

To: The Durham Conservation Commission
From: Carol Birch, 17 Garden Lane
Date: November 20, 2020
Re: Mill Plaza – Conservation Commission Review

Thank you for all you are doing regarding the difficult job of reviewing the documentation on various positions on the Mill Plaza Redevelopment. I know that you have a great deal of input to process in a short time before providing a recommendation to the Planning Board regarding how well the Mill Plaza Redevelopment complies with current requirements, including minimizing or eliminating wetland setback violations. Thus, I will be brief, mostly echoing the concerns and hopes expressed by scores of my neighbors over many years.

I am an avid walker. I walk all over the downtown area and have spent many hours in the Mill Plaza Shopping Center, especially when the ice cream stand used to be in operation as a community-gathering fixture.

The 10-acre plaza could and should be a downtown gem for Durham. Imagine the type of site that the collaborative Mill Plaza Study report detailed, with year-round community space for interaction, shopping, and eating. Imagine the beautiful brook-side park that report describes, for walking, biking, and gathering.

As scores of my neighbors have written and said over the years, the proposed buildings are wildly over-sized for the site, the destruction of the wooded hillside between the plaza and Main St to put massive proposed Building C is horrifying. There is no excuse for having so many parking spaces and other structures in the wetland setback. CDA should be required to make the buildings smaller, to spare the wooded hillside, and stay out of the wetland buffer with other structures.

We all want a finer plaza, but if Colonial Durham Associates is allowed to do what they are planning, it will desecrate for all our lifetimes the potential of this site. What CDA is proposing is in violation of being an ethical partner as well as being in violation of our conditional use zoning on almost every dimension of the ordinance. Some aspects of what they propose seem like a big improvement only because they have treated the site so badly over the decades. Similar improvements could be incorporated into a much better plan that complies with our zoning.

Thank you.