Taft Corners Associates, Inc.
2 Church Street
Burlington, Vermont 05401

January 31, 2022

Matt Boulanger
Director Planning & Zoning
Town of Williston
7900 Williston Road
Williston, VT 05495

Dear Matt:

Thank you for taking the time with us last week to discuss re-zoning at Taft Corners. Please pass on these comments from us to the Planning Commission and the Selectboard.

Dear Commission & Board members:

We represent Taft Corners Associates (TCA) the owner & developer of Taft Corners Park (TCP). We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the ongoing zoning process at Taft Corners. We applaud the efforts that the Town is making to improve the pedestrian friendliness and future downtown amenities at Taft Corners. We also have some significant concerns about the proposed regulations.

TCA has been developing Taft Corners Park since 1984. While some believe that our park is strictly box retail, that is not the case. TCP is a mix of retail, office, grocery, dining, manufacturing, and service businesses. In fact almost half of the square footage in our Park is not box retail. We have taken a very disciplined approach in our development and as you are aware, still have a significant amount of developable land in the Park. We have strived to create a mix of uses and resisted a "build it and they will come" approach.

We are proud of what we have created. We have contributed millions of dollars in property taxes and additional millions in local option tax revenues, which have helped the Town of Williston keep its tax rate reasonable and build beautiful community facilities, municipal buildings, parks, and bike paths. Many Williston citizens join the tens of thousands of Vermonters who visit our park each week.

We can also tell you that consultants, who advise you of the inevitable end of a development pattern such as ours, and the need to redesign it, are incorrect. Our businesses are thriving and the future is bright. This includes the box retail stores. Several are exercising future lease options earlier than necessary, and are also asking for lease extensions beyond the expirations of these options which carry

through the middle of the 21st Century. We are privy to the sales figures of some of the stores and they are very strong.

Our businesses have adapted and devised strategies to compete with internet sales. These include pick up & delivery options, assisted shopping, and distribution and internet sales from store locations.

We have also had good results in facing the retail changes happening today. We promptly replaced Toys R Us with REI Co-op and will be filling the AC Moore space with a quality retail tenant this spring.

Because of the above discipline and long term strategy we are well positioned to succeed into the future. We hope the Town will work with us to make new regulations flexible in order to meet market demand.

We recognize & support the Towns desire to create more of a Downtown feel in the immediate Taft Corners area. We have the following suggestions in the area north of Marshall Ave and east of Harvest Lane

- Building heights:
  We support the density of the taller buildings proposed in the draft regulation however we believe a vibrant downtown should have a mix of building heights, including single story buildings. All attractive downtowns (example Burlington) have a number of one story buildings mixed with 3 to 5 story and taller buildings. We recognize the Town does not want to see too many one story buildings. We propose that the Town allow 15-20% of the building footprint in this area to allow a one story use.

- Parking:
  While underground parking is strived for and necessary for a downtown, successful downtowns also contain a certain amount of surface parking in addition to street parking. Cost considerations and development layout considerations along with a business's needs make some surface parking attractive, functional and necessary. We propose that the town allow flexibility in this area for a percentage of the parking to be surface parking.

- Block Designs:
  Block designs and street layouts need to be flexible in order to allow creativity to meet the market demands. As written the zoning would require a bylaw amendment even for minor adjustments. This takes a lot of time. We propose that the regulations allow the DRB to use discretion to adjust block designs, street layouts, alley ways, sidewalks, etc. to provide this flexibility

- Grid Road Alignment:
  We would request that the future Trader Lane grid road circle behind the northwest corner of Hannaford be shifted slightly to the west in order to align up with other property owners to the west. Town staff has a sketch of this and it will provide access to properties to the west which we have sold as well as making land contribution equitable from all parties.

For the rest of TCP (south of Marshall Avenue & west of Harvest Lane) we urge you to reestablish traditional zoning. As explained above TCA has been very disciplined (and will continue to be) in the type of businesses we select to put in this area. Form based zoning here will stifle market forces and drive good projects away. As an example, we could not convince REI Co-op and others to locate on Lot 26, just south of Petsmart because of storefront on the streetscape, parking in the rear, and potential multi story, regulations. Again, this is a consultant assuming an area needs to be redeveloped because it is not succeeding. But it is! REI Co-op jumped at the opportunity when Toys R Us became available.

We appreciate your consideration of the above as you consider the planning of our land.

Thank you,

Jeffrey L. Davis

Jeff Nick