

December 1, 2021

Durham Planning Board
c/o Rick Taintor, Contract Planner
Town of Durham

Dear Planning Board Members,

We are Jean and Jerry Olson. We lived on Mill Pond Road for 25 years and loved the mix of small town and nature, such as our mini-wilderness, the Milne Nature Preserve, walking trails, and always being surrounded with trees. We loved our home, neighbors, and community. We moved to Indiana a year ago to share our lives with our daughter's family. Although, we no longer live in Durham, we still care deeply about its future. Therefore, we are writing this letter in support of the growing movement to urge the Planning Board to deny CDA's proposed development of the Mill Plaza. We agree with the well-documented concerns of the 1,008 citizens from all over Durham who signed the August 2021 petition opposed to the focus of this development.

When we think of Durham, we envision the flow of town, nature, and community (both students and residents). We often spoke about the need for a good redevelopment of the Mill Plaza. But never in our wildest dreams (or nightmares) did we ever imagine multi-storied buildings crammed with 258 student beds (albeit with some commercial space on the first floor) stuffed into a narrow parking lot with a tiny, 50-year old grocery building and more than an acre of trees cut down. Is this a sensible design plan for the largest retail space in Durham, for Durham's *only* downtown shopping plaza?

What continues to puzzle us is the Planning Board's continuing and never-ending tolerance of CDA coming back to the table time after time with proposals that clearly violate existing zoning standards (neighborhood scale fit, wetland setbacks, noise, light, hours of activity, etc.). It is our understanding that the legal agreement of 2015 required CDA to meet all other zoning standards. If so, why has this issue dragged on for six more years with one zoning-violating plan after another?

We appreciate this opportunity to share our concerns as former long-term residents. We are clearly not NIMBYs, as the Plaza is now a 1,000 miles from where we live. Yet, if we still lived in Durham, we would have signed the well-founded petition and displayed a lawn sign. We would have done those things, not because we are *against* students (students add a lot of dynamism to Durham), but because we are *in favor of* development that enriches the lives of *all* who live in a town – students and long-term residents alike. The current proposal offers a limited benefit to students and *not* a benefit to long-term residents. It is beneficial only to the out-of-state owners who want to exploit the site for maximum profit. Durham's zoning sets limits to such exploitation and gives the Planning Board broad discretion to reject any plan that doesn't meet current standards. We urge you to follow zoning requirements and reject CDA's non-compliant plan. Then a better more-compliant plan will surely be forthcoming, either from the current owners or the next ones.

Jean & Jerry Olson