

MINORITY REPORT

of the

Comprehensive Plan Committee

Submitted on February 11, 2012

by

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in response to the

**TOWN OF
ITHACA, NEW YORK
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

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A New Approach

Although the proposed Plan adopts some Smart-Growth principles, it ignores others that are fundamental. — The rush to finish the report was exacerbated by some very problematic process decisions imposed on the committee. — The whole report was organized, designed and written by staff. — Committee members had to beg and beg to get electronic copies of any draft documents. — It took a majority of the committee members *present* at a meeting to make any changes to the drafts that staff presented. — The first time the Comprehensive Plan Committee approved and sent to the Town Board its recommendations, it only provided a partial draft of the proposed Plan. — The public was not allowed to speak at committee meetings. — While committee members and staff are recommending that the Town only make minor policy changes, other communities are stepping forward and are making changes that were unthinkable a few years ago. — The Town of Concord, MA banned the sale of plastic water bottles within the town. — The Philadelphia Orchard Project plants fruit trees in the City of Philadelphia that grow healthy food, provide green spaces and community food security. — Porter Township, PA became the first local government in the United States to eliminate corporate claims to civil and constitutional privileges. — The Town of Sugar Hill, NH enacted a local law to establish a local “Bill of Rights” which gives residents the right to sue corporations that damage the environment. — The Town of Ithaca should be proactive in these ways too.....p... 57-61.

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Introduction

A town's comprehensive plan should be a document that describes the town's goals and objectives for the future, and acts as a guideline for town officials making decisions, especially with regard to the issues of land-use. While the Town of Ithaca's draft Comprehensive Plan was created in the hope of reducing future sprawl development in the Town, it misses the mark on numerous crucial elements. In fact, experiences in similar communities predict that implementation of the proposed Plan will *encourage* continued sprawl development.

The problems with the proposed Plan permeate the document so thoroughly that they cannot be addressed with a simple list of corrections. We are so dissatisfied with the proposed Comprehensive Plan that we feel compelled to present the Town Board with a critical analysis of the proposal. Above all, we adamantly take issue with the Plan's assumptions that land-use planning can continue with only minor variations from "business as usual" planning so common for the past few generations. These assumptions underlie almost every recommendation in the proposed Plan. Town of Ithaca residents have been quite clear in their desire to see a dramatic change in planning—one that does far more to protect open space. And for good reason: our society is facing a future where such narrow planning approaches are increasingly more detrimental than they have ever been in the past.

Humanity has reached a point of diminishing returns in resource extraction. "Peak oil," the point where oil production levels off because no new significant sources are being discovered, occurred around 2005. Nevertheless, companies are drilling more and more oil wells in a futile attempt to

keep up with the oil production of previous years. We will now obtain less oil—and it will always be less—than in previous years. To make matters worse, we are also facing peak extraction of many other natural inputs to our society. Water that is both clean and widely available is becoming scarce. We are losing quality topsoil at an ever increasing rate. Copper, nickel, silver, lithium, rare earth metals, etc. are becoming difficult to find and are requiring ever larger energy inputs to recover. Technological innovations cannot ameliorate these facts. We are running out of the materials we need to maintain our society's requirements and demands.

We can see the results of the expanding extraction of resources to maintain our way of life: 90% of the large fish in the ocean are gone; approximately 200 species of flora and fauna go extinct every single day; climate change has dramatically changed weather patterns, and will continue to do so for generations to come. Each year, 16 million hectares of forest disappear, and by this century's end there may no longer be any rain forests left. Scientific studies predict that in the first half of the 21st century we will lose between 30% and 50% of all species on earth. We are witnessing what many scientists are calling the "sixth mass extinction".

The world's economy is in a state of crisis. Many European countries are effectively bankrupt and no attempted solution has improved that situation. The US economy is not much better, forced to accept an ever-increasing percentage of its workforce being unemployed together with another significant percentage being drastically underemployed. The middle class is disappearing, while the rich amass unprecedented amounts of wealth and the ranks of the poor swell dramatically. Most localities are making drastic cuts to their budgets, eliminating programs that previous generations would never have considered cutting. We have climbed out of previous depressions/recessions by growing the economy to absorb the unemployed. Given the current resource situation, there is no viable strategy to grow the economy; there are no new frontiers. The human population on this planet is growing, seven billion and counting, and the resources we have at our disposal are shrinking. We cannot continue on this path for much longer.

The reality is that our society is going through significant changes. We can choose to deal with these challenges ourselves, or allow events to make our choices for us. The Town's proposed Comprehensive Plan is a place where we can start to make those choices. Given the sea change that humanity is facing, the Town's proposed Comprehensive Plan needs to be dramatically different from those in the past. Unfortunately, it is not.

The proposed Town of Ithaca Comprehensive Plan is presented, in the typical style for comprehensive plans written in the last few decades, with chapters detailing individual aspects of our community: Land Use and Development, Housing and Neighborhoods, Natural Resources and Environment, Energy and Climate Protection, Agriculture, Recreation, Historical Resources, Transportation, Municipal Services and Infrastructure, Community Services, and Economic Development. While this provides an easily accessible inventory of our Town's infrastructure, it does not describe how these elements relate to one another. Missing from this approach is a framework for coordinating these elements to create the kind of community we want to live in the future. For example, infrastructure (water/sewer, roads, bus routes, etc.) drives development. If one analyzes these elements separately, it is too easy to miss how adjusting one will dramatically change the other. In Chapter 2, the Plan proposes to "Limit extensions of infrastructure into areas not designated for intensive development except when required for health and safety." However,

the proposed Future Land Use Map recommends extending the development line into the current agricultural area on West Hill, while also extending it beyond the capability of the current water system to service it.



The orange area is proposed to be a “New Neighborhood” development area. The yellow line (and the area to the right of it) delineates the maximum elevation to which the Town’s water system can provide water from the Trumansburg water tank without additional pumping stations and storage tanks. This is the maximum reach; development near this line will have inferior service compared to the rest of the Town, especially on upper stories of structures. Ideally, there should be a buffer between this line and where development is encouraged and/or allowed.

The Comprehensive Plan should be organized to cover 3-5 important issues the Town is facing and look at those in detail, with the understanding that each will address all of the relevant elements. The advantage to this format is that policy makers will have more of an understanding of everything that needs to be done, in tandem, to deal with the important issues facing our community. Organizing a comprehensive plan in this way makes the document a much more useful tool in helping a community plan its future.

In this report, we critique the Town’s proposed Comprehensive Plan using an issue-focused approach. While most of the Town’s proposed Comprehensive Plan may sound reasonable in detail, it fails to give us sufficient vision to deal with some of the major cumulative issues we are facing today. We will focus on these issues in the following pages: “Land Use: Preserving Open Spaces”, “Sustainability”, “Economic and Social Justice” and “Intermunicipal Planning for the Next Century”.

Land Use: Preserving Open Spaces

A key question facing the Town is how to accommodate the perceived demand for more housing with the coexisting demand for preserving open space (e.g., farms, parks, natural areas, lakes, and streams). The rural environment that attracted many of us to the Town and that still attracts students and tourists to our area, is being lost. Since 1980, the Town of Ithaca has added approximately 2000 housing units to its built environment. A steady demand for new housing has resulted in a loss of agricultural and open space and an increase in population and housing units in the Town. Even with this dramatic increase in the Town's population, thousands of people continue to commute daily through the Town to get to work.

In 2006, the "Tompkins County Affordable Housing Needs Assessment" projected a need for an additional 3,894 housing units within the county by 2014. Six years after that report was published, several Comprehensive Plan Committee members were still projecting a "need for 4,000 more housing units in the county in the next 10 years". Many of those same committee members felt strongly that the Town of Ithaca should be the location for a large percentage of those units. Committee members expressed that the Town had the "moral obligation" to build its "share" of the housing, not necessarily that it would be good community planning to do so. Additionally, this "share" was usually more than half of the projected needs for the entire County. However, vacancy rates are far higher in the Town of Ithaca than in the City (7% in the Town vs. 0.5% in the City), indicating that housing is needed in the City more than in the Town.

In January 2009, the Town commissioned a survey of its residents on a number of issues. One of the clear conclusions from the survey was that residents valued natural areas and farm land, collectively referred to as "open space". Not only was open space at the top of Town residents'

list of reasons why they were attracted to the Town, but it was also close to the top of priorities of how they wanted their tax dollars spent (marginally exceeded by a call to improve the infrastructure for bicycling throughout the community).

Given the pressures of increased development, whether real or perceived, it is important that we not expand the perimeter of development each time we revise our comprehensive plan. There is no point in setting limits on growth if they are moved every 20 years or so. Regularly moving the development line tells developers that these lines are only temporary suggestions.

Preserving open space is not simply a matter of aesthetics. Open spaces are critical to the long-term health of the Town and to the health of the planet. As residents turn to local sources for food, the Town's agricultural lands provide a critical resource for farming. Furthermore, the clay soils that are common in the Town do not absorb water well, so preserving wetlands and woodlands are an important part of the Town's storm water management system. The Town is also blessed with natural features that provide beauty and recreation for residents and visitors, such as Cayuga Lake, Buttermilk Falls State Park, Robert H. Treman State Park, and the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell. We also have an obligation to the planet to maintain well-planned, well-protected open space that preserves the diverse habitats (and interconnecting natural corridors) that sustain our community.

Over the years, a significant portion of the Town's open lands has been lost to sprawl. Sprawl requires people to use automobiles for getting to and from work, shopping, recreation and professional services. Sprawl creates a world in which walking to work is impossible, convenient public transportation unaffordable, and life without a family fleet of cars is unthinkable. It is for these reasons that modern, "Smart Growth" principles have guided planners to minimize sprawl. The Town of Ithaca must take the lead in planning the growth of the Town to avoid sprawl while preserving a diversity of types, sizes, and costs of residences.

The Smart Growth approach to accommodate the needs for open space and more housing is to increase the density of already-built areas and to limit sprawl. It is not enough simply to pack more housing among the loosely spaced houses we already have. Instead, the Town needs to target specific locations for land preservation and other areas for dramatically increased density—a density that is concentrated enough to allow for public transportation, maintain a mixed-use focal point, and create a sense of community. It is vitally important that in order for non-sprawl development to meet demands, it has to be dense. If we provide developers with too many locations for new housing, they can all too easily meet demand with sprawl development.

In the 1993 Comprehensive Plan, the Town stated that one of its specific goals was to "focus development to avoid sprawl." To accomplish this goal, the plan recommended that the Town "plan its development pattern with densities that justify conveniently located shops and/or facilitate access to existing shops." Twenty years later, despite good intentions, we see that sprawl development has continued in the Town. The densities the 1993 Plan encouraged never created the stores envisioned.

The Town must reevaluate its traditional zoning tools and implement new mechanisms for encouraging landowners and developers to pursue the twin goals of increasing density and limiting sprawl. In this context, the Town should implement a form-based zoning code, which will

encourage mixed use and a sense of community among neighbors. A form-based code addresses the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks. It is the only zoning approach that allows us, as a community, to decide what our community will look like.

Clearly, in order to stop the sprawl that is overrunning our open space, the Town's 2012 proposed Comprehensive Plan needs to change dramatically from the previous Plan of 1993. What follows are some specific ways in which the land use component of the proposed Comprehensive Plan should change.

Growth Boundaries

The largest single element in the 1993 Plan that allowed sprawl to develop was its failure to focus on small areas of the Town for targeted development. While the Town cannot eliminate all ways in which a property can be used for economic gain (without having to compensate the owner for a "takings"), it does have significant power to influence what will be done with that property.

The current draft of the Comprehensive Plan, unfortunately, does little to restrict development in any area of the Town. The Plan does include some suggested actions that its authors assume to be disincentives for development. For example, it recommends increasing the minimum lot size in agricultural areas to one lot per 15 acres.

James Howard Kunstler points out the fallacy of this thinking in his book, *The Geography of Nowhere*:

As sprawl spilled over the countryside, alarmed town officials passed laws designed to mitigate it, which had the unforeseen consequence of making it worse. One common mistake was to increase the minimum lot size in the mistaken belief that spreading houses farther apart would preserve the open character of the landscape. In fact, it had the opposite effect: it ruined the rural landscape in larger chunks. A two- to five-acre minimum lot requirement meant houses were being plopped down in the middle of every cow pasture. The scraps of land left behind weren't used for anything. They were, "too big to mow, and too small to plow," in the words of Robert Yaro, Randall Arendt's former boss, now an officer with the regional Plan Association in New York City. (page 264)

This change does not really protect open spaces from encroaching development; large lots are still able to have 15-acre homesteads carved out of them. There is not a single acre in the Town where this proposed Plan says that no new building should be built. Even in the areas designated as "Natural/Open" (the most restrictive land use category in the proposed Plan), building, albeit as "sparse residential development on a case-by-case basis, is still permitted.

While every acre of open space in the Town is potentially a building site, the draft Plan recommends little, if any, rezoning to a category that limits development. Areas categorized as "rural residential" in 1993 with very few homes/buildings on them are still largely designated as a "Semi-Rural Neighborhood". This designation not only allows for more sprawl development in these areas, but implicitly approves the sprawl development that has already been built.

Committee discussions made it clear that the proposed Future Land Use Map was created based more on where current buildings are, and where developers have shown interest in building more of them, rather than on developing a master plan of how the Town should be laid out and where development ought to be.

The Committee quickly dismissed any suggestions of expanding the open space designation into areas that the 1993 Plan categorized as developed or semi-developed. Sites with one or two houses on large acreages are still designated as “Semi-Rural Neighborhood”, although one would have trouble visualizing these stand-alone houses as a “neighborhood” when viewed from the road.

The Committee, however, did focus on whether more open space should be converted to housing. Remarkably, the committee could not agree to keep open space such as the Country Club. Even though there are no plans to close the club, and no developer has proposed any building there, many committee members wanted to have the proposed Plan carve out a large section for potential development of housing. Large areas of open space, such as the Country Club, located in the middle of an urbanized area, are treasured by the surrounding residents (think of Central Park in NYC). They are not only rare, but impossibly expensive to create after an area has been heavily urbanized. The pressure is one-way: open space is always redesignated as new building lots, never the other way around. Planning like this will, eventually, eliminate all open space. The proposed Comprehensive Plan should make it clear that the Town wants this acreage to remain open space, forever.

