

To: Rick Taintor, Contract Planner, Todd Selig, Town Administrator
Members of the Planning Board

From: Kay Morgan, 16 Valentine Hill Rd., Durham

Date: 12/10/21

From the 2007 Town Report (pp. 72 - 73): The Mill Plaza Study Committee has hosted dozens of public meetings and workshops to generate ideas and conceptual plans for redeveloping the nine-acre Mill Plaza property in the heart of downtown. We have done so with the encouragement of Plaza property-owner John Pinto — who in late 2006 suggested the Town develop its vision for the future

Planning Board (PB) membership has come and gone during those years, and after the plans developed by meeting attendees and the pro-bono work of 3 teams of architects who produced a prize-winning design by 2008, where are we in 2021 on the cusp of 2022? And what has happened to our “vision for the future?”

Attorney Pollack is fond of reminding the PB and residents that this process has gone on for 7 years, but I want to point out that since the first plan presented by Colonial Durham Associates (CDA) and particularly since the legal settlement of 2015, CDA is responsible for dragging out the process by presenting one plan after another that doesn't comply with the Conditional Use requirements of the Town of Durham, the legal settlement agreement or the spirit of the Master Plan (which ought to be the guiding document for reviewing ALL development in Durham).

We have heard endlessly how hard they have worked and how hard they have tried to comply and, you know, we've heard repeatedly that they have done everything they can do. So why does Attorney Pollack hammer away at this lapse of time and throw in the opinion that “It is a once-in-a generation opportunity?”

He does it for two reasons, I believe. First, to make the Planning Board feel guilty for continuing to question the plans and to request changes. Second, to intimidate the Planning Board and the Public by the implicit threat that sooner or later CDA is going to walk away from all redevelopment if we don't capitulate to one of their many insufficient (one might say terrible) plans.

I hope the Planning Board does not feel guilty or intimidated by his rhetoric. Over the years, members have voiced legitimate concerns and have kept the original goals of re-development at the forefront, as they should. This community, many years ago, stood up to Aristotle Onassis and the dreadful proposal to locate an oil refinery in Great Bay. It's clear the public is prepared to support a similar rejection of the idea of 3 and 4 story buildings adjacent to family neighborhoods, which do nothing to further the vision developed by the community 15 years ago.

I have one simple suggestion for Colonial Durham Assoc. that will bring this process to a successful conclusion for all of us: To wit: Shrink the 2 new buildings. Take off the two top

floors and reduce the footprint of each building. Move giant building C back from the buffer and away from the hillside.

With these reduced footprints, try to divine how a roadway into the Plaza from the current entrance could be configured so that it isn't in the buffer and trucks could still turn around and get out of the Plaza.

In addition to your green roof, add some solar panels, imagine some green space where now you have tar. Imagine buildings which, themselves, are environmentally sustainable even energy-producing in line with new ideas for "regenerative development," * and for goodness sake, match the scale of architecture in town of the buildings in the surrounding neighborhood.

Present a proposal that looks forward instead of back. Design with the environment in mind and with fewer students but more offerings to draw town residents, as well as students, to shop in the Plaza. This could be an opportunity to better integrate Town and Gown, but we're not there yet.

We've been waiting 15 years, for a fully functional shopping area and town center. It is CDA who have continually failed to meet the most basic aspects of the settlement and Conditional Use requirements not to mention the guiding principles in the Master Plan.

The Planning Board must continue to push back until the final proposal meets all of the above regulations in letter and spirit. The Public, will continue to hold the Planning Board and CDA to account.

*See *The Boston Globe* October 24, 2021 Front Page of the section "Address."