND IT MUST BE SOLVED.

While we are a community sympathetic to the downtown business owners, we need to consider the BIG PICTURE. Like any investment that fluctuates over time, there is no guarantee for maxing out our financial investments. The town should not be in the business of insuring an individual's profit, but rather must consider the fiscal well-being of the *entire community*.

It is time for PB members to accept the fact that we need a correction or we will, as Councilor Katrak stated, "lose the soul of our community." With potentially burgeoning taxes to compensate for loss of tax revenue from The Lodges and The Cottages, and a downtown that offers more and more student-oriented businesses, what will attract prospective residents to this town? If perspective home buyers want good schools, they can live in Lee or Madbury.

I hope the Planning Board will step back and look at the long-term health and welfare of our community for the years to come. That is what Planning is all about.

Respectfully Submitted,

Beth Olshansky

PS I think Jay Michael had an interesting idea to enact a moratorium. One way or another, we need to pause the downtown development process until we come up with a viable plan. I ask the PB and the TC to evaluate which mechanism would work best.