

**From:** [RobinM](#)  
**To:** [Rick Taintor](#)  
**Cc:** [Karen Edwards](#)  
**Subject:** Respect for the public at Planning Board meetings | process  
**Date:** Friday, July 31, 2020 11:23:40 AM

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Please forward this email to the Planning Board. Thank you.

\* \*

Greetings,

While the Planning Board bears the brunt of lengthy evening meetings and may even (understandably but regrettably) \*tune out\* from time to time during lengthy or repetitive public hearings, residents who are watching may also miss key points.

Thus, I missed an exchange at the July 22 public hearing on the proposed Mill Plaza redevelopment that I wish to bring to the Board's attention.

Public hearings are not intended to be a conversation between members of the public and the Board. That can be frustrating for all, particularly the public, but I do understand that is normal procedure.

However, at the discretion of the Chair, a direct question from the public may be answered.

On July 22, resident Bob Russell asked that the Board ask the architect for the Mill Plaza a reasonable question. The Chair was dismissive in his response.

This was, at best, unfortunate, and at worst, reflects badly on the entire Board. Even if the Chair did not believe the question required an answer, other members could have requested an answer, for surely they, too would wish to know. (Surely?)

Below is the exchange (DCAT recording time approximately 2:25:50 to 2:28:21).

\* \*

Bob Russell: When [Sharon Ames, architect with Harriman] stated the credentials of her architectural firm, she mentioned that they did commercial and residential housing. There was no mention of student housing. Has that firm designed any student housing anywhere in the State of New Hampshire?

[6 seconds of silence]

Bob Russell: Could she answer that, please; that's important, because that's what they're designing here.

Chair Rasmussen: Um... [5 seconds of silence follow]

Harriman architect Sharon Ames: Do you wish that answer?

Chair Rasmussen: No, I don't see a need to answer that.

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One: I believe the public deserves a respectful answer to a direct question, if only to say that the Board will follow up on the question.

Two: Bob Russell deserves an apology.

Three, and perhaps more important: This is only one instance of occasional disrespect for the public and the public hearing process shown by the Planning Board over the past stressful-for-all six years of the Mill Plaza hearings.

I think we all have frayed nerves at this time, not least due to the pandemic, but I trust the Board will do better in the future.

I also hope you will address Bob Russell's question, and take into consideration whether the answer has ramifications, at your follow-up discussion about architectural design on August 26.

Some of us are keenly aware how fortunate Durham is that residents have volunteered to serve on what probably has the heaviest lift of all volunteer boards and committees -- and in a community that typically wants its say. Vacancies on the Board have been frequent for obvious reasons. Some of you have hung in there through many years of long meetings with challenging agenda items, and some of you have even been willing to take the helm as Chair (remarkably, some more than once), and I sincerely thank you.

Regards,

-- Robin

Robin Mower

*Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,  
nothing is going to get better. It's not.*

-- Theodor Seuss Geisel, author and illustrator

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