

# Mill Plaza committee prepares final report

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CONTRIBUTING WRITER

It's been over a year since the Mill Plaza Study Committee began plans for reconstructing Mill Plaza in downtown Durham. After receiving positive feedback and interest from the public, the committee will present a final report to the Durham Town Council in the next few months.

"A few of us are going to draft a final report," says Dave Howland, chairman of the Mill Plaza Study Committee. "Then we're going to return for a final meeting in early April so that everyone can discuss, and hopefully vote, on the report to hand into the Town Council."

The final report will be a compilation of public feedback, public ideas and multiple drawings as a reference for residents, council members and a future developer to look at, Howland says.

During the Mill Plaza Study Committee meeting held on the night of March 5, 19 members of the community closely listened as enthusiastic ideas infused the air, exemplifying all of the hard work that has been accomplished. One challenge that the committee has had is how they will present their plan to the Town Council.

"Let's show our potentials, why show plans?" says Chuck Cressy, the owner of Durham Market Place and a member of the committee. "We need to let them know our strong points."

Howland emphasizes all of the different architectural possibilities that the committee has worked with the public to create and establish.

"We have clear recommendations based on the input of the public," says Howland. "We'll be addressing issues regarding a mixture of property use, such as pedestrian and motor vehicle access,

and community oriented space."

The committee has worked with the public in order to establish a plan that is accessible and convenient to residents and students in Durham.

Members of the committee are hoping to have their report finalized and ready to be handed into the Town Council by late April or early May.

"There is a demonstrable amount of evidence for a great opportunity to rebuild Mill Plaza," says Julian Smith, the Mill Plaza Study Committee vice chairwoman. "There are so many ways that students and residents will benefit from this. They could walk right down to the grocery store instead of driving to an urban store. I think we're headed in the right direction."

The plan that will be given to the Town Council will not be written in stone. The committee has created architecturally convenient and en-

joyable layouts that can meet a wider goal that the committee, property owner, and public may have. They have ultimately constructed pieces to a puzzle that have many ways to be put together.

"We've been working with architects throughout this entire process," Howland says. "We've done justice with this task."

Carolyn Isaak, the New Hampshire American Institute of Architecture chairwoman, is certain of the benefits the town will gain based on the designs that have been created.

"If and when the Town Council approves the vision we have, they'll have to work with it," says Isaak. "I'm very hopeful that it'll take place, but it may take a while. We're at a transitioning spot at this point. We have all of these great ideas, now we have to move into the next phase of the program."

Although explicit details have not yet been

made, members of the committee are confident that whether in a year, two years or even three years, the plans will become reality.

"I don't know concessions that the town and [John] Pinto will make," Smith says. "How much money it will cost, things like that. It took years to build the Irving gas station, and it took years to build the hotel. It will happen."

John Pinto, the New York-based Mill Plaza property owner, was unavailable for comment.

"We're at the beginning stages," says Warren Daniel, owner of The Bagelry in Mill Plaza. "Is this the end of the game? No. The economic reality of it is that we have a long way to go. Two weeks ago I thought we were working for nothing. Now, I'm encouraged. We have an organic design that the town likes."

# Therapeutic Riding holds fundraiser

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At two and a half, Catie Racicot's speech was limited. After a year with the UNH Therapeutic Riding Program, Catie's speech went from three words to full three-word sentences. Catie's success is just one of many from the 19 year-old program that runs out of the Equine Center.

The program, managed by Cindy Burke, helps people suffering "physically, mentally, or emotionally." The benefits of horse riding are innumerable. Burke gives a lecture on the topic that lasts two-and-a-half hours.

"[Physically] the natural gait of a walking horse is the closest thing to a human pelvis," Burke explained. So when someone physically-challenged rides, his or her "body is moving in a natural walking rhythm."

Burke said of the programs success, "big success stories could be something pretty small." She recalled one autistic client who, at the beginning, would not keep the helmet on or hold onto the reins. By the end of

the session he was doing both.

"For him," Burke said, "it was so huge."

For another rider, who suffered from multiple sclerosis, the victory at the end was being able to ride the motorcycle games at the arcade.

"It is just so rewarding to be a part of the journey with the rider," said long-time volunteer Ginny Ann. "It is such a healing environment with the horses' ability to reach the riders in a different way than humans possibly can."

Catie's mother, Joyce Racicot, agreed. "If you had told me that a horse could get her to speak, I would have thought you were nuts. We had tried all sort of things: picture books, sign language anticipation... the list went on and on," she said. "But it was that special bond with horses that made the difference."

Each member of the program begins the session with set goals. Ranging from physical to social, the client could set the goals personally or through his or her family, or it could come from a physical, occupational or speech pathologist.

The nature of the pro-

gram lends itself to different requirements. While the program uses university equipment and horses, it often needs special equipment such as smaller helmets, as Burke explained. In addition, riders often cannot afford to pay so the program offers scholarships.

"We don't want some-

one not to be able to participate who can't afford it," Burke said.

This Sunday, the program will be having its spring fundraiser, a dinner and silent auction. The profits will go directly toward funding scholarships and equipment for the program. Some of the items to be auctioned

include a Salomon Loft snowboard, Red Salomon X Wing 10 skis and bindings, and a women's Timberland leather jacket. Tickets are \$50. For more information, contact Burke at 862-0131 or via e-mail at cindy.burke@unh.edu.

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