
Colonial Durham Associates | Mill Plaza

Arcade or Pedestrian Access

Pedestrian circulation through the site and “vitality,”
or only amenities for Buildings B & C?

For the Planning Board, Durham, NH
February 1, 2022
by Robin Mower

Pedestrian Activity Through the Site

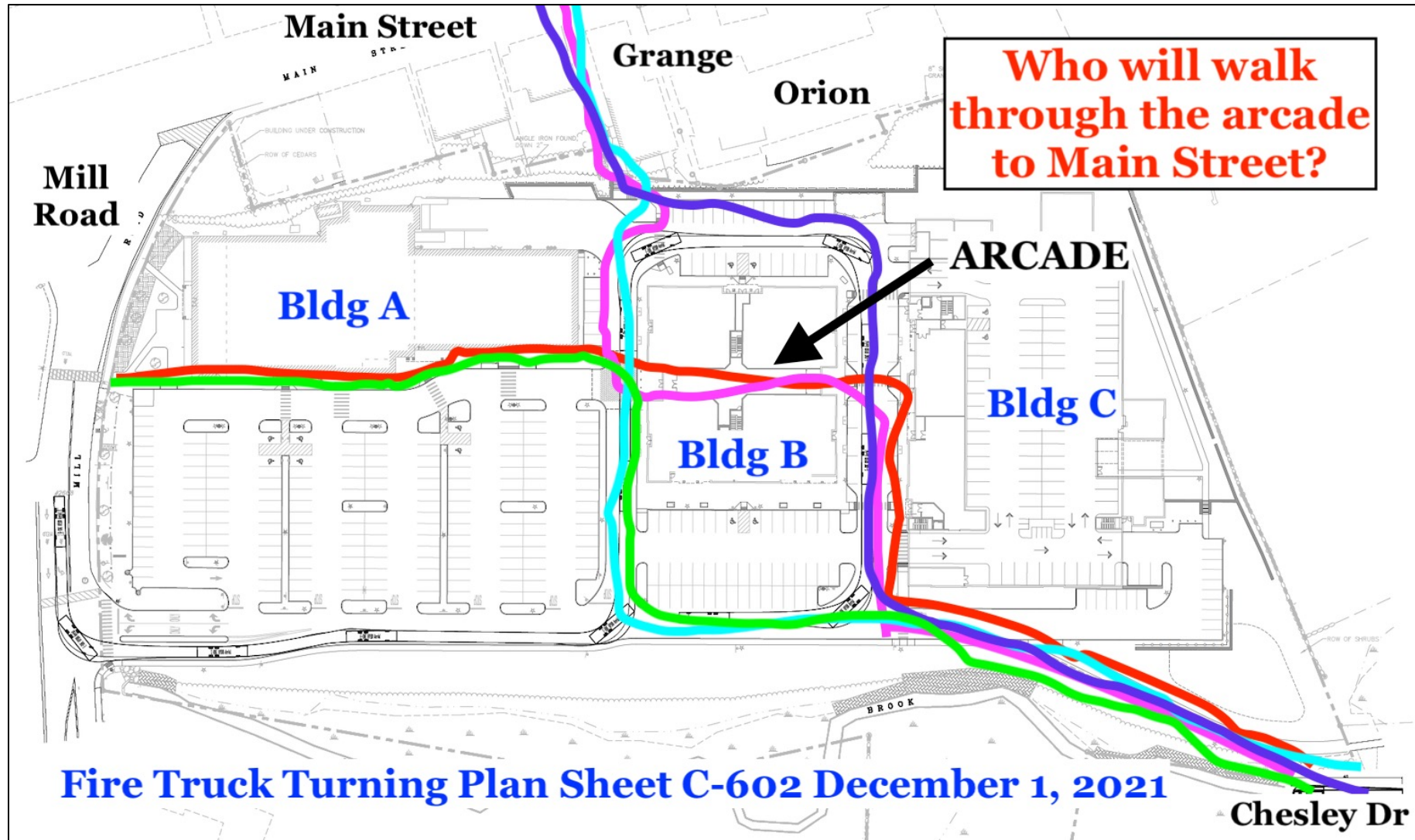
Would the “arcade” facilitate non-vehicular circulation both onsite and to Main Street?

