

From: [John Hart](#)
To: [external forward for sneedell](#); [Rick Taintor](#); [Michael Behrendt](#); [Karen Edwards](#)
Subject: Mill Plaza redevelopment; site walk Nov 20, 2020
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19 Nov 2020

Dear Sally and the Durham Conservation Commission:

I'm back again with some commentary on the proposed Mill Plaza redevelopment.

The total encroachment is a huge percentage of the site, ten percent of the total site in my recollection, and markings of the extent might be helpful for the town boards and citizens. It is unacceptable to grandfather this encroachment, as the proposed project is huge and will destroy pretty much everything on site except (unfortunately) the Hannaford's bldg. Demo will include the "bank building," all asphalt, all trees including the ones they just installed for purely political reasons. [Planting new trees that you know you will rip out within a year is pretty darn cynical, and hard to watch (more natural resources being destroyed).]

The redevelopment is a total do-over of almost the entire site and should be seen as a new project, subject to 2020 rules and regs -- any grandfather from the 1960's is long dead and buried.

I've included below a summary of my comments on the Site Walk, Nov 20, 2020, which add some rationale to my conclusions.

Thanks for all you do for the Town!

John Hart, President, Brookside Commons Condo Assn
13 Mill Rd #9, Durham
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Mill Plaza/Durham Conservation Commission Site Walk, 20 Nov 2020

1. Problems with wetland/shoreland setbacks, College Brook health, and planting plans

- [For site walk, the boundaries of the wetlands and shoreland protection zones should be delineated clearly]
- Wetland protection zone compromised
- Shoreland protection zone very compromised: almost 1 acre under asphalt, almost 10 % of whole site
- Grandfathering of above violations should not be allowed: this is a wholly new project, totally altering the site; current standards, rules, and regulations should apply
- Habitat restoration is non-existent; improvements to College Brook are absent (reducing bank

slopes, removing riprap, installing coir stabilization plantings, step-pool systems, etc)

- Proposed runoff and drainage solutions are improvements to existing conditions, but are still minimal and insufficient (rain gardens, green roofs, site vegetation, etc)
- Trash and debris into College Brook will increase with increased residential and commercial use
- Proposed planting plans are minimal, design is poor, habitat is non-existent; both in wetland/shoreland protection zones and throughout the site
- Invasive plants are present throughout the wetlands and shoreland protection zones
- Very little that speaks to Durham's commitment to sustainable development
- **Please refer also to my testimony and letter to the DCC of July 23, 2018

2. Environmental impacts on abutter at 13 Mill Road

- Many related impacts from issues in (1) above: degradation of shoreland, wetland, and riverine habitats
- Various forms of pollution from increased residential and commercial use of Mill Plaza site, including vehicular pollution, noise, light, litter, visual (massive buildings, dead trees, etc)
- Seeding of invasive species from Mill Plaza site to 13 Mill Road (Japanese knotweed, purple loosestrife, multiflora rose, in particular)
- Siltation of now non-existent pond

3. Some recommendations

- Follow the laws, removing construction from wetlands and shoreland protection zones; this will require substantial reduction in scale of the proposed design, likely resulting in widespread public and governmental acceptance and rapid approval of the project
- Restore habitat in the wetland/shoreland corridors; remove dead, invasive and poisonous vegetation
- Expand sustainable development aspects of proposal, including larger planting areas, raingardens and bioswales, green roofs, solar panels, electric vehicle ports, bicycle racks, people amenities
- Dredge silted pond at 13 Mill Rd, stabilize slopes, restore habitat; apparently Mill Plaza did dredge this area in the 1990's at the request of the Brookside Commons residents
- Remove wooden bridge over College Brook connecting 13 Mill Rd with Mill Plaza

4. Tangentially related to DCC site walk, here's some information on habitat restoration at 13 Mill Rd being undertaken by the Brookside Commons Condo Assn:

- Recommended dredging of pond, removal of silt and invasive species, bank stabilization, habitat planting; area will act as sponge for heavy rains and provide increased habitat diversity
- Removal of dead/dying trees, invasive Norway maples, Amer elms (dying), white ash (dying);

retain stumps and root systems to prevent erosion

- Removal of invasive shrub and vine species, incl multiflora rose, autumn olive, Euro and glossy buckthorn, honeysuckle, winged Euonymus, oriental bittersweet
- Install large native shrub species adapted to site
- Lawn: mow at 4-inch height and leave clippings to decompose; mow on a bi-weekly rather than a weekly schedule; annual topdressing with compost, aeration, overseeding with predominantly fescue mix with clover; mow fall leaves and leave on ground to decompose; no applications of fertilizers or pesticides.

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