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September 9, 2015

Mr. Mark Torpey, Chair
Saratoga Springs Planning Board
City Hall
474 Broadway
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

Dear Mr. Torpey:

RE: HAMILTON STREET PARKING FACILITY

Sustainable Saratoga is a not-for-profit organization that promotes sustainable practices and advocates for smart growth land use principals and procedures. We strive to monitor development for compliance with existing planning and design principles. While we have limited resources and must have missed the original review of the Hamilton Street parking structure, we'd like to offer these comments now.

We understand the Planning Board originally issued a special use permit and site plan approval for this structure without it having met the requirement for a liner building.

Since 2003 Saratoga Springs' zoning ordinance has had a guideline that encourages liner buildings for downtown parking garages. Article 3.1.2D.1 states:

“Parking structures should be set back 50 feet from property line of all adjacent streets to reserve room for liner buildings. If no liner building is constructed in conjunction with construction of the parking structure, the yard should provide publicly accessible civic space.”

Ideally, full height buildings should line the street frontage of parking structures. Ground floor commercial activity is critical. It is possible that the upper floors could have parking or residential uses. The greater the ratio of active land uses to accessory parking, the more activity the downtown will enjoy. Downtowns with higher ratios of parking tend to serve the interests of visitors and commuters, at the expense of people who live in the city and people, who prefer a walking and cycling-friendly live-work-play environment.

Liner buildings for parking facilities are an important feature that should be taken seriously in Saratoga Springs. Small shops along the first floor frontage of the Woodlawn Ave. parking structure would have been a big asset to the downtown – they may have even stimulated the redevelopment of the block across the street

Now that requests for a special use permit extension and a site plan approval extension are before you, we ask that you take this opportunity to open up the review and give consideration to requiring that it accommodate liner buildings. If your board chooses not to require liner buildings for this parking structure, you should articulate why it is in the public interest not to do so.

Respectfully,
Harry Moran, Chair