Pedestrians have zigzagged on shortcuts through the site since the Plaza was built, skirting parked cars, hopping onto the 10-foot-wide median strips, and walking up the highly-visible gentle ramp from the Plaza, along the Grange to Main Street.

Bicyclists have avoided the nerve-racking intersection of Mill Road and Main Street to ride up the same ramp to the safety of the crosswalk at Madbury Road.

What would the “arcade” add?

Likely Pedestrian Routes Through the Site



It looks like the “arcade” is for pedestrian access for Building C.

Arcade, or Pedestrian Passageway?

The design of the enclosed pedestrian path through Building “B” is important, as is its availability on a 24/7 basis.

[Rick Taintor, [Technical Review Group Minutes 1-14-20](#)]

There was discussion about the view that showed the proposed pedestrian passageway/arcade through Building B. Ms. Ames said **this design would be an inviting space while the businesses in the building were open, and would allow people the choice of eating outside of a restaurant there, or inside as part of the arcade.** She said they’d like to get input on how they could all could make this into a kind of public gathering place that was inviting.

[Planning Board minutes, January 22, 2020]

- Anyone remember this discussion from two years ago? Has the Board or applicant commented since then?
- Inviting “while the businesses are open?”
- If it’s that inviting, will there be adequate restaurant space? Will there be a second restaurant in the building?
- Will there really be enough room for eating inside the arcade to appeal to adults, perhaps business people? If so, will there be adequate restaurant seating to communicate vitality—or room for just a table or two? (Are there plans for a second restaurant? The SE corner restaurant does not appear to have access to the arcade.)
- Who will use this space other than tenants of Buildings B and C?

Technical Review Group, January 14, 2020 — Verbatim, Part 1

Arcade? Access Corridor?

My verbatim transcription from [January 14, 2020 Technical Review Group on DCAT](#); this section begins about 26:10 on the DCAT marker. This excerpt continues on a later slide.

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TRG Members in Attendance: Rick Taintor, Contract Planner, chair; Mike Lynch, Public Works Director; John Powers, Deputy Fire Chief; Christine Soutter, Economic Development Director

Applicant's Representatives: Joe Persechino (Tighe & Bond; engineer); Sharon Ames (Harriman; architect); Ari Pollock (attorney); Sean McCauley

[recording marker about 26:13]

Soutter: How is—forgive me if this is a repetitive question; I've forgotten the answer—The pedestrian flow between the buildings: Are they going to go through Building B? *[occasionally says "OK" after CDA team members speak; not recorded here]*

Persechino: They would go through Building B. It's an access corridor. Sharon, you can...

Ames: It's basically, it's an access corridor. It's wider, it's not just a four-foot corridor...and we're envisioning that the tenants would, it would be more of a storefront location, so that you would have visual connection to the retail operations as well.

Persechino: So you go in and you could access each individual retail or restaurant from within that corridor as well.

Taintor: Just to follow up on that: So each unit is going to have, essentially, two front doors, one on the corridor and one on the, facing either the street or the parking lot?

Ames: Yes, in effect, and I don't think it's intended as the primary from that internal corridor zone. The primary entrance for each retail occupant would be the exterior face.

Technical Review Group, January 14, 2020 — Verbatim, Part 1, cont'd

Arcade: A Good Idea? Part 1a

Rick Taintor has reservations about “arcades,” as he expressed at the [Technical Review Group meeting on January 14, 2020](#). He responds directly to CDA architect Sharon Ames’ comment (see previous page):

“Yeah, I’ve seen a lot of places that have been poorly designed that have that door there, but it still feels like a back door. Is this going to be an enclosed space? Is it going to be open to the public 24 hours a day, or is it going to be an open covered alley, basically? One of the ways this plan is less good than the previous plan, is that you’ve lost that nice pedestrian street. You’ve basically put the building in front of it. And try to figure out how you’re going to get that back to, right now, it seems like it has the potential to feel very private.”

