

July 14, 2020

Planning Board
8 Newmarket Road
Durham, NH 03824

RE: *Continued Public Hearing - Mill Plaza Redevelopment. 7 Mill Road. Continued review of formal application for: 1) Site plan and 2) Conditional Use for mixed use redevelopment project and activity within the wetland and shoreland overlay districts. A revised general layout has been submitted for review. Colonial Durham Associates, property owner. Sean McCauley, agent. Joe Persechino, Tighe & Bond, engineer. 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: Site plan and architecture driven by engineering?

Greetings,

Throughout the Design Review, i.e., from September 2014 through June 14, 2017, the architect for the project was the DeStefano Group. From that point onward, the agenda description omits any mention of an architect. Is this an insignificant oversight, or is it meaningful?

Tighe & Bond engineer Joe Persechino introduced Sharon Ames, a senior architect with Harriman, as the project manager at the TRG meeting, April 17, 2018. Then, according to minutes of the June 13, 2018 meeting (at which the application was accepted as complete), "Ms. Dill said she'd like to know who the architects for the project were. Attorney Pollock (sic) said Ms. Innis and Mr. Cecil were still involved, and also said Sharon Ames was part of the team. He said they would be making a presentation"—which CDA did on June 27, 2018. (See posting titled "Applicant's Presentation 6-27-18.")

That was two years ago. Two points: Of today's Board members, only these were present at the 2018 meeting: Paul Rasmussen, Barbara Dill, James Bubar, Michael Lambert, Sally Tobias; second, the PDF of that presentation is difficult to read, which means that those not present at the 2018 meeting (including members of the public) must "go to the videotape."

Also: Why has the Planning Board not asked that the architect attend a more recent meeting to respond to questions and concerns?

Architects can bring considerably more to the program than pretty elevations, but if we haven't yet come to the stage where an architect should be consulted, why haven't discussions focused more tightly on the layout of the site and all structures' footprints?

At the Technical Review Group meeting held February 2, 2016, Code Official Audrey Cline noted, *It's a difficult site, but right now, I'm feeling like it's run by the engineering, and the engineer needs to support the design, not vice versa.*

Yes, the plans have changed since that meeting, but I would argue that Audrey's comment still holds water.

Sincerely yours,

Robin