

July 12, 2017

Planning Board
8 Newmarket Road
Durham, NH 03824

RE: *Riverwoods CCRC – Conversion of Barn to Market Center. Site plan and conditional use, related to the Riverwoods CCRC to convert the existing barn and a portion of the existing house on the adjacent lot to a marketing center, reconfigure parking, and make other site changes.*

Greetings,

Many in the community welcome the *idea* of RiverWoods opening a branch in Durham, at least in part because friends now live there and because most of us have positive attitudes toward the original Exeter location. But as everyone has heard *ad nauseam*, the devil is in the details. And one of those details is the proposed redesign of the barn, which will be used for five years for the intended purpose, but then the screen dims...

RiverWoods proposes to make changes to a visually prominent, if not important, historic building along one of our gateways. It would be establishing a nonprofit operation in what may be an institutional-size new building on this site, with a significant reduction in vegetative buffer, radically altering the visual approach to Durham. It would not be paying property taxes, and it remains to be seen whether Durham residents will choose to move to the facility. A Payment in Lieu of Taxes also remains to be worked out, so one might ask, "How would the community benefit?"

Vertical panels beneath windows:

As you know, the Heritage Commission held a related public hearing on July 6. While the Commission has no decision-making authority over the project, it does have both specialized expertise and standing in our community.

Regarding the vertical panels beneath the windows, I concur with the comments of concern submitted to the Commission by email from Nancy Sandberg ("...The latest designs for the north and south elevations are too high and out of proportion to the original window and door openings") and others, as well as with the following excerpts from the public hearing:

- Town Planner Michael Behrendt: "On the west and the east elevation, there are panels below all the windows... And a number of people have expressed this in their comments. The desire to keep the traditional character of the barn while accommodating reasonable changes...this is one element that, by including those panels, they create this vertical sense for all the windows, and it really, I think, disrupts that great traditional proportion of the barn and the sense of the barn. So I would urge you, if there is only one thing, to eliminate those panels and just extend the clapboards across."
- Chair Peter Stanhope: "I would follow Michael's comments by saying those panels have been strongly objected to by people who feel they do not fit the character of a New

England barn. (There are some people who think the frequency of windows is too prevalent on the side of the barn.) ...But as a member of the Heritage Commission and having heard from members of the public, there is strong concern about those panels as just being a distraction to our gateway and to the character of a NE barn.... I understand the windows make the interior of the building function at a much higher level, but I can't see that the panels are more than an architectural pimple on the side of the house (excuse my vernacular)."

Gateways: Master Plan Land Use Forum, May 13, 2017

The summary of input collected from the Master Plan Land Use Forum held two months ago reveals that many residents regard our **gateways, our natural resources, and our agricultural heritage as assets.**

Nancy Sandberg's letter to the Heritage Commission reveals her expertise as a local historian. You will have seen the entire letter, but I make note of a small excerpt:

The old farm and barn are an important part of the gateway into historic Durham. Preserving these buildings while adaptively reusing the property as a marketing center I hope is the goal of the Heritage Commission.

Peter Stanhope stated at the Heritage Commission's public hearing, "Compromise sometimes is the road to success...." In that spirit, I would recommend that the Board consider positively those proposed architectural changes to the barn that are critical to modern functions but ask that the applicant omit unnecessary modernization, e.g., the vertical window ornamentation, and revisit Nancy Sandberg's recommendations regarding proportions.

Thank you for considering these points.

Regards,

[Signed: Robin Mower]