

Planning Board Meeting Oct. 20,2021

To Planning Board

CC; Todd Selig, Michael Behrend

From: Peter Wolfe

Date: 10/23/2021

Having been chair of the Planning Board for three years and member for many years I know how hard it is to sit and listen to members of the public speak with whom you do not agree. What I did learn however was there was always something useful to take away from the public's input. We can learn from each other. Public input is a necessary and valuable aspect of the planning process.

I just viewed DCAT of the Planning Board Meeting of Oct. 20,2021 and am concerned by the tone of some members when addressing comments by the public. Please remember that during the planning process we all want what is best for Durham. Of course, we have differences but that does not mean we cannot learn from each other and respect each other.

Residents giving input need to feel heard when presenting to the board. If they feel that they have not been heard they will bring up the topic again and again and dismiss the process as not caring about what they have said. I mediated and trained mediators for over 10 years and taught the mediation clinic at the University of New Hampshire School of Law. During my career mediations failed when parties feel they have not been heard. To counter this, I spent a lot of time training mediators about **active listening**. People need to feel they have been understood and heard. These same principles of **active listening** apply to running a meeting.

Active listening is the process of listening attentively while someone else speaks, paraphrasing or reflecting back what is said when the speaker is finished, and withholding judgment and advice. People need to feel heard. An example you might consider is for the planning board member to say "I understand that "abc" is important to you. We are not discussing that tonight but will look into it at a future meeting." Or "thank you for your concerns about "xyz" and their impact on the project."

Last, remember no one has a monopoly on what is accurate or correct. As an example, the Planning Board had an inaccurate understanding of the zoning ordinance it wrote relating to parking in the wetland buffer during the course of this project.

I would like to attend the Planning Board meeting Wednesday to talk more about this topic but unfortunately, I am attending a memorial dinner for a friend who died. But I am available other times to discuss these topics.