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**From:** Robert Healy, Ph.D.  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 12, 2024 2:41 PM  
**To:** Robert Healy, Ph.D. <healy@duke.edu>;  
DurhamPlanningCommission@durhamnc.gov  
**Cc:** John A Goebel <john.a.goebel@gmail.com>; Charles Welch  
<charles.welch@duke.edu>; Rick Gutlon via Pickett Road Zoning <pickett-road-zoning@gaggle.email>  
**Subject:** Pickett Road Apartment Rezoning

Dear Member of the Durham Planning Commission:

I am writing on behalf of the New Hope Creek Corridor Advisory Committee. The Committee was created in 1993 to advise the City of Durham, Durham County, Orange County and the Town of Chapel Hill on implementation of the 1992 New Hope Creek Corridor Plan, newly approved by each of those jurisdictions.

One of our earliest projects was the creation of Sandy Creek Park. As you may know, this 103 acre natural area, with extensive ponds and wetlands, was at one time a sewage treatment plant, built in 1929 to serve the newly created Duke University. Made obsolescent by the Clean Water Act, the plant was demolished and a paved hiking trail, rest room and picnic facility was installed by the City. Over subsequent years, tens of thousands of dollars from Durham County open space grants and private contributions combined with the labor of well over a thousand volunteers to put a new deck on the bridge over Sandy Creek, build a wildlife observation deck, construct a new trail (mainly boardwalk) from Garrett Road into the park and (recently) construct the Larry Stogner wildlife observation garden for the mobility limited. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in state funds were expended to create artificial wetlands as offsets for lands filled in elsewhere by the NC Department of Transportation.

Sandy Creek Park has obtained official recognition as an important bird habitat, a natural area, and a Monarch Butterfly habitat. It is used by many hundreds of birders annually, most coming from outside the immediate neighborhood, and is used by Duke University for outdoor education programs. Keep Durham Beautiful has organized at least 20 cleanup events in the Park, drawing participants from all over the City.

The New Hope Advisory Committee is deeply concerned over the environmental impacts of the proposed Pickett Road project on natural qualities of the park. Especially

--given projected changes in rainfall patterns (more frequent, heavier rains) the proposed catchment basin has a good likelihood of overflowing, directing polluted water into the Creek and adjacent wetlands

--residents of the proposed development are very likely to construct "informal" trails into parts of the park where wildlife had heretofore been able to exist without human contact

--light and massing from such a tall building is likely to interfere with insect activity, shown to be the basis of bird use of natural lands

---traffic from the development, while not a direct impact on the park, is likely to bring forth demands for additional lanes on Pickett Road, cutting into the park area and making pedestrian crossing along the trail to the other side of Pickett hazardous

The Committee recognizes that Durham needs more housing, particularly affordable owner-occupied housing. We believe that the Pickett property could accommodate as many as 50 townhouses, rather than the out-of-scale tower currently proposed for the property. We urge the Planning Commission to recommend against approval of the current project in favor of one at more appropriate scale given the nature of the property and the nearby parklands.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Healy, Co-chair

New Hope Creek Corridor Advisory Committee