The primary strategy of the draft Plan is to create dense areas and avoid sprawl with density “incentives”. These incentives encourage developers to create projects that are denser than the surrounding area. It is a mistake to think that if we make new development denser than the old development, it will not be sprawl. This is simply wrong; sprawl comes in many densities.

To avoid sprawl development, we need a working definition of sprawl.

Sprawl includes these elements:

1. Developments consisting primarily of one- and two-story buildings.
2. Developments consisting primarily of single-use buildings.
3. Developments that are primarily dependent on automobiles to move the public to them and throughout them.

It is important to remember that sprawl is not about how a *single parcel* is developed; it is about how an *area* is developed. For example, the motel on the corner of West King and Danby Roads is multistory, but is located in an area of the Town that is primarily strip development. Thus, it suffers from one of the largest problems of sprawl: it is still a single use project, requiring staff and visitors to commute in and out of the place one or more times each day. The surrounding area is so sparsely populated that it is impossible to maintain regular mass transit, so the motel is only accessible via individual automobile, unless one of the 3 buses each day between 9:30 AM and 6 PM fits your schedule.

In order to have an urban development instead of sprawl, there needs to be sufficient density to allow for a significant portion of its population to pursue their daily activities (e.g., live, work,

play) on foot. This kind of development simply cannot be done with a few hundred people. For example, a diverse retail community needs a sufficiently large population base to allow for enough customers to keep it in business. It takes an even larger population base to support the kinds of commercial activities that create the kinds of jobs that can support a family.

Further, communities are more than a collection of houses and businesses; they need civic space. The Project for Public Spaces describes the value of well-designed civic space:

Civic spaces are an extension of the community. When they work well, they serve as a stage for our public lives. If they function in their true civic role, they can be the settings where celebrations are held, where social and economic exchanges take place, where friends run into each other, and where cultures mix. They are the “front porches” of our public institutions – post offices, courthouses, federal office buildings – where we can interact with each other and with government. When cities and neighborhoods have thriving civic spaces, residents have a strong sense of community; conversely, when such spaces are lacking, people may feel less connected to each other. Great civic spaces are really great public places. They are recognized and valued in their cities and towns as places with their own special flavor that relate to and nurture the larger community and bring the public together.

Developers typically do not add civic space to their projects unless compelled to by local requirements; building civic space does not add to their bottom line. Public spaces (town halls, courthouses, schools, libraries, theaters, and squares, etc.) are built by the public because they benefit the public. In a speech to the American Institute of Architects in Orlando (August, 1998) James Howard Kunstler explained the importance previous generations placed on quality civic space:

And this is what happened in America of the 1890s. Our cultural leaders agreed that we had to create cities and towns worthy of a great nation. This project was carried forward in the spirit of a great patriotic movement. It started with a show: the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, at which the great architects and civic designers of that day— Daniel Burnham, Charles McKim, Stanford White, and many others— demonstrated how wonderful public places could be created by using the vocabulary of neoclassical architecture and the grammar of French formal civic design— how to arrange the beautiful buildings to define space in a way that is humanly rewarding.

Before long, the movement became a competitive craze across the nation. Towns and cities tried to outdo one another in fabulous buildings and public places. Every town had to have its new neoclassical courthouse, and perhaps even a civic square to go with it. Every town built a magnificent new library. The great college campuses were laid out. Every new bank, post office, and firehouse was endowed with a richly expressive, dignified facade. It was an exuberant, confident era. Many of our most beloved public places and public buildings owe their existence to the city beautiful movement: the San Francisco Civic Center, the campus of UC at Berkeley, the great museums of the Washington DC Mall, the Coply Square library in Boston, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The list is very long and it includes innumerable less famous town halls, courthouses, schools, theaters, and squares.

Civic space is so important that it is given premium placement in communities. The public buildings are located where street vistas terminate, at the head of a public square or prominently in neighborhood centers. Prominent placement states that these buildings are important landmarks as well as reinforcing their symbolic importance.

Other than parks and trails, the proposed Comprehensive Plan makes no provision for civic space. Parks and trails are important, and it is good that the proposed Plan clearly values these elements of our community. But the omission of even the discussion of any other kind of civic space is striking. Places for people to gather and interact with each other bind a community together. They give communities a focal point. The Town is severely lacking in such spaces, and this is reflected in the fact that most residents have trouble telling the difference between the Town and the City. One of the reasons Town residents think they are part of the City is because the City has real civic spaces.

The kind of change that our community needs—a change from a community with a large amount of sprawl development to one which has sustainable land-use and real neighborhoods—is far more than a few incentives in the right direction. Incentives, at best, will produce gradual change. The proposed Comprehensive Plan’s first recommendation under “Land Use and Development” is to “Avoid Sprawl by focusing and promoting development...” Avoiding sprawl requires direct measures that are explicit about what kind of development is acceptable in the Town, as well as what kind is not. As we saw with the 1993 Plan, it will take more than gradual changes to rid the Town of sprawl and arrest the current trends.

The Town of Ithaca should designate a small number of areas for development, and gather all the tools at its disposal to stop development in all other areas. In addition, the Town should remove all the incentives that are in place that make sprawl possible. For example, the Town must assert that it is not going to extend the water and sewer districts beyond its current network, and, in some areas, will not allow new hookups, even if the property is adjacent to a water/sewer line. The creation of new roads, as well as enlarging roads to accommodate more traffic, simply encourages sprawl, yet is commonplace in our communities. The Town should be clear that in areas that are not designated for urbanization, new roads are not going to be built, and existing roads are not going to be expanded for more automobile traffic. Agricultural land becomes more viable by removing the competition of development, as well as by reducing taxes (land is valued at unaffordable tax rates for agricultural uses if serviced by water and sewer).

Furthermore, the Town must note that some buildings built in the past were a mistake and should be reverted back to open space. This includes both encouraging razing of buildings in poor condition, as well as moving other buildings to more appropriate locations. Many will see this recommendation as severe and unrealistic. If we acknowledge that some of the buildings built in the Town should never have been built—and by rejecting sprawl we are implicitly saying this—why continue the mistake by encouraging them to remain in place? Mistakes should be corrected. If it was a mistake to build them, it is a mistake to keep them in place if we have other options.

Road Diets

Town residents commenting to the Comprehensive Plan Committee spoke often about the challenges they face finding transportation using anything other than private automobiles. At the

Northeast Area Meeting, on June 14, 2010, residents told Committee members:

The new plan for Hanshaw Road rebuild will remove trees that help with traffic calming; the plan for the road appears to be overbuilt; the County has not paid attention to the residents.

At the East Ithaca Neighborhood Meeting, on June 16, 2010, the following comments were made:

- Snyder Hill – traffic too high, traffic calming needed.
- Poor shoulders on Pine Tree Road – no place to bike – potholes are also an issue on Pine Tree Road – would be willing to give a little front yard for bikes.
- Traffic / speed on Pine Tree Road – lots of trucks.

At the South Hill Neighborhood Meeting, on June 10, 2010, residents made the following suggestions:

- Lack of sidewalks leads to people walking along the shoulder, this is particularly scary during rush hour traffic. Need to create a safer environment for walkers, so people can safely walk from where they live to Ithaca College. Make it safer for cars and students.
- Sidewalks needed to King Road and beyond too.
- Efforts to address the need for sidewalks require many parties to collaborate.
- Need bike shoulders. Shoulders are soft and narrow on S. Hill roads, except for 96B.
- Roads enhancement, while needed, must be built to a reasonable size – they should not be built too wide as that will only increase traffic speed and impact the safety of pedestrians.
- There is no disagreement that Coddington Rd. needs improvements; but it should be reasonable for the character of the area (i.e. 10 ft. lanes, 3-4 ft. shoulders).

At the West Hill Area meeting, June 17, 2010, residents gave committee members the following feedback:

- West Haven Rd. residents tried to get the speed limit reduced on their street and were refused. Living sustainably means more walking and biking, but can't do that here because of the speeding, frustrated that there wasn't a lot of action taken to deal with speeding and traffic impacts on neighborhood.
- Route 79 (Mecklenburg Road) is really scary without sidewalks.
- There has been increased traffic, increased development, and increased speeding.

Though Town residents are clearly worried about traffic, they are asking for the existing roads to become more narrow, not wider. The classic approach to making roads more bicycle/pedestrian friendly is to widen the road to accommodate bike lanes and sidewalks, and is exactly what the Town and County have been doing. This is a mistake. Instead of taking up more land for transportation, we need to allocate the space we have already dedicated to transportation *differently*.

In 1994 the British government's Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment (SACTRA) issued a report that concluded that building roads actually generates traffic (referred to as "induced traffic"). London Transport and the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) jointly asked the natural follow-up question: "Does reducing the size of roads eliminate traffic?"

They looked at locations around the world, including the United States, where roads had been narrowed or car use had been eliminated altogether. The reason for the changes ranged from construction projects to creating bus and bike lanes. The general prediction was that these road narrowing projects would result in major traffic problems. The actual results showed a reduction in traffic.

Traffic problems were short term as drivers learned of the new traffic conditions. On average, 14-25% of the traffic simply disappeared. When the road was removed, the induced traffic went with it. When road removal was combined with an increased emphasis on alternatives to automobile use, such as bike lanes and buses, traffic reduction was substantially higher.

The report investigated the change in traffic patterns resulting from the collapse of Manhattan's West Side Highway. This limited-access highway running the length of the island along its western shore was a major conduit for cars. Carrying 110,000 vehicles a day, it was seen as essential to managing Manhattan's traffic. Lack of maintenance caused large portions of the highway to collapse in 1973. The remaining sections were still able to carry 50,000 cars a day. It was assumed that Manhattan's streets absorbed the remaining traffic. Yet, after the highway's collapse, Manhattan saw an 8% total reduction in traffic (or 50,000 cars per day).

The report summarizes why this reduction happens:

In explaining what was happening to the traffic, the following model of behavioral response emerged. Initially, when road space for cars is reduced, drivers simply change their driving styles in ways which pack more vehicles in, for example, by driving closer together. As conditions deteriorate, they then take the next easiest options - swapping to neighboring streets, or changing their time of travel, leaving a bit earlier or later to avoid the worst of the traffic. As such adjustments also become problematic, a whole variety of responses is triggered, ranging from people altering how they travel, or where they carry out activities, through to people moving house or moving job, where the change in travelling conditions "tips the balance" in a decision that was being made for other reasons anyway. Taken together, this third set of responses accounts for the measurable "disappearance" of a proportion of traffic from the networks studied.

The project also highlighted the amount of variability which underlies apparently stable traffic flows, and which enables people to change their travel habits. Specifically, individuals make adjustments to their travel behavior on a fairly regular basis anyway, either because of minor factors (like the occasional decision to work from home, or to carry out one activity on the way to another), or because of more important decisions (like changes in car ownership or job location or home location), or because of longer-term, life-cycle events (like changes in household composition). Hence, when road space is reduced, some people are forced to alter a repeated, habitual pattern of

behavior, but other people are spontaneously reconsidering their travel options anyway, and can take account of changes in the network conditions as part of this process. It is this flexibility which enables surprisingly large changes in traffic flows to result from a particular change to road conditions.

Opening up the streets to traffic other than automobiles has been shown to reduce traffic problems, and make for a community that is more livable. This should be highlighted in the proposed Comprehensive Plan as an action item for the Town.

Additionally, wide streets encourage faster traffic. Drivers generally drive at the speed that feels safe to them, regardless of the posted speed limits. Hence, we have speeding problems on Pine Tree Road and West Haven Road. Widening the roads will only make this problem worse. No amount of enforcement will change this to the point that the roads are safe for pedestrians and bicycles.

Residents want space for bikes and pedestrians on our roadways. In the 2009 Town of Ithaca survey results, it was the number one way the community wanted its tax money directed. Similarly, as we have seen with the community opposition on Coddington Road, residents do not want roads to be larger, with fast moving traffic. Unfortunately, nowhere in the proposed Comprehensive Plan is there any suggestion of reducing the size of any of the Town's roads. This is a striking omission given that the studies point to road diets as the solution to the traffic problems our community is facing; essentially it is what our residents have been asking our Town and County officials to implement.

Real Density

The term "density" is used differently in the Town's proposed Comprehensive Plan than how it is used in most settings. For example the Town's proposed Comprehensive Plan states:

The Neighborhood Center character district is intended to be the setting for a dense mixed use neighborhoods (sic) based on the rural-to-urban transect and traditional neighborhood design principals. (page 54)

The density proposed for this "dense mixed use neighborhood" (this is the highest density of any designation in the proposed Plan) is an average of 4-18 housing units per acre (which includes opens space requirements of 10%-20% of the acreage). Developers would be allowed to build slightly more dense developments if they included low income housing. The proposed Plan is suggesting this range for the developed property. So for a "dense mixed use neighborhood" the proposed Plan suggests a "neighborhood" of a block or two with the density of 18 housing units per acre with the surrounding blocks having a much lower density. The overall density in these proposed neighborhoods will be 8-12 housing units per acre. And this density is only for the three red areas of "high density" shown on the Proposed Land Use Map. The much larger orange areas, labeled "Established Neighborhood" and "New Neighborhood", have proposed overall densities of 2-6 housing units per acre.

This sounds good, until you consider what this kind of density looks like on the ground. Julie Campoli and Alex MacLean authored a book called, *Visualizing Density* which documents what



Some sample illustrations from Julie Campoli and Alex MacLean’s book, *Visualizing Density*, illustrating various density levels and what they look like in the real world.

various densities look like in the real world. It is quite clear from their photo documentary that mixed use communities form after the overall density of an area reaches 15 housing units per acre. We can see that in our own community: the Belle Sherman area in the City of Ithaca has a density of 5-6 housing units per acre; Fall Creek has a density of 8-10 housing units per acre.

The members of the Town Comprehensive Plan Committee held various opinions about what size population it takes to maintain a retail base in a community. Below is a chart from the DIA’s retail market study done by Urban Marketing Collaborative in 2005. While the study is somewhat dated, it is pertinent to look closely at per capita expenditures by category, which have not substantially changed. These are total expenditures for all purchases.