Technical Review Group, January 14, 2020 — Verbatim, Part 2

Arcade: A Good Idea? Part 1b

My verbatim transcription from [January 14, 2020 Technical Review Group on DCAT](#); continued from an earlier slide.

Pereschino: Understood. I'm not sure if the full security plan has been vetted out for that corridor. The intent is to make it very open for folks to kind of walk through and continue that streetscape, so to speak, but that's certainly a comment we can take back and discuss and determine how and when the hours of operation would be for that area.

Taintor: Well, I think, it's not a pedestrian connection if it has hours of operation.

Pereschino: Understood.

Taintor: So, unless it's a 24-hour, 7-day connection, I don't think it meets the needs. I do feel like you've really lost a lot by shifting that building north and blocking what was otherwise a kind of nice pedestrian street, so we're eliminating a pedestrian street. I'm sorry, I interrupted you.

Soutter: No, no. And I remember hearing about that before and why you had to move it, because it was just because of concerns for the residents being too close to their neighborhood. I know you didn't really feel you had a choice to do that. But, hopefully, with that constraint, and trying to be respectful of citizens' concerns, that as long as that hallway's wide enough, nice big glass doors, well lit, high ceilings, maybe a very inviting corridor, maybe even a draw, to, storefronts could really showcase what they have.

Pereschino: Right.

Soutter: I'm not sure what would be in there. There's a potential to make it really nice.

Pereschino: Thank you.

Ames: Agreed.

Arcade: A Good Idea? Part 2

Michael Behrendt also has reservations about “arcades” (as I reminded the Planning Board at the July 22, 2020 public hearing):

[Town Planner’s Recommendation](#)—Hayden Family Realty Trust, June 26, 2013

- We have discussed with the applicant maintaining/creating a pedestrian passageway from Main Street to the rear parking lot. It remains to be seen where this could best be located: on the easterly side adjacent to Durham House of Pizza, on the westerly side adjacent to Young’s Restaurant, or through a passageway in the middle of the new building. The latter could conceivably be an open air passage between two separate buildings, a partial open air passage in the middle of one building, a passage under a glass skylight/atrium, or a passage through a corridor in the building.
- **I would be wary of building an interior passageway - sometimes called a “galleria,” “arcade,” or “interior mall.” -if the intent is to have shops take access from it. I have observed that such arcades are not successful, except where very special conditions are present.**

Do the designs for Building B and C promote a lively streetscape?

Arcade: A Good Idea? Part 3

[“Leaving Value on the Table”](#) from the StrongTowns website suggests caution when welcoming an arcade.

...Having a lot of entrances is crucial to the granularity* that creates a lively streetscape. It means you’ve got people flowing in and out of businesses, stopping to poke around or inspect the surroundings. And it means the businesses are narrow, the frequent changes creating more variety and sensory interest as you walk.

...From the public’s perspective...ground-floor space is everything, and its value should not be wasted.

...The condo tower’s lobby is accessed from the middle of the pedestrian tunnel via a keycard entrance. Even the management office faces this corridor. Nothing about it screams, “We want people to linger here.”

* Fine-grained development = many smaller owners or tenants rather than fewer larger ones, translating to greater pedestrian interest and greater resilience. See text at right.

...granularity matters, as I argue in “A City Shaped By Many Hands,” not just for the tactile experience of exploring a place, but for its long-term resilience. A place owned or controlled by many hands, and made up of an eclectic mix of structures, will fare better over time, because it can evolve by small degrees—one business closure here, one building renovation there—rather than its fate being determined as a unit. [Is This Development ‘Out of Scale’?](#) by Daniel Herriges.

Will Building B's “arcade” be good for the community?

**Does the “arcade” meet criteria
for both pedestrian circulation and long-term retail and site vitality?**
