

Dear Conservation Commission Members,

I am writing to encourage the Conservation Commission to reject the proposed development and encroachment on the wetland buffer in Mill Plaza.

Many years ago, much time and discussion went into community planning regarding the redevelopment of the plaza, making it into a pleasant, walkable hub in downtown Durham. Part of that plan included the preservation of the College Brook side of the parking lot with environmental sensitivity, landscaping and places to sit and chat with friends and neighbors.

Now, we are confronted by a plan which presents a focus on 4 story student housing and the virtual elimination of a welcoming, walkable place to shop or gather. The plans are such that in order to deal with the increased paved area, the number of cars and huge buildings and the concomitant stormwater run-off, there is no chance that the wetland buffer will be anything more than a tiny add-on to the concretized cityscape which will transform the downtown area.

To make matters worse, the need for additional parking in order to meet the requirements specified by Hannafords has brought back to life a separate development proposal for a parking lot on on the adjacent property (Church Hill area) which will wipe out one of the last stands of trees in the area, create even more run-off of sand and salt into College Brook.

The Conservation Commission has done yeoman service for the preservation of the rural nature of our town surroundings. It is now time to address the prime downtown area with an eye toward sustainable infrastructure in keeping with zoning requirements, town policies and residents' desires.

Beyond the serious concern of the encroachment on the wetland, we need to answer these questions: How much habitat will be ruined? How much pollution will be added to College Brook and the Oyster River? How much traffic congestion will we experience in the downtown area and avenues of ingress and egress to town? How much will noise and light pollution increase?

Please reject this proposal on environmental grounds as it now stands as you consider the sustainable future of Durham in the broadest sense of that concept.

Thank you,

Kay Morgan  
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