Average Household Expenditure

	Downtown	1.5 Mile Radius	3.0 Mile Radius	Tompkins County
Retail Merchandise				
Apparel	\$ 1,538	\$ 1,876	\$ 2,481	\$ 2,115
Furniture and Appliances	\$ 1,305	\$ 1,632	\$ 2,295	\$ 2,054
Recreation	\$ 720	\$ 880	\$ 1,197	\$ 1,036
Convenience Goods				
Food from Stores	\$ 3,466	\$ 4,117	\$ 5,205	\$ 4,582
Alcohol from Stores	\$ 202	\$ 250	\$ 339	\$ 281
Tobacco	\$ 291	\$ 329	\$ 385	\$ 355
Health and Personal Care	\$ 1,025	\$ 1,218	\$ 1,584	\$ 1,376

Eating and Drinking

Food from Restaurants	\$ 2,029	\$ 2,479	\$ 3,317	\$ 2,827
Alcohol	\$ 166	\$ 203	\$ 274	\$ 227
Personal Services				
Personal Care	\$ 334	\$ 401	\$ 526	\$ 451
Laundry and Cleaning	\$ 114	\$ 146	\$ 210	\$ 172

Other

Shelter	\$ 6,945	\$ 8,437	\$11,251	\$ 9,559
Transportation	\$ 6,917	\$ 8,455	\$11,342	\$ 9,820

Source: Claritas, U.S. Census

So, for apparel, the average household in Tompkins County expends \$2,115 from all sources. If an apparel store opened in a neighborhood, it could expect to do no better than capturing 100% of all apparel expenditures from people in the capture area (obviously this would never happen). But, assuming this unrealistic scenario, a store that grossed \$300,000 (a typical small store) would need 150 households spending 100% of their apparel dollars at the business. More likely, the households might spend 10% of their apparel budgets at a local, mom and pop store in a neighborhood (maybe even less). But at 10%, you would need 1,000 households to support one \$300,000 store. Until your neighborhood reaches a population near that 1,000 mark, any apparel store would fail. Realistically, it would be nearly impossible to get a potential retailer interested until you could demonstrate that you clearly have the demographics necessary to support the store (i.e., you need to exceed these numbers, not just meet them).

Clearly, businesses such as restaurants and grocery stores are out of the question for development of less than 1500 people. These are, unfortunately, the very kinds of businesses that members of the committee envisioned being the first to open in these new developments. The size of these neighborhoods are all much smaller than what would be needed to support the retail that we would all like to see in the new neighborhoods the Plan is proposing.

What does tend to move into development areas similar to the kind the Town is promoting? Primarily, these are the kinds of commercial enterprises that are used infrequently, but take up a lot of space. Examples include furniture and mattress sales, veterinary services, equipment rental, plumbing supplies, bridal boutiques, snowmobile or pool sales, antique stores, medical offices, gun shops, and small nurseries. These commercial buildings can be used by retail, wholesale or service industries, and even manufacturing. The key is that they need a LOT of space (big stuff, big trucks, or both) and not a lot of walk-by or drive-by traffic. For retail or service industries, that means that use is occasional (veterinary or medical, or furniture or antiques); these “destination businesses” tend to draw customers from a wider circle, including the urban core. For wholesale or manufacturing, proximity to a highway matters, but location outside the urban area is often preferred (easier for trucking, more space for material storage, etc.). This is a far cry from the cafe and corner grocery store envisioned by the authors of the proposed Comprehensive Plan.

A look at how a comparable business district has fared will show that even the above assumption of a small retail district capturing 10% is overly optimistic. Community Corners is a good example of a small neighborhood retail center. The Village of Cayuga Heights has a population of 3529 people (2010 census data), with an additional population next to it in the Northeast corner of the Town. It comprises 2944 acres, thus it has a population that is much higher than the 1500 cited above.

Despite this large population, Community Corners has been struggling as a retail center. Storefronts are being taken over by office rentals, a sure sign of a retail district in trouble. The Village is searching for ways to make the district more pedestrian friendly, a task made difficult because the buildings are surrounded by parking and the retail area is bisected by Hanshaw Road.

A major obstacle for Community Corners is the Shops at Ithaca Mall, a major retail center for the area, located a little more than a mile away. Even with the density of 11 housing units per acre in the ½ mile surrounding the retail district, enough people choose to drive to the mall, rather than travel via foot or car to Community Corners, to keep this shopping area from maintaining a healthy retail district. This aspect is important, since every neighborhood in the Town is a short drive to a large retail area in the city or a neighboring village. So every mixed-used district will have to be strong enough to convince people to shop in the local food store rather than the larger one a few minutes of driving away.

In order for the Town to have neighborhoods that maintain a retail sector and allow for a true mixed use, it will have to maintain both sufficient population and density. The areas designated as “New Neighborhood” peak at this density, but all the areas on the proposed Future Land Use Map under this category are far smaller than Cayuga Heights, so unless they are built far denser than prescribed, or take up a much larger space than designated, they will never have the population numbers necessary to support retail establishments, regardless of the illustrative photographs in the proposed Plan showing otherwise. The area designated “Neighborhood Center” calls for more than this density. Of the two areas on the proposed Future Land Use Map with this designation, the area on East Hill is proposed to have far too small a population to possibly attract retail. The other, even if you included the orange area next to it designated “New Neighborhood”, is proposed to have a maximum build-out of 1113 housing units – not enough to support a restaurant, even if we allow for incentives for low income housing.

Incentives to Develop Large Land Holdings

The proposed Comprehensive Plan cedes planning decisions from our elected officials to large landowners. The way “Smart Growth” would work under this proposed Plan is that people with a large piece of undeveloped land can opt into the incentive program, and build more than the zoning would normally allow, but would have to follow the new Smart Code. Small land owners would not be able to take advantage of this program for various reasons, mostly because they do not have enough land to be able to create the necessary elements that would be required. The proposed Comprehensive Plan is eerily silent on how to increase density in the already developed areas of town; there are no incentives targeting smaller properties.

In other words, the Town is proposing to create an incentive system to encourage the erection of buildings on the very open space that the population has indicated it wanted to keep open. One cannot preserve open space by devising a system that provides incentives to build large developments on large, undeveloped, parcels. While it is true that this could supply the leverage to change a large subdivision into a denser neighborhood, it also will encourage property owners who may not have wanted to build on their property to do so.

An examination of the incentive program also raises the question of why the Smart Code, which is a preferable system, is not being mandated town-wide. In essence, the Plan is telling the development community that it can build sprawl if it wants to. If the developers want to eliminate large blocks of open space, the Plan provides an incentive program that allows them to make more money doing so.

The other persistent question is: Why does the proposed Plan emphasize developing open space into housing rather than adding density to the already built areas of the Town? The proposed Comprehensive Plan makes little to no effort to find ways to add density to existing neighborhoods – a glaring oversight.

Transect-Based Layout

The Town’s proposed transect-based code is sometimes described as the planning strategy for individual projects and sometimes it is described as the overall planning strategy for the Town. It fails to work for the former, and is clearly not the latter. Let’s look at them separately.

The proposed Comprehensive Plan recommends that new development be done following a modification of a transect-based design code, Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND), developed by Andrés Duany. While the proposed Plan allows for new development to follow more conventional zoning rules, the developer can choose more dense development guidelines, referred to as TND. In this TND framework, the developer would design a neighborhood of varying density depending on which part of the “Future Land Use Map” the property happens to be in: “Established Neighborhood”, “New Neighborhood” or “Neighborhood Center”.

There are many problems with the proposed Comprehensive Plan’s approach to implementing



neighborhoods that are built by one developer generally have a small number of house plans made, which are then repeated over and over again, as can be seen in the photo at the top. Individuality is virtually non-existent. The developer, in this case, did not even paint the doors *different* colors. On the bottom is a photo of a neighborhood in which each house has its own personality. Diversity of homes is an attribute we need to be encouraging in our planning decisions.

TND. First, the proposed Plan relies on developers/large land holders to centrally design and build entire communities. It is ironic to call this “Traditional” Neighborhood Development, since traditionally, neighborhoods were created organically, with their design the result of thousands of people—not one central planner—making individual decisions. This version of “Traditional Neighborhood Development” forces the development of the community to fit the shapes of the large land parcels, not necessarily what the terrain and community needs would dictate. Under this system, decisions are made on what makes the most money for the large landholder, not what will be most valuable to the community. Therefore, it is likely that the developer will never decide to put the most dense, and most profitable, portion of the project on a smaller neighboring property (not owned by that developer), even if this makes the most sense from the standpoint of the community.

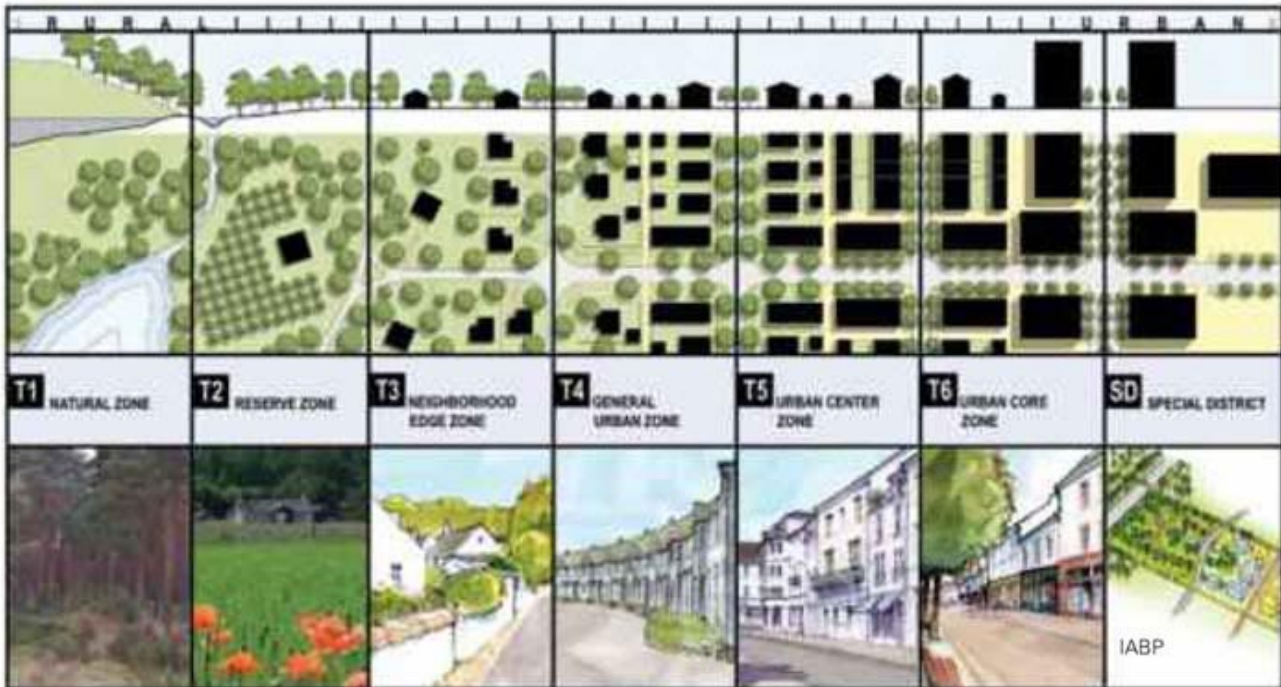
Neighborhoods designed by a single firm look like they were designed by a sole person, hardly a desirable attribute. When designing Seaside, Florida, architectural partners Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company (DPZ) established a rule that any single architectural firm could design no more than 12 buildings in the community. They felt that, in order to make the community a desirable place to live, the buildings needed to have diversity in look and design. This did not create a chaotic look, design rules were firmly in place to give the buildings a unity in mass, scale, placement and character.

Christopher Alexander, et al. emphasize the need for multiple designers in their book, *The Production of Houses*:

People sometimes wonder of the principal of individual house design makes sense in a world where dwellings are changing hands so often, in a world where people move all the time. If one family designs a house, and another family moves into it, later, three years later . . . is this house, designed by one family, and then occupied by another, still compatible with the principle? Does it make sense for the second family? Would it not make more sense to have standardized houses, since long-term occupancy is so unpredictable?

The principle of individual house design does make sense even under these conditions. If we examine the real estate market, we find that houses which command the highest prices are the ones which are unique, which have charm, which have character, which stand alone. These houses, many of them built years ago, have the charm (and *value*) which they have, precisely because they were designed by some particular group of people. The fact that some entirely different family is now moving in does not alter the fact that these houses are more human because they are based on a human reality – and that it is *this* which makes them valuable.

Another way of looking at the same thing is this: if we imagine the variety of houses available to be extremely great, corresponding to the range of variety that exists in actual families, then we see that a family which buys an existing house has a far greater choice. It can choose from among a huge variety of houses, which differ in psychological qualities and peculiar character—and the situation where all this variety exists on the market gives people the opportunity to find a house which corresponds to their idiosyncrasies and special needs, much more than anything they can choose from now among the small range of limited, standardized houses. (page 205-208, emphasis in original)



An illustration of Andrés Duany's rural-to-urban transects. The progression is from farm/natural area to the inner city. The Town of Ithaca does not have sufficient population to support multiple "urban cores."

The second problem is the absence of any actual planning, or proposals for future planning, in this document. The proposed Plan has a scale of each of these developments being a 10-minute walk across, that is, from "Urban Core" to the "Natural Zone" with a gradation of density along the way. Since no "Urban Cores" are delineated, nor even suggested, in the proposed Plan, it is difficult to discern where they would be located. Some regions of the Town may be peppered with them, as various large landholders propose new developments, while other portions of the Town may have none at all.

There are many important aspects of planning that Andrés Duany describes in his book, *The Smart Growth Manual*, that have been largely overlooked in the proposed Plan. It is worth looking at a few excerpts from this book to inform our understanding of what should have been included.

