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To: Mayor and Council of Princeton Borough  
From: Bob Durkee

While I appreciated the opportunity last evening to reply again to the question that was asked and answered at last week's Council meeting, I thought perhaps it would be better this time to reply in writing. The question was whether the University would consider developing its arts and transit neighborhood without relocating the terminus of the Dinky.

I answered this question last week and I believe President Tilghman answered it in her comments at the January 31 joint meeting. The arts and transit project involves much more than just the spectacular Steven Holl-designed building. At full development it is likely to include at least two other buildings to the east of that building and at least one other building (the performance hall) to the south. The plan depends on easy and safe pedestrian access through the site from north to south and east to west as well as on diagonals for all who walk through the neighborhood, including students, faculty, staff, visitors, and local residents. Pedestrians will have to be able to walk among the buildings, between the Lot 7 garage and the arts buildings (including McCarter and Berlind), and to and from the retail spaces. This cannot be accomplished with a train running through the site.

Another key element of the plan is the access driveway to the Lot 7 garage. This has sustainability benefits in reducing vehicle miles traveled and it contributes to a reduction in congestion at the Faculty Road/Alexander Street intersection. It also makes the garage accessible to arts patrons during evenings and weekends (when performances are likely to be occurring) and opens the possibility of making use of that garage for other purposes as future phases of the plan are developed. This access driveway also cannot be accomplished with a train running through the site past the proposed location of the new station.

Even if we are not able to proceed with the full arts and transit project on this site, it will be critical to future development to be able to create the access driveway and an open and safe pedestrian space north of the proposed new terminus. This is why we would plan to relocate the terminus, as provided for in our agreement with New Jersey Transit, whether or not we receive the zoning necessary to construct new space for the arts in this area. As we have said on numerous occasions, if we have to develop the area within existing zoning we can do that, so the question is not whether this site will be developed with a relocated Dinky terminus, but whether it will be developed for the arts and with the other infrastructure improvements we have proposed.

Under any circumstances we continue to have a significant interest in sustaining the Dinky, but it will be much more difficult to do that without the benefits that would accrue from embedding the Dinky in an arts and transit neighborhood and without the other infrastructure improvements that are part of our proposal. We do not agree with those who assert that ridership will be reduced because of the relocation of 460 feet, and we also do not agree that the proposed site of the new station creates impediments to use by those who will drive to it. The proposed setback of the station from Alexander Street is very similar to the setback of the Princeton Junction station from Wallace Road, behind a grove of trees and a parking area, and the proposed AET zoning ordinance would permit signage on Alexander that would make it very clear that this is the location of the Princeton station. Because the drop-off and pick-up would be set back from Alexander it would not interfere with the flow of traffic on Alexander or create unsafe conditions as drivers pull in and pull out.

Our understanding was that the MOU negotiation was proposed because the governing bodies recognized that the Dinky would be moving and they wanted to see if agreement could be reached on steps that could be taken to address some of the concerns that have been expressed about that move and to begin to identify ways that all of us can think and plan together for a future time when the Dinky will be replaced by a more contemporary technology. If we are able to go forward with our proposed plan, we are prepared to make the commitments and contributions in the draft agreement if it is approved by the two municipalities.

cc: Kristin Appelget