

May 16, 2022

Re: Planning Meeting

Dear Members of the Durham Planning Board,

I am pleased to see that the PB is taking some “time out” to catch your breath and do a review of past projects. Hopefully there will be some “lessons learned” — to benefit veteran members, newcomers to the Board, and the community.

I would like to remind board members of a couple of things:

- 1) Please recall the fiasco at The Lodges when the Board neglected to ask for renderings of the project from 360 degrees around. To this day, when I drive north on Mast Road, my heart aches for the needless loss of a cherished scenic vista along one of our formerly pastoral gateways (the scenic viewshed that once existed looking north across UNH Moore Fields and the densely forested hillside just beyond). This could have been prevented had we only understood the full visual impact on all sides of the project.

It has taken years for the trees planted at the base of the concrete wall to grow up, the promised vines to grow both down the wall and up along the chain link fencing never took, and the reality is, even when the evergreens planted on the site grow taller, we will *never* regain our pastoral gateway viewshed. This was a huge loss for the community and one which I hope the PB embrace as a “lesson learned” as you review all projects that come before the Board.

- 2) Please review the reasons why the Town purposefully did not include parking for the large downtown student housing projects. This was intentional, not an oversight. In our very limited downtown area, and based on recommendations of our Master Plan, parking lots for students is a very poor use of our downtown commercial space. Not only does it take up limited, valuable development area, but also it runs contrary to the Town’s and UNH’s Master Plans and Climate Goals. More parking for students downtown only encourages more students to bring cars to UNH and to bring them into our tiny downtown. Students who need cars for work obligations can choose to live in any number of the large student housing

complexes to the west of campus where there is ample parking. It is not Durham's job, nor is it in our Town's interest, to provide parking for students downtown.

Perhaps under other business, it might be worth discussing your review process for significant applications. It seems the Board allows itself to get drawn into unnecessarily lengthy review processes by allowing developers to divert attention away from significant determinative elements required in the regulations, to focus on less significant details. We have seen this pattern over and over again. If a plan does not meet critical criteria, do we really need to spend meeting after meeting reviewing "the small stuff" such as landscaping, light fixtures, or any number of other smaller details? Continuing this long drawn out practice will only continue to overwhelm the Board, expending limited time and energy of our volunteers. Please consider doing a "big picture review" up front before getting dragged down into the details.

Thank you for the endless hours and the frustrations you endure.

Beth Olshansky  
Packers Falls Road