

July 6,2021

To the Planning Board Members:

There seems to be some serious misrepresentation about the opposition to the current development plan for the Mill Road Plaza in Durham.

Residents displaying the signs and signing the petition are not "against" UNH students. Indeed, UNH students are among those who have signed the petition and are displaying the signs. We are all necessary parts of the same community and share the same desire for a welcoming and respectful environment.

The opposition expressed in the black-and-white yard signs is to the specific NYC-based Colonial Durham Associates (CDA) Mill Plaza site-plan -- for its disregard for the community values codified in our land use regulations.

I understand that the Planning Board must work with these legal requirements. And the Board has the zoning tools to stop a terrible plan. Virtually no one who lives in Durham, long-term residents and UNH students alike, wants our small shopping plaza turned into noisy and crowded 3-and 4- story apartment buildings, an insufficient setback from College Brook, blasting away the thickly vegetated hillside buffer near Main Street housing, and a bulldozed adjacent Church Hill Woods made into a high-rise football-field size parking edifice for Plaza tenants' cars.

The debate is NOT about welcoming or not welcoming students. It IS about not wanting to lose any more of our small-town character. The proposed site plan does not serve to enhance our downtown in ways that represent the values of the Durham community. It is certainly not pedestrian-friendly, for example.

How, exactly, would the plan benefit the community? And I'm not just talking about the impact on the tax base, which will be affected by a glut of student housing as UNH enrollment hits the long-anticipated "cliff" of 2025 and beyond.

I started by emphasizing that the yard signs signal opposition to the proposal itself. I agree with Malcolm Sandberg's entreaty to the Planning Board. "It is time to close the public hearing, deliberate, and deny the CDA application as submitted."

Sincerely,

Katie Wheeler, NH State Senate 1996-2002

Resident of 27 Mill Road, Durham since August 1967