1.6 Growth Priorities

Direct investment to smart growth priority areas

Smart Growth directs both public infrastructure funding and private development where they will have the greatest economic, environmental, and social benefit. This approach requires a clear prioritization of growth alternatives, from smartest to "dumbest," as follows:

1. Urban revitalization
2. Urban infill
3. Urban extension
4. Suburban retrofit
5. Suburban extension

6. New neighborhoods on existing infrastructure
7. New neighborhoods requiring new infrastructure
8. New neighborhoods in environmentally sensitive areas

Once this hierarchy is established as policy and designated on a regional map, governments can attract development to the high-priority area through a range of incentives. Maryland Governor Parris Glendening described his state's program this way: "We told communities that they're still free to sprawl – we're just not going to subsidize them anymore."

Under the proposed Comprehensive Plan, the vast majority of new development will fall under categories 5-7. For example, both areas designated as "Neighborhood Center" would qualify as a 5 or 6. Whereas the largest area in orange ("New Neighborhood") on the proposed Future Land Use Map, labeled "West Hill Neighborhood" would largely qualify as a 7, one place away from "dumbest". Duany further prescribes:

2.4 Map Development Priorities

Identify and rank the areas best suited for growth

As described in Point 1.6, there is a range of growth locations from smartest to dumbest. This hierarchy should appear as prioritized development sectors on the regional plan map. These can be described as follows:

- Intended Growth Sectors: High-priority areas of urban infill, brown-field sites, and transit stops
- Controlled Growth Sectors: Moderate-priority areas of urban extension and suburban infill
- Restricted Growth Sectors: Low-priority areas of suburban extension and new development on existing infrastructure
- No-Growth Sectors: Area of development requiring new infrastructure or in environmentally sensitive locations

Once these sectors have been mapped, governments at every level can use incentives and coordinate policies to prioritize development (see points 2.8-2.10).

No such prioritization is done in the proposed Comprehensive Plan, nor is it suggested that such a task be done at a later date by anyone else. The proposed Plan implies, therefore, that development priorities will be made by the organization of developers queuing up at the Planning Department's door.

Duany did not envision transects to consist of multiple little nodes peppered over a region. His vision, as described in his book, is:

The rural-to-urban transect extends the classification system to include a sequence of human habitats of increasing density and complexity, from the rural hinterland to the urban core.

If the Town were following Duany's prescription, we would see on the proposed Future Land Use Map a steady gradient of density from the dense Neighborhood Centers (red) to the Established/New Neighborhoods (various oranges), to the Semi-Rural Neighborhoods (yellow) and finally to the Agricultural/Conservation areas (various greens). Of course, topography and previous development will preclude this from being perfectly geometrical, but we still should be able to see the general pattern. And it should go without saying that the red areas should be largely near the City.

No such progressive pattern is even remotely visible on the proposed Map. The "New Neighborhood" (red) on East Hill is essentially surrounded by green. Most of the orange areas have no yellow areas adjacent to them whatsoever, let alone being largely surrounded by yellow. The green areas of West Hill are peppered with what could best be described as small and medium-sized yellow dots.

The proposed Land Use Map is much more a depiction of the current status, and what developers are likely to build, than a thought-out vision of what the Comprehensive Plan Committee would like the Town to be in the future. This was especially evident when a Comprehensive Plan Committee member suggested that the yellow area near the intersection of Poole Road and Sheffield Road be changed from yellow to green to indicate that we would not be interested in seeing further development there. The area consists primarily of woodlands, surrounded by agriculture. This area is adjacent to a "Conservation Area", and was most likely not part of this conservation area because of the extent of previous development. The change from yellow to green would not tear down any existing housing. The change would simply indicate what kinds of changes we would like to see—or not like to see—in the future. The conversation at the meeting focused on the fact that there are already houses there; the focus was on what is, not on how we would want to *plan* for it to be.

Rate of Growth

The Town of Ithaca experienced a total of 669 new housing units built during the years 2000-2010. Of these, 270 were single- and two-family homes. That is an average of 67 units, per year, for the entire Town. Keep this in mind when looking at the construction rate that the proposed Comprehensive Plans suggests will cut back on sprawl and preserve open space.

On West Hill the proposed Comprehensive Plan follows the 1993 Plan by recommending that a "New Neighborhood" be built on the open space between Westhaven Road and the City of Ithaca line. Two other "New Neighborhoods" are also proposed, one to the north of this one, and one to the south. Given the density that the proposed Comprehensive Plan calls for in these areas, 4-6 units per acre, we can conclude that the Plan calls for an implementation of incentives that its authors believe will lead to the building of an additional 2283 to 3424 units of housing on these approximately 570 acres of open space on West Hill.

On South Hill, the proposed Comprehensive Plan suggests a new "Neighborhood Center" at the intersection of West King and Danby Roads. This is in addition to the "New Neighborhood" proposed to the east of this "Neighborhood Center". In the 60-acre triangle bounded by Coddington Road, Troy Road and East King Road, the proposed Comprehensive Plan calls for a creation of a "New Neighborhood". The proposed Plan is suggesting that at just these locations,

an additional 1280-1922 new housing units be built on approximately 281 acres of open space. This is in addition to what would be built at the Emerson location and elsewhere on South Hill.

The proposed Comprehensive Plan suggests two new neighborhood centers on East Hill, both along Ellis Hollow Road. The easterly one is based on Cornell's Master Plan, which calls for 77 to 342 housing units to be built. The westerly one is also based on Cornell's Master Plan, and calls for 241 to 482 housing units. The Town of Ithaca's proposed Comprehensive Plan suggests that even more housing be built on a slightly different acreage of open space totaling somewhere between 1230 and 1800 housing units. That is another 1230-1800 housing units just for the "Neighborhood Centers" on East Hill.

The proposed Comprehensive Plan is characterized as a document that "guides long-range physical development for the Town of Ithaca over the next 10-15 years". So, if just the large developments are built as the proposed Plan recommends, we are looking at 3881-7201 new housing units being built over the next 10-15 years... an astounding 5-10-fold increase from what we have seen in the past. And that figure does not include the one- and two-family houses that inevitably will be built outside of the "Established Neighborhoods", "New Neighborhoods" or "Neighborhood Centers." One- and two-family houses comprised 40% of the housing units built between 2000-2012, suggesting that significant development will continue to happen outside of the proposed Plan's zones targeted for higher density development.

There is a striking paradox in this kind of planning. If we succeed in the density of construction that the proposed Comprehensive Plan calls for, and employ the Plan's recommended incentives, then we will dramatically increase the size of the built environment and population of the Town. Thus, the character of the community will significantly change. If only a fraction of this new development is built, and is spread out among the various development areas, the new construction will just be a continuation of the sprawl we all want to stop.

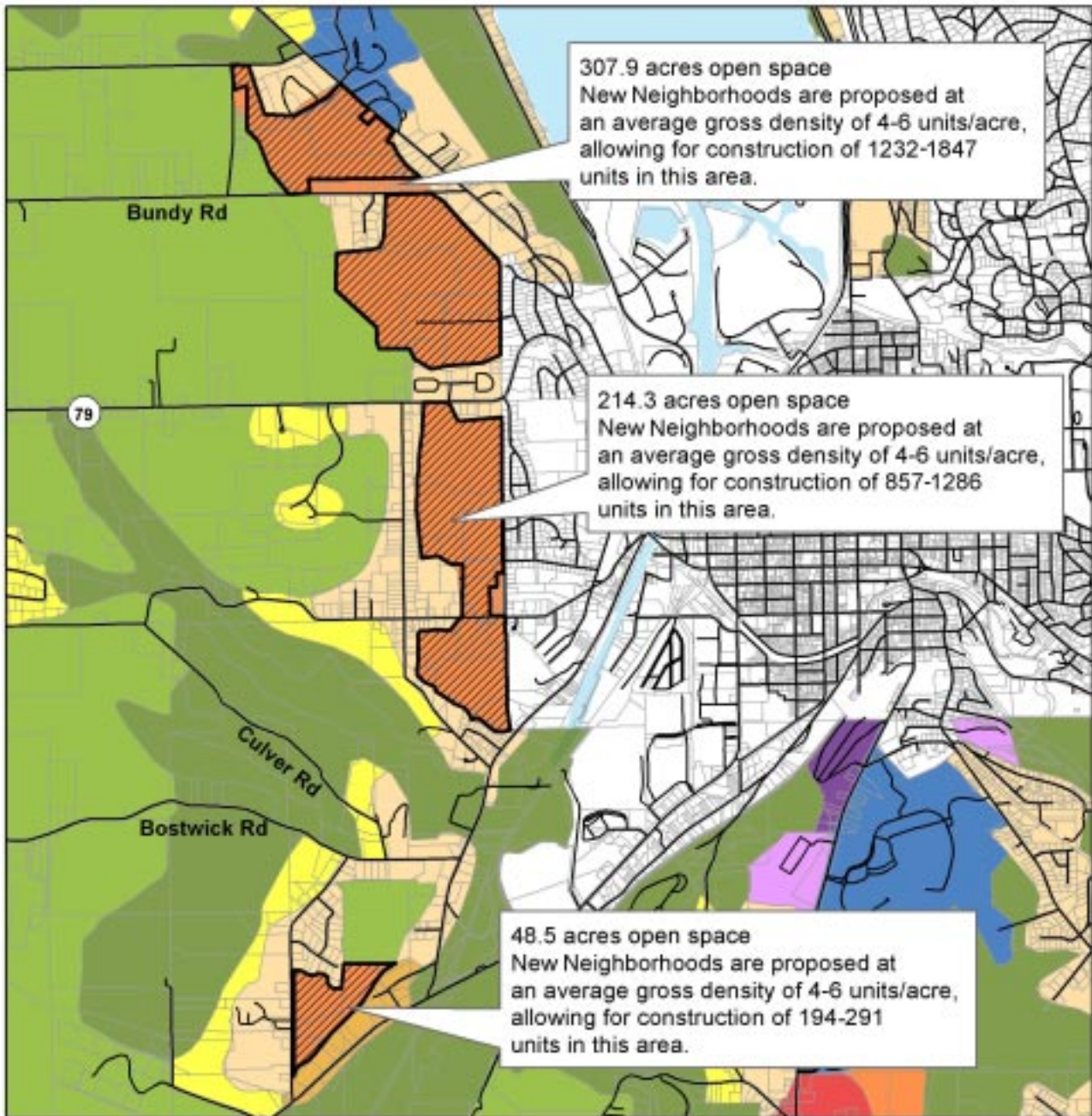
In the final analysis, the only way to stop sprawl is to severely limit the areas in which growth is allowed in the Town. The Town must limit development to an area(s) just large enough to meet new demand and, at the same time, maintain the targeted density. There must be an analysis of the various areas of the Town, allowing development only in those places that make the most amount of sense, a step Duany *specifically* recommends.

What follows is a brief look at three sections of the Town, and the beginning of a critique/ comparison between the type of development recommended in the proposed Comprehensive Plan and the kind of development that should have been recommended.

West Hill

The Town Comprehensive Plan Committee spent considerable time discussing the building of two new mixed-use areas to "infill" some of the developed area on West Hill. This is clearly at odds with what the resident survey, conducted in January 2009, showed: preservation of open space was vitally, and consistently, important to residents of the Town. This concern was amplified at a meeting the Comprehensive Plan Committee had with West Hill residents. When asked, "What do

Proposed Development of Open Space on West Hill



Map prepared by Karen Edelstein
Data sources: NYS GIS Clearinghouse, Town of Ithaca

you NOT like about the area where you live?” at a neighborhood meeting on June 17, 2010 at the Linderman Creek Community Building, they responded:

- There has been increased traffic, increased development, and increased speeding.
- Large development proposals are being proposed here that are unlike the other proposals in other parts of the Town.
- Open space and farmland being replaced by development is a concern – West Hill has the best farmland and open areas but development pressure is mounting and we could lose the best farmland in the Town to development if we don’t preserve it.
- Farms are important to all of the residents of West Hill (not just farmers) and once they are built upon, they are lost forever.
- At what point is there a line crossed where too much development is happening? Do you keep building and building or can you say enough is enough?

Clearly the community is interested in limiting development on West Hill, not dramatically increasing it. The proposed Comprehensive Plan, unfortunately, will encourage turning large tracts of open space on West Hill into more suburban sprawl.

The proposed Comprehensive Plan describes the status of various streets using a scale called Vehicle over Capacity (V/C) (see: proposed Comprehensive Plan, page B-97). As the proposed Plan explains, “A V/C of 1.00 indicates that the volume of traffic on a road is at its design capacity, a lower number indicates that traffic is below design capacity...” According to the proposed Plan’s charts, all the roads in the Town are functioning quite well, with traffic well below design capacity. This assessment does not correlate with most people’s experience.

Traffic engineers use another measurement, called Level Of Service (LOS), to determine the effectiveness of elements of transportation infrastructure. They grade the elements like teachers do in schools, using the letters A through F, with A being the best and F being the worst. In other words, A-D represent traffic conditions that most people will find acceptable; F and E are grades that most people will not. If we turn to a traffic study that staff distributed to the Comprehensive

Intersection	Traffic direction and turn	2012 LOS	Buildout LOS
Buffalo at Fulton	Fulton southbound left	C	F
Buffalo at Fulton	Buffalo westbound through/left	B	F
Buffalo at Taughannock (NY 89)	Taughannock southbound left	C	F
Buffalo at Taughannock (NY 89)	Buffalo westbound through/right/left	B	F
Mecklenburg (NY 79) at Hopkins	Hopkins eastbound right/left	C	F
Mecklenburg (NY 79) at Campbell	Campbell right/left	C	F
Seneca at Fulton	Fulton southbound through	B	E
State at Fulton	State westbound through	C	F
Trumansburg (NY 96) at CMC	Trumansburg southbound through/left	F	F

A table from the *West Hill Traffic Report* showing the changes in traffic conditions if a heavy West Hill build-out is implemented. Note the numerous intersections that change from “good” to “failing.”

Plan Committee, using LOS data from 2008-10, we see that the Route 79/Fulton Street intersection receives a failing grade of “E”, despite the fact that it has a V/C of 0.42.

In 2012 the Town issued the *West Hill Traffic Report*, which examines the traffic pattern on Route 96 from Trumansburg to Ithaca. That report, which was not distributed to the Comprehensive Plan Committee, looks at what will happen to traffic on Route 96 if a build-out of West Hill, similar to the one that the proposed Comprehensive Plan recommends, is implemented. The table on page 29, which comes directly from the *West Hill Traffic Report*, summarizes resulting traffic conditions.

