

To: The Durham, NH Planning Board
From: Dennis Meadows, 34 Laurel Lane, Durham
Date: May 20, 2020
Re: Fiscal Impact Analysis for Mill Plaza Redevelopment

On May 27, 2020 you will again discuss the fiscal impact study submitted by Mark Fourgere in support of CDA's proposal for revising its Mill Plaza development. To understand the issues that have been raised about Mr. Fougere's report, I have reread the 11 relevant documents posted on the Planning Board's website since the FIA was submitted - 3 under Supporting Documents¹ and 8 under Citizens Comments.²

Four important facts stand out.

First, the eight posted letters that explicitly address the FIA are intensely critical. Only three inputs, one letter and two comments in the *Planning Consultant's Reviews*, have been favorable to the analysis.

Second, the negative reviews were written by people who live in Durham, pay taxes here, and will thus be affected financially, socially, and environmentally by the results of the Board's decision.

The positive reviews were from people who do not live in Durham, do not pay taxes here, and thus will not be affected financially, socially, or environmentally by the Board's decision.

The negative reviews come from seven people with a wide variety of professions. The positive reviews come from two people who are paid to facilitate development.

Third, despite our society being in the very early stages of an economic collapse widely acknowledged to be without precedent in the past century, the FIA ludicrously assumes that projections of past trends are valid foundations for projecting future economic impacts of the proposal.

Fourth, although Durham residents have pointed out numerous important errors and omissions in the Fourgere report, these have not been

¹ Souter, Tainter, Tainter

² Chen, Gottschneider, Katrak, Lund, Meadows, Mower, Mower, Olshansky

addressed by anyone supporting the project. In his April 29 report Mr. Tainter wrote, "I anticipate that Mr. Fougere will address many of these concerns in his presentation of the report." He definitely did not address them.

These four facts have two implications.

First, since the Board wants to base its decision on information about the full range of possible outcomes, it should not rely solely on the narrow analyses of someone chosen and paid for by the developer. At the May 13, 2020 Planning Board meeting Jim Lawson pointed out that CDA's FIA is a best-case analysis. He eloquently suggested the Board hire an independent consultant who would provide a worst-case analysis. Then the Board would be able to consider a more realistic range of future outcomes before reaching its decisions.

Durham regulations governing conditional use permits explicitly require: "The Planning Board's decision shall be based upon an analysis of the fiscal impact of the project on the town." Mr. Fourgere's analysis does not do that, but an independent analysis could. Since the future is so uncertain, the independent consultant should not be constrained to a narrow set of issues. At a minimum the independent impact assessment should respond to the so-far unanswered questions and objections addressed to Fourgere's analysis by the eight letters of record.

Durham regulations explicitly state, "The Planning Board may commission, at the applicant's expense, an independent analysis of the fiscal impact of the project on the town." The regulations do not authorize cost sharing. The citizens of Durham already have "skin in the game" with this initiative. It has cost us many thousands of dollars in direct costs and volunteered labor. It is totally appropriate to ask CDA to pay the full cost for securing information about the consequences of the initiative it has proposed.

Second, several Durham residents have specifically asked the Planning Board to suspend consideration of this proposal until conditions again permit all our concerned citizens to observe the proceedings in the normal way and to participate fully without worrying about their personal safety.

Short delays will be of little consequence for the CDA initiative, which has been under discussion in Durham for many years. Indeed CDA has asked

the Planning Board to pause the review process on more than one occasion. Surely it will be willing to extend the same courtesy to the Board.

CDA has frequently stated that it wants its project to serve the people of Durham. The firm would not want to force its proposal through during a period when many Durham citizens are unable to participate normally in the discussion about their project, which will profoundly shape the future of the town. Please secure CDA's agreement to adjourn the Mill Plaza discussions until after public hearings can again be organized in a way that permits all interested people to assemble freely and to express their views without worrying about the danger to their personal health.