

December 11, 2020

Planning Board
8 Newmarket Road
Durham, NH 03824

RE: *Public Hearing - Mill Plaza Redevelopment. 7 Mill Road. Continued review of application for site plan and conditional use for mixed use redevelopment project and activity within the wetland and shoreland overlay districts. Colonial Durham Associates, property owner. Sean McCauley, agent. Joe Persechino, Tighe & Bond, engineer. Emily Innes and Sharon Ames, Harriman, project designer. Ari Pollack, attorney. (Rick Taintor is serving as the Town's Contract Planner.) Central Business District. Map 5, Lot 1-1.*

Topics in this letter: Traffic-related issues, including access driveway safety; bicycle storage, car shares

Dear Members of the Board,

First: About 6 p.m. on Thursday evening, October 22, I drove to the Hannaford supermarket in the Mill Plaza. What a mistake, as anyone knows who has ever gone on a police ride-along: Thursday is the start of the UNH weekend, which means many students are out buying food and beverages in preparation for partying.

When I tried to exit the Plaza, this is what I saw:

- 1) skateboarder swooping down from Main Street and turning left into the Plaza
- 2) pedestrian walking north along Mill Road trying to cross the driveway
- 3) driver exiting the Plaza in the right-hand lane, pulled out completely across the crosswalk
- 4) bicyclist (not wearing a helmet) coming from Main Street turning left into the Plaza, followed by cars
- 5) dim light, reducing visibility significantly

You know as well as I do that every driver exiting Mill Plaza pulls out into Mill Road over the crosswalk, because the sight line from the "legal" position is lousy. It is particularly bad late afternoons in the winter, as shown in the below image (also included in my PowerPoint presentation dated July 11, 2018). As I have said before: This is the time to fix that problem.



The current location of the driveway was driven by distance from Main Street:

March 2, 1973—Letter from NHDOT traffic engineers Lindh and Alexander to Planning Board Chair noted: "...During our recent visit we did not review the entrance from Mill Road into the shopping center; however, its location appears suitable as it is back from the Main Street intersection as far as present property ownership allows."

Yet the Planning Board soon observed that the entrance was inadequate:

October 22, 1976—Town Meets with Plaza Engineer re: Traffic, Building Orientation, Elderly Housing [excerpts from Planning Board meeting minutes]

[Chair] Frost: The entrance to the parking lot is still not well planned for rush hour. Is there the possibility of having double lines of traffic to alleviate the long lines waiting to get out of the lot?

Roberts: There is a cross-traffic situation on Mill Road.

Frost: The worst time is between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m.

[SOURCE: "Durham's Mill Road Plaza 1967 to 2018," compiled by Joshua Meyrowitz, page 11 <https://www.ci.durham.nh.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning_board/page/54488/joshua_meyrowitz_history_of_mill_plaza.pdf>]

Decades later, the entrance was the site of a fatality: In 2008 pedestrian Angela Bianchi, a Faculty neighborhood resident, was struck and killed at midday by a Town vehicle.

Here we are, twelve years later, discussing whether we need to improve the intersection.

It seems to me that installing flashing lights (such as a Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacon suggested by the "Mill Road Pedestrian Crossing Analysis," November 19, 2020) is a poor alternative to fixing the geometry. I do not believe I have heard a serious, in-depth discussion of the latter; rather, it appears that "everyone" simply accepts that "it cannot be done." Perhaps the applicant does not want to do it. But the Board should discuss whether it is in the interest of the community to do it and whether it is feasible, and then negotiate with the applicant.

Bicycle parking / storage

The site plan regulations that apply solely to the Mill Plaza do not include subsequent updates that better reflect the community's interest in encouraging pedestrian and bicyclist use. The Board could require, as a Condition of Approval, that more bicycle storage be provided.

The current, "non-Mill Plaza" standards would have included specifics on bicycle storage, parking:

11.3.3 Bicycle Storage. Bicycle storage shall be provided as follows:

/.../

(g) For projects located in the Central Business, Church Hill, Courthouse, and Professional Office zoning districts, the applicant shall provide a total number of bicycle storage

spaces equal to or exceeding 1/3 the number of parking spaces that would be required for the project or 1/3 the number of residents who will occupy the project, whichever is greater. For projects not located in one of these zoning districts, the applicant shall provide a total number of bicycle storage spaces equal to or exceeding 1/5 the number of parking spaces that would be required for the project or 1/5 the number of residents who will occupy the project, whichever is greater.

When covered bicycle storage is required per Subsection f), above, at least 1/3 the total number of required bicycle storage spaces shall be outdoor covered spaces and/or indoor spaces.

The Planning Board may adjust any of the amounts in this section upward or downward, as appropriate, based upon such factors as the site location, site characteristics and layout, the type of users and residents, the amount of vehicle parking provided, and other pertinent factors.

Traffic Demand Management (TDM)

Please note this excerpt from minutes from Traffic Safety Committee meeting April 24, 2013 and consider whether this is a concept the Board would entertain:

There was discussion regarding Traffic Demand Management (TDM) [a] concept which basically is the application of strategies and policies to reduce travel demand and/or to redistribute this demand in space or in time. All of the members of the committee agreed that this concept should be considered when any building project is proposed to be constructed in Durham. Further discussion actually demonstrated a significant commitment to this concept is ongoing.

Shared parking spaces for residential buildings, e.g., Zipcar

I will close with suggesting that the Planning Board ask the applicant to include “Zipcar” spaces, such as those found on Madbury Road near Madbury Commons, which also provides little or no parking for residents—ideally in an underground parking area. Below is an excerpt from an interview with “progressive parking policy guru” Donald Shoup:

Q. What’s the parking connection for cities that want to encourage people to ride transit, apart from jacking up curb prices?

A. ...I believe that, in San Jose, developers can offer everyone in the building free transit if they don’t include as many parking spots. That works. Or some developers with little parking will have shared cars on site and pay for one shared space, which reduces minimum parking requirement by several spaces. Those are very expensive spaces for developers. And they’re offering an amenity for all who live there: free membership to a Zipcar in the basement. Those are real alternatives to privately owned cars. It doesn’t seem so unthinkable now that these alternatives are available.

source: “Parking Is Sexy Now. Thank Donald Shoup.” CITYLAB, May 30, 2018
<<https://www.citylab.com/transportation/2018/05/parking-is-sexy-now-thank-donald-shoup/560876/>>

Regards,