

AIA NEW HAMPSHIRE

PRESS RELEASE

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HYBRID DESIGN PLAN FOR DURHAM VILLAGE CENTER RECOGNIZED AS “2008 PLAN OF THE YEAR” BY NH PLANNERS ASSOCIATION

Durham Mill Plaza Study Committee and AIANH Honored as Award Recipients

DURHAM, NH- A plan to revitalize downtown Durham has been honored as “2008 Plan of the Year” by the New Hampshire Planners Association. The visionary plan, entitled “A New Village Center,” was the result of a year-long collaborative effort between the Mill Plaza Study Committee and the New Hampshire Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and its AIA150 partners. It was the product of numerous public meetings, workshops and focus groups with residents to determine their vision for the future of the 10-acre property between Main Street and Mill Road.

“We are thrilled to win this award from the NH Planners Association,” said Dave Howland, Chair of the Mill Plaza Study Committee. “These professionals work every day on projects that have a profound effect on the way New Hampshire grows. It is an honor to be recognized by them for the open process we followed and the conceptual plans our community developed for a new village center.”

This plan was the result of combining the work of three design teams along with the community input into a "hybrid" design; it includes creating a village center with quality design, aimed at giving residents an area where they can enjoy both indoor and outdoor activities, and promoting a balanced mix of multiple uses: grocery store, retail shops, office space and new housing. Other key elements include building a new library on the property, and protecting nearby College Brook. In addition, the overall plan stresses environmental sustainability, including green building techniques.

President of the NH Planners Association, Jennifer Czysz, said, “The Mill Plaza Plan was selected by our Executive Board due to its exemplary demonstration of how New Hampshire communities can utilize an urban design-based approach to re-image their commercial strip malls as an integrated component of the community center.” Czysz also stated that the board was pleased to see a *design*-based approach, when most New Hampshire plans typically use only a *narrative, goal*-based approach. “Additionally,” she added, “the plan went way beyond the usual – creating a vision that graphically demonstrated what the final result would look like, as well as whether the design plan was financially feasible. The Mill Plaza effort represents a planning process and style worth emulating across the state.”

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Co-Chair of the AIA150 effort, Patricia Sherman, who is a member of the AIA College of Fellows, credited the consensus-building process used in the Durham/AIA 150 Community Partnership with helping to shape the best possible project for the entire community. “We feel that, in honoring us with this award, the Executive Board of the NHPA recognized that the unique collaboration of residents and AIA professionals volunteering their expertise led to the creation of a useful, attractive design concept that may never have materialized without the cooperative efforts of so many diverse parties. And at the end of the day, the whole indeed turned out to be greater than the sum of its parts!”

Accepting the award were Mike Castagna, Co-Chair AIA 50 Task Force; Dave Howland, Chair, Mill Plaza Study Committee; and Robbi Woodburn, Landscape Architect, who participated on one of the AIA150 Design Teams.

The Durham Town Council last month formally accepted the final report of the Mill Plaza Study Committee; this report will now serve as a guide in working with the owner of the Plaza, John Pinto, in moving forward with the project.

For more information on the NHPA Awards, visit: www.nhplanners.org. For information on AIANH/AIA150, visit: www.aianh.org.

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