SITE PLAN APPROVAL
Exterior Building Design **September 16, 2011**

The commercial district where this project is located is the only district in the Village Growth area that has no set limits on the area of a structure or design guidelines for its looks. This district relies totally on Section 4.3(3) in the Zoning which requires: *Adequacy of ……. exterior building design in regard to achieving maximum compatibility with adjacent property and with the character of the neighborhood.* While the applicant states that they were surprised that the building design is receiving the scrutiny it is, a cursory review of the regulations yields that maximum compatibility has always been required, and the scrutiny shouldn't have been a surprise, it is required.

They furthermore state that the authority of the town to regulate building design is quite limited. They are right in stating that the town has no authority to tell them what size or design the structure has to have, however the DRB has to find that it is maximally compatible with adjacent property and with the character of the neighborhood and that is the authority that the Town has. The question is not whether the neighborhood can assimilate their proposed structure, but whether the big box nature of the proposed structure will achieve that maximum compatibility with adjacent property and with the character of the neighborhood.

Two definitions may be helpful: Compatibility, harmonious, agreeable or congenial combination, well matched and Character the set of qualities that make something distinctive, interesting or attractive

It should be remembered that the Planning Commission in the original 12/10/86 – Commerce Park Subdivision approval stated that: "#8 Potential purchasers are notified that the Commission will carefully review the site plans and proposed uses, and that those lots on the exterior of the development (which includes lot 15) will receive particularly close attention for aesthetically pleasing construction….." While not binding on the DRB, it is advisory.

For the purposes of neighborhood, I am including all structures on property directly adjacent to lot # 15 or across Mechanicsville Rd, and all others in this Commercial District, 17 in total.

Hannaford will be about 50% larger than the largest neighborhood structure and 200% larger than the average one. The size of the existing structures ranges from around 21000 square feet footprint (Firehouse Plaza, the Ministorage and Nestech) to 900 square foot residence, with an average size of about 7400 Sq. Ft. (Tail hook) and a median of about 4416, (the Vet clinic). While size, in itself, is not an issue, a larger structure in relation to the smaller structures that constitute the neighborhood becomes more of a challenge.

Hannaford walls are basically 22 feet high. The structures in the neighborhood are genuine single story structures other than Darkstar Nestech and Tailhook which have front portions a genuine two stories and rear portions that are a higher "one story" with either manufacturing or storage space within. The average total wall height of all the existing structures is 13 feet with the median being 10 feet.

13 of the 17 structures have pitched roofs and there areas far as I can tell, no visible mechanicals on the roof except relatively small fans.

All of this keeps them from being imposing structures and they are human scaled – with doors and windows located in relation to people's use so if the walls are more than one story high, the structure is a two story building.

While objective arguments may be offered that it is compatible with this facet of one structure, and some other facet of another, or possibly that since there are other structures in the area that were designed with only cost in mind, it passes the maximum compatibility test, the subjective comparison of this to the structures that comprise the basic fabric of the area may well establish that it is not maximally compatible.

The applicant has stated that they were unaware of the fact that the building design would receive much scrutiny, and they chose to begin with their standard (big box) design. It should be remembered that it was their choice to have no communication with the planning and zoning office until the plans were submitted. The choice of a basic shape which is a large monolith has created a starting design for the structure that may make it very difficult for it to achieve maximum compatibility.

Exterior building design is not only the outside walls of the structure, but the shape of the structure itself, and the applicants statement that "The exterior design of the building has been completely revised to respond to concerns we heard" is simply not the case. Thus far, with all the front façade changes included, the front has morphed to look much like the front of the Taft's Corners Wall Mart. Reconsideration by the applicant of the basic nature of this structure is highly recommended.

Peter Erb

Zoning Administrator and Staff for this project for the DRB