Note that all the intersections described, except one, start at passable levels of service and all end up failing. It is pretty clear that a full-build out will not work with commuters using individual automobiles. Yet staff still encouraged the Committee to include a large build-out for West Hill.

Staff presented the Town Comprehensive Plan Committee with a full build-out scenario for the “New Neighborhood” bordering the City, complete with commercial districts containing multiple shops and offices, areas of dense housing, as well as an urban grid of roads and set-asides for parklands. It’s clear that not all of this development will happen at once. To that end, a Committee member asked how the town would deal with the interim period, while there is a steady increase of people living on West Hill, but not a sufficient number to support the office and retail necessary to create a mixed-use community. During that interim period, we will see an increase of traffic between West Hill and Ithaca, where people will still need to work and shop, but simultaneously, we’ll see none of the traffic reduction benefits of a mixed-use neighborhood. Whether the staff’s best case scenario will ever be built is a different question; the question here is whether we can get from the current development to the proposed one, or will traffic problems limit growth to the point that the dream of mixed-use neighborhoods (complete with retail) cannot be achieved?

This question is important; if we cannot deal with the traffic during a long transition, the dream that staff presented will not ever get built. Developers will not build housing in places that are inaccessible. Earlier traffic data presented to the Comprehensive Plan Committee showed that Route 79 coming out of the Town and leading into the City of Ithaca is currently failing to move traffic at an acceptable level of service. The *West Hill Traffic Report* shows that if the proposed Comprehensive Plan’s build-out happens, many more intersections will fall to an unacceptable level of service as well. Given the dramatic intersection failure rate predicted by the *West Hill Traffic Report*, it is reasonable to assume that some intersections will degrade to this level well before a full build-out is completed.

One committee member speculated that most of the people moving to this new development would already be commuters, and thus already be part of the traffic flow, so the increase in traffic would be insubstantial. This was the sole suggestion as to how to deal with this transition period, so let’s examine the implications of this solution, ignoring that it contradicts the *West Hill Traffic Report’s* predictions, and assuming that she is correct on her first point. This committee member’s argument rests on the assumption that the daily commute to work is the only drive that a family undertakes. This is an incorrect assumption; these hypothetical commuters will generate considerable new traffic through the intersections where Routes 79 and 96 cross the Inlet.

For example, let's say that a family that currently lives near Trumansburg moves into one of these proposed new developments on West Hill. Previously, when they needed to go shopping, wanted to go out for dinner, visit a bar, etc., the traffic remained in Trumansburg. In their hypothetical new location on West Hill, however, all this traffic would have to be routed through our already overburdened streets; what is currently one trip per day for the former Trumansburg resident becomes many. Furthermore, because the proposed Plan suggests building an additional 2283-3424 units of housing, we need to consider all the support traffic associated with these additional homes. These would include expanded school bus routes, a new school bus for every 60 children, US Mail/UPS/ FedEx/etc. deliveries, service vehicles for NYSEG, lawn care, home repairs, etc. In addition, one must consider how much traffic the construction itself will generate. Clearly, traffic levels would change on West Hill. It is not a question of *if* banks, developers and potential home buyers will decide that traffic between West Hill and the City is completely unmanageable and refuse to invest in the area; it is only a question of *when*.

The point of summarizing this exchange is that this scenario is the only way that anyone, staff or Committee members, could suggest that it is possible for the proposal for West Hill development to be built at the density they are projecting. Everyone agreed that the projected additional 2283-3424 units of housing could not be built at once. Additionally, everyone agreed that until the area neared the recommended density it would not experience any advantages of a mixed-use neighborhood (e.g., reduction of automobile traffic). And finally, nobody could come up with a plausible way to actually implement the proposal.

If it is this difficult to envision a scenario where we get from Point A (current situation) to Point B (proposed build-out suggested by Town staffers), why is the Committee including this in the Comprehensive Plan? If there is not going to be enough development to achieve the mixed-use district that both Committee and staff predict, are we going to trade open space for nothing more than increased traffic on Route 96 and Route 79?

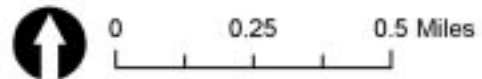
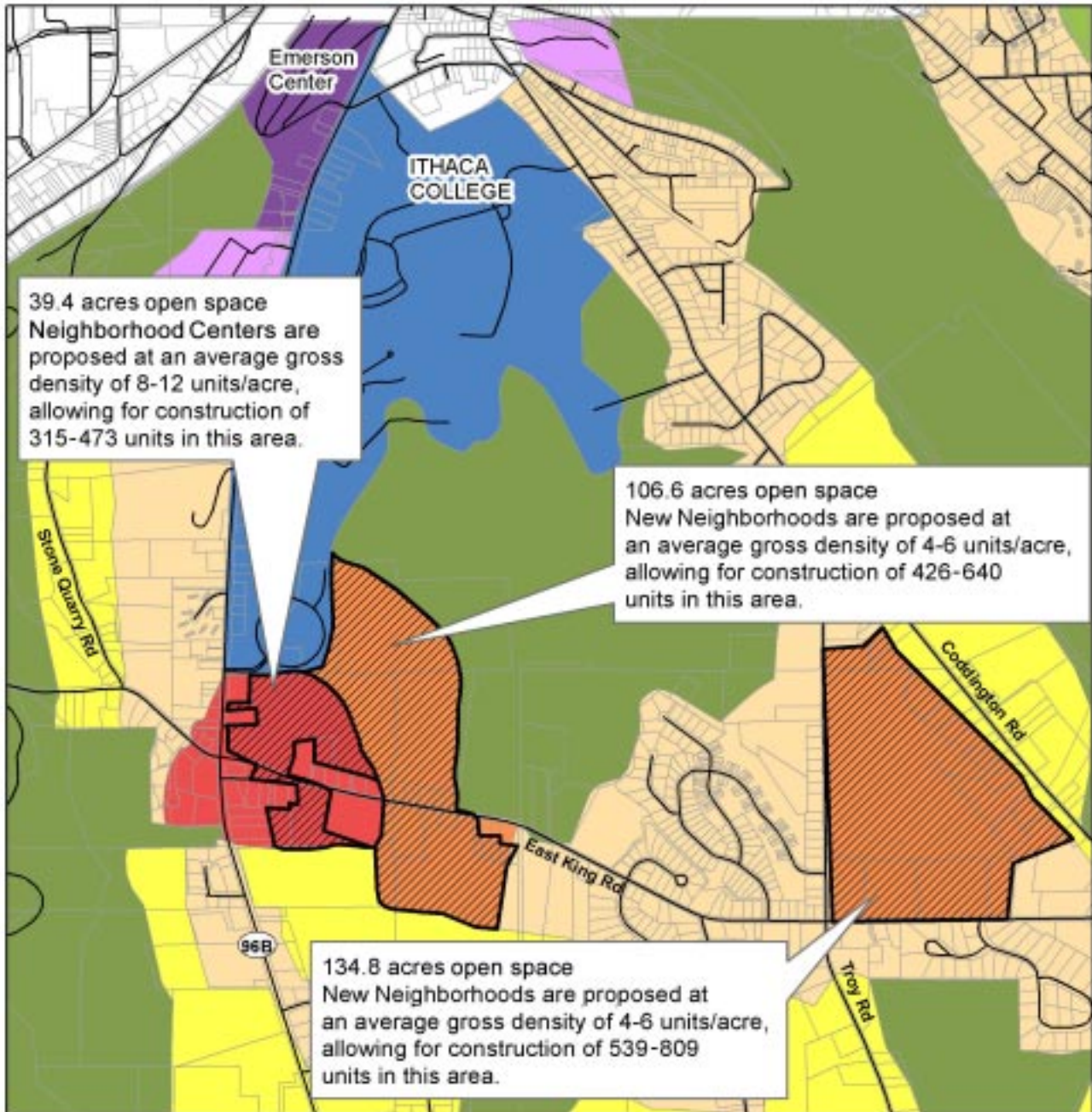
West Hill has the largest expanses of high-quality farm land anywhere in the Town. Food is just as important as housing, so it makes sense to use arable land for food rather than housing. Given that the main employment center for the Town is on East Hill and we are already experiencing a transportation problem moving people from one hill to the other, the proposed Comprehensive Plan should instead suggest all possible ways to minimize development on West Hill.

South Hill

At a neighborhood meeting hosted by the Comprehensive Plan Committee at Ithaca College on June 10, 2010, South Hill residents were asked to consider a possible Node/Compact neighborhood in the King Road/Danby Road area; they were quite clear in their uneasiness about the idea:

- Don't want "Collegetown" on South Hill – a pitfall to caution against.
- Commercial feel should not take over the area.
- Too easy to end up with just another strip development – put small shopping - need bounds on the node – say a 10-year plan).

Proposed Development of Open Space on South Hill



Despite these reservations, the proposed Comprehensive Plan suggests making W/E King Road and Danby Road a major development area. Town staff is suggesting that it be targeted for the development of between 741 and 1113 new housing units. Students would be the targeted population for this recommended housing. This is problematic for a number of reasons:

1. The major employer on South Hill is Ithaca College. The question we have to ask ourselves is: In which direction - towards the City or East King Road - do we want to have the surrounding development happen? The College, with its 6400 students, is not large enough to create anything more than sprawl if that development is in multiple directions. There is a large, undeveloped parcel between the College and the City, the Emerson Center site. This is a brown-field site, with known TCE contamination on the City portion of the site. It makes much more sense to focus development on this parcel, building density towards the City. By trying to develop both “growth areas” at once, the Town spreads out the development money/energy over a larger area, and sends the message that it is not too concerned where development happens.
2. The growth potential for the proposed “Neighborhood Center” on South Hill is severely limited. Staff proposed a dense growth scenario that yielded nearly 1200 units. This was a total build-out, since the area is surrounded by parks and unique natural areas. Thus the site is not large enough to allow for a population that will support a mixed use community. Further, if we actually approach a full build-out, which is unlikely, we will likely create pressure to develop some of our important unique natural areas.
3. The site is split by a State highway. Given State control of this road, and the adjacent right-of-ways, it is going to be exceedingly difficult to make this stretch of road a walkable community and to connect the two “communities” on the two sides of the road. The fact that the road along here is already largely developed as auto-dependent strip businesses, suggests that this kind of development will continue, making the area which might develop as “dense- mixed use” development even smaller.
4. Residents of South Hill have, in the past, objected to further development of this intersection and there is no reason to believe that their opposition has diminished.

The 100+ acres of the Emerson property, which is located in both the City of Ithaca and the Town, is a development project that both the City and the Town are committed to developing in a joint planning project. When residents at the June 10, 2010 neighborhood meeting were asked about development at the Emerson site, they were unambiguously in favor of it.

- Clean it up, it could solve everyone’s problem if developed; residential density, trails, energy improvement district, affordable housing – but needs to be clean to residential standards.
- South Hill Business Campus is an example of what is possible; taking a brown-field building, identifying the commercial potential and making it very attractive. With S.H. Business Campus someone took the risk. Emerson has done very little to clean up the site – the potential to develop is there if someone would clean it up; need to find someone to sink money into the project.
- Green building codes in Seattle give priority for “green” building proposals; move to

front of list in building permit reviews – fast track – Emerson site could benefit from this.

- The ultimate “palazzo” – great place for views – should be living units.
- Love to see mixed uses – houses and clean jobs.
- Should be preserved and if can be devoted to housing; mixing uses, it is a huge property with many potential uses.

Development on the Town’s South Hill should be focused on the Emerson site. It is adjacent to a residential neighborhood and will serve the growing Ithaca College community. It is a place where people can walk to Ithaca College for both classes and employment while also being able to walk to Downtown Ithaca for shopping and entertainment needs. If we look to see where it falls on Duany’s “Growth Priorities,” it is a #1, “smartest”.

In order to develop this property, the Town and the City should form a joint planning commission. This commission should design the area, specifically laying out all the streets, sidewalks, civic spaces and other infrastructure. This is a perfect place to design a car-free neighborhood. These designs should be modeled after Joel Crawford’s Car-Free design. He started with the question of “are car-free cities possible?” After several trips to Venice, the answer was that they were not only possible but highly desirable. He has spent years researching the elements necessary to create vibrant urban areas. His work can be seen at: <http://www.carfree.com/>

Such a development would be tremendously popular. As Crawford explains in his book, *Carfree Cities*:

Carfree cities can offer rich human experience, great beauty and true peace. They greatly reduce the damage we are doing to the biosphere. They permit the construction of beautiful districts in the manner of European city centers, with parks but a short distance away. Carfree cities are a practical alternative, available now. They can be built using existing technology at a price we can afford. They are the real future for our children. (page 33)

After the public space has been designed by public entities, the private spaces can be designed by various private entities. Just as it is important that the public design the public space, we want a variety of designs for the numerous uses of the private spaces.

The draft Comprehensive Plan presents two proposals for South Hill: one is Emerson Center, an urban revitalization site; the other is replacing the open space to the south of Ithaca College with a new neighborhood center. The proposed plan presents them as equally acceptable areas to expand the developed part of the Town. The only location for which the proposed Plan recommends development, and where development would in fact be appropriate, is Emerson Center. The area south of Ithaca College, which the proposed Plan labels as the “South Hill Center,” is currently being developed in a classic suburban sprawl style, and the plan suggests nothing that will change this course of direction. Instead of encouraging more sprawl in this area, the proposed Plan should be recommending the Emerson Center development and should be discouraging any other development as much as possible.

East Hill

The proposed Comprehensive Plan's suggestion of two "New Neighborhoods" on East Hill is undoubtedly in response to Cornell's Master Plan, which calls for redeveloping the East Hill Plaza area into an urban village along with another development nearby. Cornell even made a presentation to the Committee, with slides showing a community with a public square, a street lined with shops and cafes with tables filled with people sipping coffee. The question is: how likely is a full build-out to match with the image presented?

Given Cornell's own figures, the total number of new residential units would range from 77 to 342. This is not a new village; it is a couple of large apartment complexes. A new population of this size is not going to support the current retail in the area, let alone a significant number of new shops of the kinds pictured in Cornell's presentation. In order to maintain and/or add retail, both customers and workers will need to be imported to this "urban village". This will be done either with a fleet of buses or a sea of parking. In either case, it is hard to see how this will not add more traffic to Pine Tree Road and other streets in the area, roads that the residents already complain have too much congestion.

Why is this site being targeted for development? It is located in an area that is largely agricultural in use. It is far enough removed from campus to make pedestrian access problematic. The proposed Comprehensive Plan says that Neighborhood Centers are "based on the rural-to-urban transect", yet this one has no lower density neighborhoods, nor room for them to act as a buffer between the "urban" area and the farmland. That the majority of the adjacent parcels to this proposed "node" were categorized as "conservation" in earlier iterations of the draft "Future Land Use" map (as shown in the illustration on page 36). This designation was changed to "Institutional" in later editions of the map. This revision did not reflect a specific change in plans; instead it shifted responsibility for planning decisions from the Town to the University. If a full build-out becomes a reality, there will be development pressure on the natural area next to campus as well as on the farm land on the other side of the proposed "node". If the Town intends to keep this area undeveloped, it should state so directly in their Comprehensive Plan.

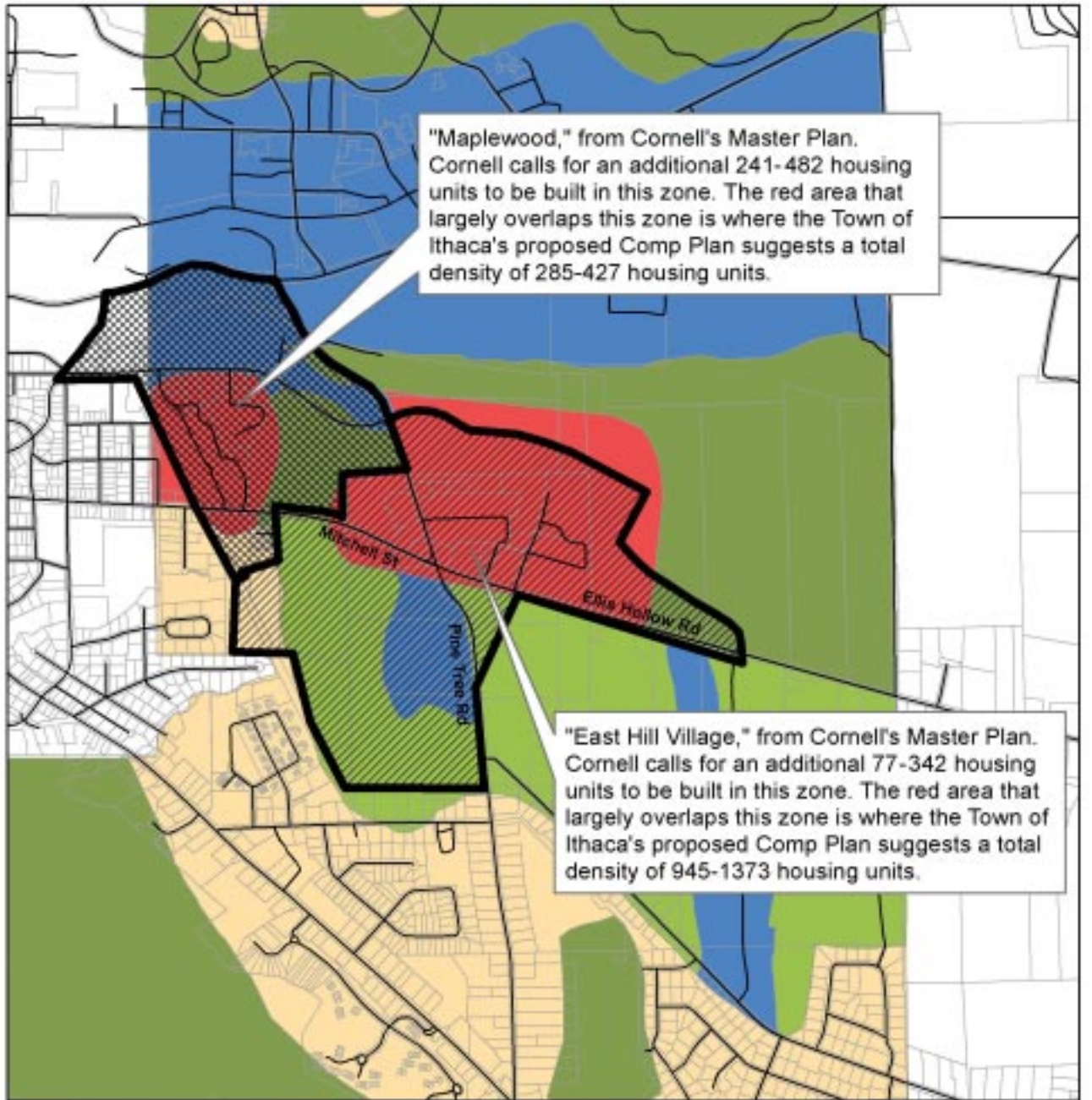
The residents of East Hill were very specific in their public comments regarding Cornell's follow-through on its promises to the community. The Committee's notes from the East Ithaca Neighborhood Meeting, on June 16, 2010, state the following concern from the group:

East Hill Plaza was not implemented the way it was originally presented – remembers the original plans with lots of trees – new plans should have some accountability.

In general, the residents expressed numerous concerns about the project. Comments included:

- Worried about Cornell agricultural land – where is the boundary for development – how strong is the boundary
- Questions why Cornell University would want to develop for housing, and not save it for Cornell University educational use
- High density requires strong boundaries
- How do we (Cornell University) make sure students don't take over the planned workforce housing

Proposed Development of Open Space on East Hill



Map prepared by Karen Edelstein
 Data sources: NYS GIS Clearinghouse, Town of Ithaca

- Would like to see concrete numbers – e.g., what amount of green space for Village plan – very firm numbers before plans get to far along
- Compact / clusters ideas are good, but unsure of how they can be implemented here
- Will 5-story building hurt the feel of planned open space – tall building next to green area may not feel right
- Support Village dream – Cornell University employee housing is very good, but would like to see trees, safe places to walk / bike, trash pickup, Cornell University students should not bring cars

So while Cornell showed us drawings of a beautiful urban setting, our residents' warnings, along with the data presented in Cornell's master plan, give us reason to believe that their final product will not look like that. The committee largely incorporated Cornell's plans for East Hill into the Town's proposed Comprehensive Plan without any specifically stated reservations.

Full Build-Out?

Residents should also be concerned about the totality of what is being proposed. The Town currently has 7500 housing units and a 7% vacancy rate. (The city has a 0.5% vacancy rate, which strongly suggests that the demand for new housing is in the City, not the Town.) The Town experienced a growth rate of 2.4% per year for the last 10 years. The proposal before us recommends an additional 3881-7201 new housing units being built over the next 10-15 years in just the areas of targeted density. The plan calls for even more development in the rest of the Town. Do we really want to add 3881-7201 new housing units, or more, in a Town that currently has a total of 7500? How will all those new housing units change our community character? What kind of impact will that have on our infrastructure?

Most importantly, what is the chance that we will see full build-out on any of these projects in the next 20 years? If we only experience partial build-out, how is that going to be different from the sprawl we would like to prevent? For example, staff gave the Comprehensive Plan Committee a presentation of an urban area at the intersection of Danby Road and King Road. But what if the Planning Board approved the plan, but all that gets built is the row along Danby Road? This is really important because it is very likely we will not see full build-out on most, if not all, of these proposed actions. This is true of virtually every spot where the Committee recommended added development. Discussions all focused on full build-out scenarios, with no thought to what partial build-out would be like. Given the facts at hand, this is a tragic mistake.

What is clear from the above criticisms is that if the proposed Comprehensive Plan is adopted without significant changes, the Town will see the same kind of sprawl that it has over the last decades. In order for the Town to curtail sprawl, it will have to severely limit where development happens as well as doing real planning instead of simply commenting on plans developers present.

Sustainability

Our planet's resources can no longer support the lifestyle currently enjoyed by its more than seven billion human residents. We cannot have a sustainable society that relies on the extraction of finite resources from the planet. During the 10-15 year period that the 2012 Town of Ithaca proposed Comprehensive Plan is designed to cover, the issue of sustainability is likely to become an overriding problem for the Town. The worldwide supply of fossil fuels is finite and their use has negative environmental consequences.

The disposal of unwanted byproducts of our consumption of the planet's resources has also become a major problem. It is vital that the Town, along with the greater society, recognize these limits, and move towards a truly sustainable society. This means recognizing that we are part of the natural world around us; our fate is inextricably linked to the fate of the natural world. Clean water and plentiful fertile soil are necessary to feed the growing population but can no longer be taken for granted. Therefore, it is necessary to restructure our community so as to eliminate the use of resources that are not fully renewable and ensure that all waste products from our society are benign.

The Town's proposed Comprehensive Plan requires major revisions regarding its treatment of sustainability. While the Plan briefly examines how the Town's operations can become more efficient, it does not look at how they can be reworked to dramatically reduce the Town's use, both governmental and private, of scarce resources. Additionally, the Plan completely ignores how the Town's actions can encourage/require Ithaca's population to do the same. The kind of changes our society needs to make are far more drastic than using energy-efficient light-bulbs, upgrading our Town's water pumps, making sure our buildings are well insulated and buying more fuel-efficient cars, etc. Those steps do need to be taken; they are, however, much more on the level of

cost savings than a move towards true sustainability. A substantial shift towards sustainability will require significant lifestyle changes for much of our population. How the Town regulates and shapes development within its borders is where it can make the most difference on sustainability issues. After decades of building an infrastructure that relies on an unsustainable support network, it is going to take significant effort to build a sustainable infrastructure for our community.

The underlying assumption in the proposed Comprehensive Plan is, unfortunately, that growth patterns and lifestyles are going to remain largely unchanged. The proposed plan assumes that housing will spread throughout the Town, especially on West Hill where agricultural land and other categories of open space are located. This is the very sprawl that the plan claims it wants to prevent. The proposed Comprehensive Plan also assumes a constant supply of fossil fuels to power an auto-dependant society and raw materials to maintain this construction boom; there is no good reason to make this assumption either.

At the Comprehensive Plan Committee meetings, there was minimal discussion concerning whether it is appropriate for the Town to grow its residential base and, if so, where in the Town that growth should happen, let alone the question: “Can the recommended growth happen?” The Town must begin by asking what kind of layout is needed for the most sustainable lifestyle possible. If this question is seriously considered, it is unlikely that the answer will include dramatically increased rates of development of new housing in the Town, and that it should be primarily on West Hill.

A serious discussion of development should not focus just on the Town; the impact of these decisions is much broader and can only be made with input from all affected communities. This should start with something like the proposed Future Land Use Map, not just for the Town; such planning should be done, at the very least, on a county-wide scale. Additionally, the map would not be drawn based on where staff and the public officials think people will want to build more housing. Instead, the group would look at the map as kind of a clean slate, and ask where development should happen, largely ignoring where it has been and where it is likely to be if nothing changes. Here are some examples of questions to be asked in the process:

- Where is their sufficient infrastructure in place to maintain projected populations?
- Are residential populations located within walking distances of work, shopping and recreational facilities so as to minimize transportation issues?
- Are developed areas located near other populated areas, so as to allow for efficient transit links between communities?
- Are urban populations located close to farm communities so as to facilitate trade between the two with the most efficient transport?

Once this optimal planning map is produced, it can be adjusted based on prior development: some areas are currently so densely developed that it is highly unlikely that they will be redeveloped as some kind of open space within the next generation. Once the areas of further development have been identified, specific street layouts can be developed for those areas. In the distant past, Towns and cities adopted official street maps, and mandated where people built new streets and thus mandated where the buildings would be located. These maps have the force of law and give the community much more control over designing its future. The Town’s current policy of letting developers determine road and building designs is short-sighted: the municipality saves the

expense of planning our community but is saddled with using and maintaining the developers' roads long after the developers have cashed their checks and left the projects behind.

Design decisions are made based on costs to the developers, not on ease of public use or the costs of maintenance. Good planning is having the public lay out where and how future development should be permitted. This kind of planning is sometimes avoided because it will require planners to tell some large land owners that they will have to develop their property in ways that are most beneficial to the public at large, not just how it is most profitable to the developer. If the Comprehensive Planning Committee had really done its job of planning for the Town's future, we would have made very different recommendations. For example, the proposed Comprehensive Plan targets West Hill for extensive expansion of its residential populations. Given that the County's major employers are on South and East Hill, it seems odd to want to pave over large acreages of the hill that is most suitable for farming with new housing.

If you put housing miles away from major employers, you create a transportation problem - hardly a sustainable move. Choosing to build our infrastructure to minimize the need for transporting individuals and goods will strengthen our community and make our Town and region a more pleasant place to live and more sustainable as well. When the community takes back planning decisions that it has, over time, ceded to the development community, there will be some resistance. The developers are used to the way things are and change includes the possibility that the future will not be as profitable as the past. It is clear, however, that we cannot continue to allow our community to sprawl out over every open piece of property within our borders. The community has a right to determine how it wants to develop, a right that trumps any desires of a small circle of developers. As we saw in the public comment about the various proposed areas for development, the public was positive about good development, and disliked problematic development.

One of the major lifestyle changes our community must accomplish is to find a way to drastically reduce the need for individual automobiles. This is not an optional change; the consequences of peak oil will make the ubiquitous use of the automobile impossible. Dense, mixed-use developments, "Smart Growth" practices, and commitment to pedestrian, bicycle, and public transportation are a first step. We have allowed our community to spread out thinly over our region, and additionally allowed necessary elements of our daily routine to be placed far from where we live. This has created a transportation problem. The only way ultimately to eliminate the transportation problem is to transform our community to one where we live, work, shop and play within walking distance of each other. During the transition, as our community redevelops to lessen the need for motorized transportation, public transportation is going to need to play a much more prominent role in our society than it currently does.

Mass transit is an obvious substitution for the individual automobile. Currently, however, every time a major new development is built in the Town, the only way for TCAT to service that community is for service to degrade somewhere else in the system. The fact that the TCAT system cannot cover the expenses for its busiest route (#10 Downtown — Collegetown) via fares without subsidies demonstrates how hopeless it is to think that it will be able to cost-effectively maintain rural or semi-rural routes without massive subsidies. Public transportation routes should be looked at much like our water/sewer line: they are not going to be extended or moved. If developers understand that new developments that are not on existing bus lines will not get bus service, they will stop proposing such developments. We will see far less of the orphaned developments

because the developers are not willing to pay for mass transit service and are aware that nobody else will either.

Ultimately, we are going to have to move away from the commuter lifestyle. It is a tremendous waste of resources to move people back and forth every day so that they do not have to live in the same community in which they work, shop and play. As resource depletion becomes more extreme we, as a society, will have to choose if commuting is the best way to use our precious, nonrenewable resources. Given that our food production is also energy intensive, as energy becomes scarcer, people will want to use that resource for growing food rather than commuting.

Only a small percentage of the earth's surface can grow the plants we need, either to eat or make things with. We are coming to the limits of how much we can extract from the planet, yet our plans do not recognize this limit. We cannot continue to grow on a finite land base. Every time we choose to turn a farm into a housing development, we choose to reduce the amount of food we can grow.

In the 19th century, Tompkins County was able to largely grow the food needed to feed its residents. It even exported staples, like cheese, to New York City. That has changed; we now import most of our food, often from thousands of miles away. Ironically, much of the food we grow is exported to other communities. As fossil fuel supplies diminish, it will become more and more unaffordable to ship the food we need from distant places to our local supermarkets. Exploring how we can use our farm land to once again grow most of our food should be a priority for our community.

As farming has adapted to the requirements of the grocery wholesale market for vegetables, it is no longer able to meet the needs of local and regional consumers. While end-use customers desire a wide variety of produce to be available over a long season, the wholesale market wants just the opposite. Instead of meeting local needs, farmers everywhere are part of the nation's supply line, and their farm's output reflects that.

The Ithaca area has one of the stronger local foods movements in upstate New York and a substantial number of diversified farms. We need to build on this base, looking not only for ways to build up our farm community, but to expand the farmer-to-consumer connection. While the Town has spend considerable time looking at its local agricultural community, it needs to look harder at how to connect this community more strongly to local consumers. Binghamton did just that, which resulted in the report *Improving Access to Good Food in Northern and Central Binghamton: Assessing the Feasibility of Three Models For Building Farmer-to-Consumer Connection*. This report, authored by Town of Ulysses resident Krys Cail, focuses on how to bring locally-grown food to the poorer sections of the City of Binghamton; many of its insights, however, could be applicable to the Ithaca area. The proposed Comprehensive Plan should recommend conducting a similar study for our community.

The Town's proposed Comprehensive Plan should encourage local sustainable farms to create their own fuels, fertilizers, seed stock, etc. As petroleum supplies diminish, petroleum-powered machinery becomes more and more costly to operate. Our fertilizers and pesticides are largely petroleum derived. Modern farming practices will be increasingly difficult as fossil fuels become

scarcer. We need to facilitate the conversion to more sustainable practices now, not when we reach a crisis point.

Local production should not just be limited to growing food, but should also include food storage and processing. By bringing production of necessities like food back to our community, we build self-reliance. Locally-grown food requires less refrigeration and transportation and thus will reduce the environmental costs compared to our current system. In a society that is facing a massive resource shortage, this will have a significant impact on our overall energy use. This needs to be highlighted as a necessity for the long-term sustainability of our community.

Likewise, we need to consider how more of our clothing can be produced locally. As energy scarcity becomes more pronounced, it is not going to be feasible to import the vast majority of our clothing from half-way around the planet. This is not to suggest that we can start developing cotton plantations in the Finger Lakes Region, we do not currently have the climate to grow cotton here; climatologists predict, however, that our children will live in a world where cotton *can* be grown here. A trip to the Ithaca's Farmer's Market will demonstrate that we already have people farming animal fiber locally. Though it only represents a tiny fraction of what we consume, this fraction can, and should, be increased. As rising fuel prices make it prohibitively expensive to ship clothing from China to Ithaca, we, as a community, will discover that it is far more desirable to have suburban sheep farms than to turn that farm land into housing. The proposed Comprehensive Plan should reflect this reality.

Decisions need to be made, not based on the economics of today, but on our community's long-term needs. Since Tompkins County, or even the Finger Lakes region, is far from being self-sufficient in food and clothing production, we need to prioritize farming in our community. We need to plan our community for a time when cheap energy is gone, so we can take advantage of the last of the relatively cheap energy to rebuild our community's infrastructure. The longer we wait to rebuild our community, the higher energy prices will become and the less affordable they will become.

Sustainability is not just about making the things we need, but it is also about the waste products we produce. We need to choose what we produce with clear attention to the waste products. All our waste products have to go somewhere: they need to be broken down and integrated into the cycles of nature. If we allow forms of production that result in highly toxic waste that is of no use, then we end up slowly poisoning ourselves. The proposed Comprehensive Plan makes little mention of waste production in the Town. The Town may have limited control over some or many of these issues, but the Town must look at pollution reduction in its long range planning, for example:

- Particulates in storm water run-off
- Pesticides and fertilizer in storm water run-off from farms and yards
- Run-off from CAFOs
- Air pollution from wood stoves, burning farm waste, burning residential yard waste, etc.
- Improperly functioning septic systems, especially in watersheds
- Air pollution from automobile use

- Industrial pollution
- Yard waste

No discussion about sustainability is complete without a detailed look at energy. Cheap energy is what made our suburban society possible; without it, the Town of Ithaca will look and act vastly different. As oil production declines, the fossil fuel industry is turning to natural gas and coal to fill the void. We in the Marcellus Shale region can clearly see what a turn to natural gas will mean: the technologies necessary to extract the gas below us will poison our underground water and industrialize the surface. These are reasons enough to turn away from fossil fuels. In a talk at the University of Colorado, Boulder on December 2, 2012, Bill McKibben described how a continuation of reliance on fossil fuels will endanger our species:

You will recall the dismal climate summit in Copenhagen. I was saying to someone earlier today, if Hollywood had written the script, we would have all come together as a world and surmounted all obstacles and done the right thing. But Hollywood didn't write the script. Nobody came together and it was a complete fizzle. And at the end, the world's leaders were reduced to writing this two-page, somewhat pathetic little statement that came with no targets, no timetables, no penalties, no nothing. Only one number in the whole thing — 2 degrees. We promise we won't go above 2 degrees. Everybody signed it: the EU, Japan, Russia, countries that make their living selling oil, the United Arab Emirates, the most conservative, reluctant, recalcitrant, China signed it. Even the United States signed on to this thing. They said, That's it. That's the one thing we've agreed on, 2 degrees is too much. That is the only red line we've drawn.

The second number, how much more carbon could we pour into the atmosphere and have a realistic hope of staying below 2 degrees, not a perfect hope but an 80% chance, let's say. The number that scientists have been giving us now for a few years — it's actually a couple years old so it's a little lower than this now, unfortunately — is about 565 gigatons, 565 billion tons. That sounds like a lot; it sounds like a high limit. It actually is a lot; 565 billion tons of anything is by definition a lot. But we pour 32 or so billion tons of carbon into the atmosphere which year, which means, since we're increasing at about 3% a year, it's about 15 years before we blow past that mark and guarantee going past that red line. Which is very bad news, of course. But it's not the worst number.

The third number is the worst one. It's the reason that I wrote that piece originally, the reason that we decided to do this tour, and the reason that we're launching all these campaigns that come out of it, the important stuff that we'll get to tonight. The third number comes from a team not of scientists but of financial analysts in the U.K. They set out to find out how much carbon the world's fossil fuel companies and the countries that are essentially fossil fuel companies — think Kuwait or Venezuela — have in their reserves now, how much coal, oil, and gas they've got. That number, when you add it up, turns out to be 2,795 gigatons, or five times as much as the most conservative governments on Earth think would be safe to burn.

It is without question that the era of cheap energy is over. It is equally clear that the world will not be able to be run on an oil economy for much longer. And, for the news nobody wants to hear, the physics of the planet also mean that we as a society can forget about finding another fuel to

replace oil and continue our current lifestyle. Oil is magical: it takes almost no energy to extract it; it is easily transportable; and it is quickly transformed into heat and work. Nothing else on the planet has these unbelievably useful properties.

Dr. David MacKay, Professor of Natural Philosophy in the Department of Physics at the University of Cambridge, did the calculations of what it would take to replace oil in Britain with other energy sources. The calculations of alternative energy requirements in the paragraphs below, which were derived from the work of Dr. MacKay, should give Americans, especially those who think we can switch to renewables and thus continue our current lifestyle, pause.

If we wanted to switch from petroleum to biofuels, how much land would it take to grow those biofuels? The answer is, approximately a 10-mile swath of land along the entire length of an average two-lane highway to power the cars on that highway. If you need to transport your biofuels to that highway, it would take even more land. Just try to imagine removing a 10-mile swath of land along every single highway just to power the cars on it. Those figures are just for the cars traveling on the highway, the fuel needs for cars in the city would require additional acreage. This would be the area necessary for fuel production for automobiles, a fraction of our energy use.

In order to consider what it would take to power our whole society with renewables, it's necessary to know that country's power consumption per unit area. On average, the world uses about 0.1 watt per square meter of land. The United States consumes power per land area at an average rate of about 0.3 watts per square meter of land. The fact that we use energy at three times the rate of the whole world should, alone, be a basis for self-reflection."

Since virtually all renewables are land-based (e.g., acres of bio-crops, acreage for wind farms, acreage of solar panels, etc.) it is possible to express their potential power output based on watts per square meter of land as well. Biofuels can produce, at peak production, roughly 0.5 watts per square meter. In other words, if the United States wanted to switch from petroleum (which supplies 90% of our energy) to biofuels, we would have to devote 3/5 of our total land base to growing energy.

Most serious discussions about implementing large scale biofuel production s sustainable harvesting from forests as a source of biofuels. To get an idea of what this would look like in the real world, only 33% of the land in the United States is currently forested (745 million acres of 2.263 billion acres). So if we used 100% of all the National and State Parks, woodlots, tree farms and nature preserves to produce our energy, we would only produce about 1/2 of the energy needed at our current rate of consumption. That also assumes that we no longer need domestically grown wood for anything, and we are OK with harvesting trees from ecologically sensitive areas.

An alternative to using wood for biofuel is growing crops for energy. This, of course, assumes that all that land is suitable farm land, which it is not. It also assumes that we have a sizable amount of surplus agricultural land; we may have some, but not 3/5 of the country.

Neither approach leaves much land for other uses. In order for us to switch from oil to biofuels we would need to dramatically reduce our energy use. Since there is not enough forested land to produce fuel for our energy needs, and most arable land is currently growing food, even if we

were to reduce our energy consumption by two thirds, bringing ourselves down to the current world average, we'd still be hard-pressed to grow enough biofuels to meet our energy needs.

Properly placed wind farms produce 2.5 watts per square meter of land or sea on average. This means that we would only have to devote 20% of our entire land base to wind-farms to power our society. Coastal wind farms are very efficient, but there is not nearly enough coastline to cover our energy needs. It is doubtful that lining the coasts of the United States is going to be very popular with the residents, who tend to be the more wealthy and powerful members of our society. Again, even if we ignore the other problems of wind farms (they kill large numbers of birds and bats, they generate noise that is audible for quite a distance, etc.), that is still a huge amount of our land that would have to be switched to energy production. Remember, that is not only one out of every five acres, but it would need to be concentrated near the population centers, where energy use is most intense.

Solar panels situated in solar parks in Vermont produce, on average, 4.2 watts per square meter of land area. Solar would require us to only cover about 12% of our entire land base with solar panels. Rooftop solar panels reduce this amount somewhat, but only about half of an average building's energy usage can be produced from the area of the roof available for solar panels. Additionally, not all buildings have the necessary sun exposure to make solar panels practical. Even if we could get 50% of the necessary solar panels on roofs, which is an unrealistically high estimate, we would still need to devote 6% of our land to solar energy farms.

Since production of solar panels is a tremendously energy-intensive process, it is not entirely clear if it is possible to produce that many solar panels, should we even decide to cover that much of the country with them. Given that we are currently at peak energy production, we'd have to give up some substantial energy use just to bridge the transition. Again, even with drastic reductions in energy use, it is difficult to imagine the kind of dramatic land use changes necessary to convert to solar energy.

If we can substantially reduce demand, we will reduce the need to fossil fuels with other energy sources. It is not possible to upgrade to more efficient versions of the things we have and make more than a small dent in our energy consumption. Insulating our buildings will result in a 25% reduction in heating and cooling costs. Heating our homes represents approximately 1/3 of our energy consumption. That is a relatively small reduction in only one part of our total energy use package. If we succeed in universal insulation, we only drop our overall energy usage by 8%. People would probably not notice the difference between covering 11% of the community with solar panels compared to 12%.

Transportation significantly depletes our resources. As demonstrated above, if we rely on biofuels to power automobile use at the current rate, there would be scarcely room left over to do anything else. Here is the energy consumption of some typical transportation systems.

- Gas powered cars use 80 kWh to move one person 100 kilometers
- Electric cars use 15-21 kWh to move one person 100 kilometers
- Trains use 6-8 kWh to move one person 100 kilometers
- Bicycles use 1 kWh to move one person 100 kilometers

The kinds of reductions we need to be making are only possible when we stop relying on the individual automobile. Transition to trains and bikes will mean that much of the commuter lifestyle that Town residents currently enjoy will no longer be practical. Worldwide resource depletion will force us to use less energy; our choice is what kinds of energy use we eliminate from our lives. Given all of these issues, it is simply not possible to plug in renewables into our society and not radically change the way we live.

