

May 15, 2006

**An Open Letter to Ruth Constantine, Chair of the Campus Planning Committee
For distribution to all members of the committee**

In August, 2005 the President of Smith College, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, and the Mayor of Northampton signed a Development Agreement (copy enclosed). Since that time three public meetings of the City of Northampton's Planning Board and the City Council's Ordinance Committee and one public forum have taken place. All gatherings were attended by many neighborhood residents who are opposed to the Agreement. The issues raised by the Development Agreement are all about planning; however, the College's Campus Planning Committee has not been heard from.

The current divide between town and gown clearly requires further cooperation and negotiation between the parties in order to avoid a deeper split. Creative planning that will preserve the campus as a beautiful gem surrounded by vibrant city neighborhoods is essential. We would like to hear the views and proposed solutions expressed by members of the committee responsible for planning.

There has been a singular lack of transparency concerning the entire educational overlay proposal. At the April 24th forum, Ruth Constantine indicated that at least three additional buildings, each comparable in size (140,000 sq ft) to building A (the proposed Science and Engineering building to be located on Green Street), would be constructed in the same area over the next 20 to 30 years. Why these buildings would be necessary was not explained. Yet Carol Christ's letter of March 7th, addressed to Members of the City Council and Planning Board, states that the College is "not growing." If the College is not planning to expand its student body or to demolish more college owned rental housing or other buildings at the edges of the campus, then why does it need this overlay?

Despite the public meetings and the Paradise City Forum, the Development agreement remains a package wrapped in opacity and tied up in knots. In addition to the zoning issues of setback (a mere 30 feet from the edge of the overlay area) and building height (ranging from 45 to 85 feet, the latter an eight story building, immensely out of scale by Northampton standards), the Agreement also raises the question of parking and parking lots, see item number 7 of the Development Agreement.

On the subject of parking lots, clearly a planning issue involving this committee, there is considerable current confusion. William Letendre, Parking Supervisor for the City, has said,

on the radio and in a following conversation on May 9, 2006, that he was told at a meeting a few months ago, held in City Hall with Bill Brandt, Director of Campus Operations, and Gary Hartwell, Project Manager Physical Plant, that a 90 car parking lot will be built this summer between Mandelle Road and Dryads Green and that the College plans to add at least 250 parking places in all. However, Kristen Cole, Media Relations Director at Smith, said in a telephone conversation, also on May 9, that the College has no plans to build any lots this summer and that a consulting firm is now examining the parking question. Asked if there would be public meetings with local residents, she said that no time lines for such meetings have yet been set. In her remarks at the Forum, Ruth Constantine said that the College does “expect to put parking in that [the quad] area.”

What is the connection between the new building on Green Street and parking on the back side of the Quadrangles? How many more cars will this new building bring to the campus? As is obvious from past experience on campus and in the City, the more parking is provided, the more cars materialize to fill the lots – consider how many parking spaces have been added over the last 20 years. Parking is a supply that generates its own demand. Buildings remove green space and apparently necessitate parking lots; large trees are cut down and further green space is covered with blacktop. But is it in the best interest of the College for this to happen? Is it in fact necessary?

What about the opinions of neighborhood residents who live on all edges of the campus where parking lots would most likely be constructed? Are there thoughts of using the Capen Gardens for parking instead of planting? We assume and hope that there are no plans to pave the Burton lawn, the green area in front of the Neilson Library or other islands of green on the central campus.

Surely creative solutions to the basic problem of too many student cars around the campus can be found. Smith is an educational institution and the ramifications of dependence on cars, beyond the increase in the price of gas, should be part of each student’s education. Students should be made aware of the fact that they live in the midst of a unique botanic garden. They should also be reminded not to drive recklessly, endangering children and others on neighboring city streets, and not to park on lawns or leave trash. Students should be effectively discouraged from bringing cars to Smith, perhaps by financial disincentives and/or incentives. Staff could be encouraged to carpool, and perhaps be compensated for doing so. More van service and College rental cars, or “Zip” cars like those in use at Wellesley, could be offered. Ask the students! Ask alumnae. Ask neighborhood residents. Ask yourselves. We all know that people, including students, don’t like to live in the

shadow of tall buildings and they don't like to live next to parking lots with their traffic, noise, all-night lighting, runoff problems, heat absorbing asphalt, and general ugliness.

If there are plans for more buildings comparable to building A, would each of them require an additional 250 or so parking places? Where would these parking garages or lots be located? If indeed the College plans such expansion – plans 'to grow' in this way – then perhaps it is not too late to consider buying land on Hospital Hill, a very short and scenic walk from the central campus, no further than the quad.

We look forward to your prompt response and to working in any way we can to ensure that good relations will exist between the College and the surrounding neighborhoods.

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The following individuals, most living on the western edge of the campus, have asked to have their names added to this letter. Many more could be added.

Pau Atela	Lawrence Fink	Suleiman Mourad
Jane Bowne	Jenny Flemming	Catherine Newbury
E. Michael Brandt	Naomi Graychase '94	Emily Powers
Mary B. Brandt	Robert M. Haddad	Melvin Prouser
Ben Braude	Janice Irvine	Lynn Posner Rice
Jay Breines	Peter B. Ives	Richard Rice
Susan Breines	Jennifer Jacobson	Joel Russell
Carolyn Dashef	Daryl G. LaFleur	Neal Salisbury
Jerry Dennerline	Diana Larkin	Margaret Sarkissian
Michael di Pasquale	Rebecca Loveland '88	Peter Whittredge
Lois Dubin	Sherry Marker '63	Robert Wilson
Barbara Fink	Deborah Marks	

cc: Carol T. Christ, President of Smith College; Mary Patterson McPherson, as Chair of the Board of Trustees of Smith College; Laurie Fenlason, Exec. Director College Relations/Public Affairs; Mary Clare Higgins, Mayor of Northampton; Michael Bardsley, as Chair of the Northampton City Council; City Planning Committee; William Letendre, Parking Division