

January 31, 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 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.

Topic of this letter: Path between Plaza and Main Street | reconfiguration would limit use

Dear Planning Board members:

Having read notes of the site walk held on December 16, and then reviewing the site plan, I would like to weigh in on the proposal to reconfigure the path between Main Street and Mill Plaza as a set of switchback steps.

(This no doubt was on the site plan all along, so apologies for noticing it only now—although I imagine it may have escaped the eyes of at least a few members of the Planning Board and public as well.)

Such a reconfiguration would limit use by (among others) people:

- using wheelchairs
- using walkers
- pushing strollers
- hauling personal wheeled bags, e.g., used as grocery shopping carts or carrying laundry

...not to mention bicyclists.

We must continue to design our built environment to be inclusive of those who cannot physically manage what others may do unthinkingly and easily. Such uses would not be limited to the elderly or those caring for young children. I recently saw a young person (college student age) hauling a wheeled cart north on Madbury Road between the post office and Madbury Commons.

In addition, the proposal would present safety challenges for the “average” pedestrian. Patrons of the post office might walk to the post office and pick up a package that could make using steps more difficult, even while that route is the shortest to their homes.

Unless it is very well lit and very well cleared after snowstorms, we should also foresee stumbles and falls.

In addition, one of the positive aspects of the existing connection is that it's clear that's what—and where—it is, i.e., one can see that there IS a direct path to Main Street. But as I review sheet C-102 of the May 20, 2020 site plans, it seems likely that a view of the Plaza

end of the path will be obscured by Building B. In other words, one would have to know the path is there to even think of using it. Thus, it cannot in all seriousness be said to be inviting to would-be users.

Finally, from the site plan, it appears that no effort would be made to make the connection attractive to use. Today, the path passes by an unscreened loading dock and dumpsters on one side and relatively well screened trash at the Grange on the other. In the proposal, the connection passes close by a recycling dumpster. I do not see any screening on the site plan, let alone landscaped screening.

Planning studies over the decades have emphasized the community's interest in a downtown that would attract pedestrians. It seems to me that the spirit of the Settlement Agreement requirement of "a ground level connector to encourage pedestrian connectivity through the site towards Main Street" isn't met by "a set of switchback steps."

Please ask the Colonial Durham team to consider another alternative.

Sincerely yours,

—*Robin*