

From: [John Hart](#)
To: [Karen Edwards](#); [Michael Behrendt](#); [Rick Taintor](#)
Subject: Mill Plaza Redevelopment testimony
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15 April 2021

Town of Durham Planning Board
Newmarket Road
Durham NH 03825

RE: Mill Plaza Redevelopment

As a direct abutter to Mill Plaza, I've written a number of letters and commented a number of times at public hearings on the Mill Plaza Redevelopment by Colonial Durham Associates (CDA). I have nothing new to add here, but before the public hearing closes, I wanted to summarize my thoughts and feelings.

The design plan (January 2021) for Mill Plaza has improved incrementally over the seven years of its evolution, but unfortunately, even in its ninth design iteration, it remains deeply and prohibitively flawed. Years of concerned and thoughtful comments from town officials, scientists, engineers, ecologists, and citizens have been almost totally ignored. It appears that any significant improvement in the design has been forestalled by a need to maximize potential profit at the expense of any significant alteration of the plan. As I and others have said before, if CDA had listened to input and adjusted the plan accordingly, this project would have been approved easily in 2015.

As currently proposed, this redevelopment of Mill Plaza will have little benefit and considerable disadvantage to the town in terms of aesthetics, public space, housing, tax relief, ecological health, sustainability, vehicular traffic, downtown parking, neighborhood enhancement, pollution (water, soil, air, noise, light), litter, and other areas. This plan fails in all areas.

Many of the negative issues just listed are criteria required of this development under the Conditional Use guidelines of the Town of Durham. This development violates many and arguably most of the Conditional Use criteria, where violation of just one of the criteria requires the Planning Board to vote this project down. Specifics of my claim have been detailed repeatedly over the years in other letters and testimony.

Over some decades of ownership, Colonial Durham Associates has proved themselves to be very poor stewards of the land and poor keepers of their word, repeatedly. Some of their actions through the years have been in violation of town and state regulations and laws. This statement has also been detailed in other testimony through the years.

In summary:

- This is a poor plan by any measure other than potential profit for the developer.
- This plan violates wetland and shoreland zones.
- This plan is in significant contradiction of many if not most Conditional Use criteria.
- Almost all public testimony over seven years has been negative.
- Colonial Durham Associates are very poor land stewards and cannot be trusted to follow through on agreements or at times the law.

It is inconceivable to me that this project, as currently presented, would be approved by the Planning Board. Disturbingly, I sense from comments by some members of the Planning Board and some town officials that this project is going to get the green light. As a direct abutter to Mill Plaza, I am staring into the barrel of months of ledge blasting, over a year of construction noise and pollution, followed by a massive and permanent negative alteration of my neighborhood and a loss

of equity in my home. I have begun looking for housing elsewhere and in a different town. I enjoy my life in Durham, but that life will be obliterated by this massive development, some 200 feet off my living room, bedroom, and sunroom. This has little to do with the regulations you must follow in your deliberations, but your decisions are not without consequence to citizens.

Thank you again for your selfless and time-consuming work on the Planning Board.

John Hart
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