



July 6, 2017

Davidson Town Board
P.O. Box 579
Davidson, NC 28036

Re: The proposed Beaty Street property development

Dear Mayor Woods and Town Commissioners,

On behalf of the Davidson Lands Conservancy, we are writing to express our concerns about the proposed Luminous development on the town-owned Beaty Street land. We would like to see this town-owned land as significant natural open space in the downtown and Village Infill Planning area.

The Davidson Lands Conservancy (hereinafter “DLC”) was established in July of 2000 as a private, nonprofit land trust, by Davidson town citizens who were eager to help protect the natural lands in and around Davidson. The DLC’s mission is to provide the citizens of Davidson and surrounding areas alternatives to urban living by protecting natural lands and other open spaces for ecological and aesthetic purposes. We work to protect valuable land, educate the public about the benefits of conservation, and advocate on behalf of our ecosystems.

Open Space Preservation

In light of our mission, we are concerned about the diminishing supply of open space within and around Davidson. Our mission focuses on the entire Town—both “within” and “around” Davidson. The Beaty Street property represents one of the last remaining, undeveloped parcels of mature hardwoods and natural areas in the core of historic Davidson, which is fast approaching “build out.” This, of course, places even more development pressure on any remaining undeveloped parcels in Town. While there may be limits to what the town can do about those remaining tracts of land that are privately-owned, this one is entirely within the Town’s control, and if maintaining such an amenity within the historic core is important to the Town and its citizens, then Beaty is the last best opportunity to provide that sort of “natural” park experience within walking distance of this northern portion of Town. This property provides significant in-town wildlife habitat, from deer to ducks to raptors, such as owls and hawks, to aquatic life in the pond, including both fish and amphibians. All of these species depend on an interconnected ecosystem of water resources, edge wetlands habitat, and surrounding mature hardwood forests; take any of those elements away, and the site no longer functions in the same manner ecologically. Therefore, DLC would like to see more of the mature upland forest adjacent to the pond remain intact in order to provide meaningful habitat for the wildlife there.

We recognize that there are a significant number of invasive plants on the property, and would like to see these invasives removed to allow native species to flourish. Should the Town move forward with significant parkland on this site, DLC would be happy to help organize work days to remove invasives,



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and work with College faculty to determine best practices for permanent removal of invasives on the property.

Lake Norman Critical Watershed

The Beaty Street property is part of the Lake Norman Critical Watershed. The applicable water quality regulations require at least 50% open space in order to protect the integrity of the drinking water of Davidson, the surrounding towns, and Charlotte. The primary reason for these riparian buffers is to protect the surface water. For those of you who frequent Lake Norman, you may have seen an unusual amount of detritus, algal mats, and pollen this year, indicating that the existing buffers are inadequate and should be improved.

Riparian buffers have undergone much scrutiny about their effectiveness, resulting in thorough testing and monitoring. A significant study conducted by the University of Georgia over a nine-year period monitored the amounts of fertilizers that reached the watershed from the source of the application. It found that these buffers removed at least 60-65% of the nitrogen and phosphorus in the runoff, with farther away zones equally as or more effective than immediate buffers at removing contaminants. (Durham, Sharon. "Riparian Buffers Effective." Southeast Farm Press. 4 Feb 2004. Pg. 26).

The current Luminous proposal before the Town Board is utilizing a 100' wide buffer on the stream corridor, and a 30' wide buffer around the pond, with an additional 30' buffer leading from the northwest to the pond. The proposal utilizes almost all of the rest of the available property for development. For water quality purposes, DLC would like to see at least 100' wide buffers around the pond, as well—and preferably more—in order to protect our Critical Watershed and drinking water supply. (See the map attached here for clarity.)

Further, it is our understanding that due to the I-77 causeway, Lake Davidson does not enjoy the same "flushing" effect for pollutants that the river current in the main body of Lake Norman provides. Thus the presence of these riparian buffers and watershed protection become all the more important if we are to maintain Lake Davidson as an ecological and passive recreation amenity for the Town.

Greenway Connectivity

DLC would like to see natural open space accessible to all residents within 5-10 minute walk via a network of greenways and bike paths. We also support interconnected regional trails, such as the proposed Hummingbird Trail Alliance Plan (formerly known as the Mooresville to Charlotte trail). This proposed trail primarily follows the Norfolk-Southern rail line and would pass through the Beaty Street property. DLC would like to see this plan incorporated into the Beaty Street property proposal, so that residents have a greenway or multi-use path along the rail line to walk or bike into (and through) town along the proposed Hummingbird Trail.

Davidson Lands Conservancy's Recommendations



For these reasons, DLC cannot support the current RFP proposal for Beaty Street. If, however, the Town chooses to proceed with development, we ask that DLC be given the opportunity to work with other stakeholders to develop a plan that would increase preservation of natural upland habitat and riparian buffer, particularly around the pond, and greenway connectivity, such as sufficient space “saved” along the rail line for a multi-use path.

In expressing our views on this matter, and in requesting that the majority of the Beaty Street site be preserved and enhanced as a publicly accessible nature preserve, DLC is mindful of the Town’s budgetary constraints. Given those constraints, the Town has a tradition of partnering with the development community to help fund amenities such as park improvements in new developments. While we applaud this strategy, we believe a unique, Town-owned property such as Beaty presents a rare opportunity to go beyond a developer-driven strategy of park development—an opportunity for the Town’s citizens, non-profit agencies and its philanthropic community to come together and organize around raising additional public and private funds to realize the Beaty Street site’s extraordinary potential as an urban nature preserve and park. Over the course of its 17-year history, the Davidson Lands Conservancy has developed close relationships with the leadership of various state funding agencies that assist local communities with land conservation and the development of parks, including the NC Parks & Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) and the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF). If given the opportunity, DLC is willing to reach out to those agencies and other constituents (including its membership base) to help secure funds necessary to make the Beaty Street site another jewel in Davidson’s growing list of natural and cultural amenities.

Thank you for your careful time and attention to this matter. Do not hesitate to contact us further if you have questions about our position, or if we can be of assistance in moving forward with our recommendations.

Sincerely,

/s/

Autumn Rierson Michael, Executive Director

/s/

John Burke, Chair, DLC Board of Directors



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Appendix: According to Polaris, the LKN Critical Watershed buffers in place and the pond are shown below:

