

122 Packers Falls Road  
Durham, NH 03824

June 23, 2024

Dear Members of the Durham Town Council,

In reading through the enormous body of work before you that has been sent over by the Planning Board, there is one item that jumped out at me as a matter of particular concern.

I see that the definitions of GRADE, EXISTING or NATURAL and GRADE, FINISHED have been revised as has the definition of PARKING LOT:

**GRADE, EXISTING or NATURAL** – The grade prior to prospective development or other ground disturbance.

**GRADE, FINISHED** – The grade adjoining a building or within other areas of a site after development.

**PARKING LOT** – An open-air parking area situated on the ground, at finished grade, on a single level and not within a parking garage. A parking lot may incorporate one or more retaining walls to provide an adequate finished grade. A car port and a parking lot covered with solar panels are considered parking lots.

I have no problem with each of these revised definitions as stand-alone items. **What concerns me is that in the Table of Uses, Parking Lot (formerly “surface parking”) is listed as CU in the Church Hill District as well as in the Central Business and Courthouse Districts.** In this letter, I am going to focus on Church Hill, though one might use a similar rationale when discussing the wisdom of adding more surface parking lots to our very limited, high-value downtown district land.

#### **Why adding more parking in Church Hill is a bad idea**

We already have a significant number of parking lots in our very small Church Hill District. The Purpose of the Church Hill District is stated as “to preserve and enhance the historic character of this area by allowing for multiple land uses including professional offices, limited retail uses, and senior housing.... New development should maintain the character of the area and is subject to the standards of the Historic Overlay District” (abbreviated for emphasis).

There is only a small amount of undeveloped land left in Church Hill, which in fact, happens to be the actual, rather steep, hill. Is a flat, surface parking lot, requiring a 20-foot retaining wall and 16,000 cubic yards of fill, the highest and best use for the small remaining undeveloped land in Church Hill? Other Uses include senior housing, multi-unit housing, childcare center, adult day care center, restaurant, offices, etc. Any of these uses would better serve our

community, increase our assessed value more than a parking lot, be more in keeping the Purpose of the district, and more aligned with the Town Council Climate and Economic Goals.

Given the parking pressures that exist in our town, a parking lot built in Church Hill would likely become rental spaces for student cars because that would be most profitable for a developer. Is such a parking lot aligned with our TC Goals? In my opinion, a parking lot such as the one previously proposed would only serve to enable more students to bring more cars to Durham, which would also mean more cars in our downtown creating more greenhouse gas emissions. How does allowing this Use further our Town Council Climate Change Goals and the Climate Action Master Plan?

Given the Town Council Goals regarding Climate Change as well as the stated acknowledgement of the importance of the Planning Board and other boards and committees aligning themselves with the Goals created by our elected officials, **I would urge members of the Town Council to change the CU in the Table of Uses for Parking Lot in Church Hill to an X.**

Last week's intense heatwave, *in June no less*, should serve to remind us that creating additional "heat islands" downtown is not in the best interest of our Durham community nor the greater Seacoast community. **Please change CU to X for Parking Lot in Church Hill. Then consider whether that also makes sense for Central Business and Courthouse Districts.**

Thank you.

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