

PATH BETWEEN MAIN STREET AND PLAZA — #2 | PLEASE IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

December 6, 2021

Planning Board
8 Newmarket Road
Durham, NH 03824

Re: Mill Plaza Redevelopment. 7 Mill Road. Continued review of application for site plan and conditional use for mixed-use redevelopment project, drive-through facility for bank, and activity within the wetland and shoreland overlay districts. Colonial Durham Associates, property owner....Central Business District. Map 5, Lot 1-1.

Dear Planning Board members:

A year ago I wrote to you on this same subject, pointing out the community value of a ramp to Main Street versus the proposed reconfiguration to stairs. Only recently have the Chair and the applicant emphasized that it is not possible to retain a ramp due to ADA compliance requirements. This communication, fraught with frustration, came late in the game.

The December 14, 2015 Settlement Agreement included a “concept plan” that appeared to show a ramp access. In addition, the Settlement language included the following term:

- g. The proposed center building shall provide for a ground level connector to encourage pedestrian connectivity through the site towards Main Street.

Site plans submitted in 2016 and 2017 also appear to include a ramp access. Yet by May 2018, the plan had replaced the access with a staircase—to the distress of many in the Faculty Neighborhood, in particular.

While I appreciate that Chair Rasmussen pointed out the need for ADA compliance, it would have been helpful for the applicant and/or Planning Board to have earlier provided a clear reference to the Americans with Disabilities Act’s “2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design” ([Chapter 4: Accessible Routes, section 4.05 “Ramps”](#)) or to explain in a written narrative why the change to stairs was in order. Frustration for all might have been avoided.

I spoke last week with a consultant on disability design, who confirmed that:

- any ramp access proposed by Colonial Durham Associates must be ADA-compliant;
- a lengthy switchback design would not be appropriate; and
- combining a ramp and stair would be problematic.

I hope that the Board will look closely at other ways to **encourage pedestrian and bicyclist through-site circulation—particularly by providing attractive shade-tree-lined paths—and to enhance the “pedestrian connectivity through the site towards Main Street.”**

Regards,
Robin