Finally, it is worth looking at what other communities are doing on the subject of sustainability. Here are some proposed guiding principles of sustainability that Dave Goshorn and Sean McGuire, members of Maryland's Department of Natural Resources, recently put together:

1. As natural systems decline, human systems decline.
2. Resources from beneath the Earth – oil, gas, coal – should not be extracted at a pace faster than the millions of years it takes to form them.
3. Resources on the Earth – forests, fertile soils, water, living resources – should not be diminished in quality or quantity.
4. The Earth's natural resources should be used to meet human needs in ways that are just and efficient.
5. Substances made by human hands – products – should not be produced at a pace faster than they can be broken down and integrated into the cycles of nature.
6. Humans owe a debt to nature and we should repay this debt by restoring the natural capital we have taken.
7. A sustainable society is not possible without personal commitment.

Minimally, the Town of Ithaca should have some equally forward thinking language highlighted in its proposed Comprehensive Plan.

Economic and Social Justice

Without economic and social justice, no community can reach its full potential. Unless these goals are an integral part of the Town's proposed Comprehensive Plan, the Town is missing a key step on the path to a vibrant future. While the Town's proposed plan makes some inroads in this direction, it could go much further.

Economic Justice

Job creation is very important to the Town of Ithaca. The Town should be interested in business development and job creation that prioritizes the full economic participation of those members of our community who are economically marginalized or left out altogether by our economy. But our community needs jobs that pay enough for a person to support themselves and a family, one that allows for the accumulation of wealth in economically marginalized sectors of our population.

Just because the larger society is accepting growing income inequality does not mean we have to accept that same inequality. While the Town is a Living Wage employer, and mentions living wages in its proposed Comprehensive Plan, the plan does not examine the marginalized sectors of our population. As long as this population remains invisible, it will continue to remain outside of the economy. Any economic development that does not focus on this sector does not contribute to building a society in which every member has an equal share.

Every decision made by public officials moves money from one group of our citizens to another. With every vote, officials need to ask themselves how this vote affects the poorest members of our community. It is far too common for the wealthy members of our society to bend policies to their

own benefit. People working two jobs just to make ends meet rarely have time to follow complicated policy discussions. Public officials then vote to move money collected from everybody to the rich members of our community. As resources get scarcer, we need to ensure that those who have historically been on the bottom get their share of what is left.

The proposed Comprehensive Plan notes that the Town welcomes locally focused business; it avoids the conflict between supporting locally owned businesses and national/international corporations. Large corporations are primarily extractive in nature; the proposed Plan should directly state that they are not welcome in our community. It should favor locally owned businesses in all contracts that it makes for goods and services. It should be looking for ways to make the permitting process easier for local businesses and at the same time harder for large corporations. Whenever it has the option, the Town should prioritize local businesses that are owned and operated by traditionally economically marginalized members of our community.

Local businesses have a multiplier effect that contributes to sustainability because profits from local businesses are more likely to be invested locally. For instance, a local entrepreneur who builds a store or factory will employ local construction workers and employees and put the profits in a local bank, where the profits may be invested in other local businesses. At the same time, employee wages are spent in the community, contributing to the financial stability and growth of other local businesses such as cleaners, restaurants, book sellers and all the while generating taxes for the Town. In contrast, enterprises such as big box stores have a smaller multiplier effect because profits generated locally are sent out of the community and invested globally. Diversity in the economy is vital for social and economic justice. The anti-trust laws have not been seriously enforced in our society for decades. Big-box, “category-killer” stores litter our society, destroying local stores and local economies. Many communities, however, are still courting these large stores as a “quick fix” to their financial woes, despite the track record of doing the opposite. Lansing recently gave tax abatements to BJ’s Wholesale Club to build a store on Triphammer Road. The vast majority of new jobs came to people from outside of the community. The profits are shipped several times a day to Arkansas. And when this corporation chooses to close this store, we will be stuck with a large, ugly, useless building.

The Town needs to state publicly that it is neither desirable nor sustainable to rely on a small number of large employers for our economic base; we have watched too many large corporations close down operations that were profitable, moving them overseas for a slightly larger margin, devastating the community left behind. The proposed Comprehensive Plan should state that our community’s economic development plan is not oriented to attracting a few large employers. Our local economic future is strongest when it is backed up by a large base of small companies that are locally owned and operated. It is important that these businesses be owned by members of our community and employ members of our community.

The Town should also strongly state its support for enterprises that are sustainable and are committed to being a part of our community for the long term. Extractive industries have a business model that provides a short-term influx of money, but increases local costs in the long-term. This is because, in part, business models that are designed to last less than a generation leave our community with the problem of cleaning up the remains of their business when they close shop. This is in addition to the fact that they saddle the community with the costs associated with infrastructure improvements, upkeep and repair.

When talking about extractive industries, many people think of oil- and gas-drilling companies, but there are others we have to consider for the future. For example, a bottling company could locate here, and ship large quantities of our fresh water outside our watershed. As clean fresh water becomes ever scarcer, this kind of threat will become more real. We need to set up safeguards now, before companies start buying property and applying for permits.

As the examples above demonstrate, the Plan needs to examine critically how the Town, with its decision-making powers, can insure that our community is constantly moving towards a more just society.

Social Justice

One aspect of social justice over which the Town has significant influence is the diversity of our community. It is important that our entire community be diverse, and that individual neighborhoods reflect that diversity. When housing is designed for only one class of resident (low income, senior, student, etc.), it isolates people and creates friction between groups who no longer interact with each other in their daily lives. We learned that “separate but equal” did not work when dealing with race; we need to recognize that it doesn’t work when separating people by class either.

The Town is, unfortunately, developing New Neighborhoods on a very segregated basis. Low-income housing is ghettoized into one location, while McMansions are built in yet another. Seniors are being sorted in a similar pattern: wealthy retirees in one neighborhood, less affluent in another. As we slice off sectors of our community to isolated units, we make diversity elsewhere less possible. Instead of placing the various populations in an area where they will see each other on the street, we separate them, making interaction between the two uncommon.

When our community is segregated, poor people in one area, old people in another, rich in yet another, it becomes easier to treat these segments of our population differently. When the poor members of our society are in one neighborhood and the rich in another, then it is very easy, almost natural, to place the well-kept park next to the wealthy members of our society and allow the poor members of our society live with an industrial building as a neighbor. If our neighborhoods reflect the diversity of our population, it becomes, by design, much more difficult to treat different segments differently. Poor and rich alike enjoy the park and suffer the negative externalities of the industrial operation.

There were frequent excuses given for segregated neighborhoods. One excuse often mentioned was that it was a good idea to place senior citizens next to the hospital (with the implicit assumption that the rest of us don’t ever need emergency care). Building “retirement communities” between the hospital and the graveyard is a not-so-subtle way of warehousing old people until they die. The elderly thrive on interaction with young people, who are equally nourished by this relationship. When they live in the same neighborhood, they can regularly interact on the street; when separated, they have to plan visits to see each other and the potential for spontaneous socializing is removed. Transportation becomes another issue to be resolved; and interactions diminished by the result. Residential development should not result in ghettoizing any group of people.

When these facts were pointed out to the Comprehensive Plan Committee, someone would quickly point to Kendal, as if this was a typical senior center, and explain how segregated communities can be positive for the residents. What this argument misses is that:

- Kendal is a retirement home for wealthy people. Their wealth brings all kinds of positive amenities that many working families do not have during their working lives, let alone in retirement.
- Kendal could be vastly improved if it were a mixed-age community. If upper stories were build on the buildings that are there now, allowing for younger families to live above the retirees, both communities would have better lives. For that matter, more able-bodied retirees may prefer an upper story, and some younger family may need a ground floor because of some disability.

Our aging population makes it more and more popular to attempt to move the elderly to peripheral locations. The reality is that the elderly are valuable members of our community. Instead of building warehouses for them to go off and die, we should be making our communities more responsive to their needs. For example, we should place more healthcare facilities throughout our communities. This would be beneficial for old and young alike. Instead of dealing with this issue directly, the proposed Comprehensive Plan ignores it all together.

Diversity is an important component in our neighborhoods. The above examples demonstrate the need to maintain diversity in class and age; similar arguments could be made for diversity in race, culture, family size, etc. The proposed Comprehensive Plan simply states the current racial demographics without so much as looking at how they are changing:

2000 census

84.14% White, 2.93% Black or African American, 0.13% Native American, 9.18% Asian, 0.04% Pacific Islander, 1.38% from other races, and 2.19% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 3.36% of the population.

2010 census

79.9% White; 4.1% Black or African American; 0.2 % Native American, 11.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.2% from other races, and 3.4% from two or more races. 4.4% Hispanic or Latino.

If we do not look at the changing racial make-up of our community, how can we insure that we have a diverse make-up of neighborhoods?

Municipal decisions are critical in determining if we are building a socially just society. The proposed Comprehensive Plan should, at a minimum, recommend specific steps that the Town can do in directing development that will maximize the diversity of every part of the Town that is experiencing development. It is important that we reverse the current trend of building segregated communities throughout the Town.

Intermunicipal Planning for the Next Century

Tompkins County's municipalities have led the way in intermunicipal cooperation over issues such as water management, municipal health insurance, fire protection, public transportation, recreation, and youth services. If we are to plan for the long-term future of the southern part of Cayuga Lake, it makes sense to decide regionally where the major commercial, education, shopping, recreational, health care, agricultural, manufacturing and residential sectors will be located. The reality is that our municipalities are not in competition with each other; they survive, rather, in symbiotic relationships. We should build on these cooperative relationships in land-use decisions as well.

Many of our neighborhoods, open spaces, and natural features cross municipal boundaries; forests alone cover 18.9 million acres of our 30 million total acres. Our transportation network only works by criss-crossing many municipal boundaries. If we can plan our roads together, we can plan the rest of our communities together as well.

Our residential neighborhoods do not fit neatly within town borders; planning rules and goals should not change arbitrarily in the middle of a community. We need to make regional decisions as to where our population centers are, and, as a united front, discourage development anywhere else.

We need to decide where retail centers are within the region rather than by municipality. Too often, multi-national corporations attempt to play towns against each other because we do our planning by town rather than by region. These large corporations try to start a bidding war, with neighboring communities offering larger and larger tax breaks to persuade the large corporation to locate in their community. It's the communities that loose these kinds of bidding wars.

New York State Law delegates planning decisions to the town and city levels, but does not forbid a more coordinated process. The Town of Ithaca, which borders a vast majority of the other towns in the County, is in a unique position to play a key role in making this inter-municipal planning possible.

And yet, the proposed Comprehensive Plan is mostly silent on this subject. The need for a regional approach to planning requires more than including a couple of neighboring communities on your Comprehensive Plan Committee (only the City of Ithaca and the Village of Cayuga Heights were invited, and then only as non-voting members). It is also more than simply telling neighboring communities what you are planning to do at the border of the Town, and maybe soliciting some input. It requires giving up some of your rights to make all planning decisions in the Town in exchange for having some voice in what happens in the areas surrounding you.

The fact that the Town completely surrounds the City of Ithaca puts the two municipalities in a unique relationship – the fates of the two are tied together. The Town of Ithaca has traditionally recognized the City of Ithaca as its commercial hub and looked to Downtown Ithaca as its downtown center. This relationship is most clearly demonstrated in the fact that the Town located its municipal offices in Downtown Ithaca. The proposed plan takes a dramatic departure from this historic stance: the proposed plan recommends numerous commercial centers located throughout the Town.

The 1993 Comprehensive Plan consistently describes the Town in terms on its relationship to the County. The City of Ithaca is also regularly mentioned as both a neighboring entity and an important partner. Most demographic statistics cited are for Tompkins County, with a narrative describing how they will affect the Town. The proposed Plan focuses on the Town, rarely mentioning the County or neighboring Towns. This isolationist view of the Town is a step backwards from the 1993 Comprehensive Plan. The Town of Ithaca does not exist by itself, and its long term planning document should reflect this fact.

Cayuga Lake is the most visible and important geological feature in our community. It is becoming more clear each passing year that the most precious commodity soon will be – and in many places already is – clean, fresh water. Currently, the Town of Ithaca as well as most of Tompkins County has plenty of clean water, abundant and free, or available at very low cost. As other communities have discovered, this resource can quickly become rare and precious.

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, a grassroots organization founded in 1998 to provide a central organization for the protection of Cayuga Lake watershed, eloquently describes the importance of Cayuga Lake in its May, 2012 “Position Statement on Hydraulic Fracturing”:

Cayuga Lake, 38 miles long and 435 feet deep, is at the center of New York State’s majestic Finger Lakes, which drain to Lake Ontario. These local water bodies define our region, providing clean water that supports the life, economy, and lifestyles of our region. All of our residents depend on the lake, its creeks, and groundwater resources for clean drinking water, as do our vibrant agrarian livelihoods.

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network is willing to lead the way in developing a sustainable and protective future for the water resources in the Cayuga Lake watershed and beyond. *The Cayuga*

Lake Watershed Network's Strategic Plan supports projects with communities, organizations, and businesses that maintain and improve the quality of Cayuga Lake, its tributary creeks, and the watershed as a whole. Their mission is “to identify key threats to Cayuga Lake and its watershed, and advocate for solutions that support a healthy environment and vibrant communities.” The proposed Comprehensive Plan should recommend that the Town share these worthwhile goals and work with groups like the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network on these goals.

The preservation of the lake, and the watershed that nourishes it, is vital for our community's long-term viability. Numerous municipalities border Cayuga Lake within the three counties with lake shoreline (Cayuga, Seneca and Tompkins) and four counties (Cortland, Ontario, Schuyler, and Tioga) contain even more town within the uplands of the watershed, each Town individually with its own development plans and goals. All of Ithaca's waters and most of Tompkins County's waters drain to Cayuga Lake, and thence to Lake Ontario, making us part of the Great Lakes Basin. For more information on how our regional drainage system works, please see, *Managing the Water Resources in the Oswego River Basin in Central New York*. The maps and diagrams illustrate clearly where our waters flow. We cannot make reasonable planning decisions without understanding what is both upstream of our community and also what is downstream.



The Northern portion of the Town of Ithaca includes part of Cayuga Lake.

All seven Counties and their towns and cities need to look at the lake as a shared treasure and find a way to make sure that all the communities bordering it are in agreement as to its use. There is nothing to insure that the Town is actively addressing the long-term health of Cayuga Lake; the lake is rarely mentioned in the proposed Comprehensive Plan at all. This is short-sighted and needs to be corrected.

The south end of Cayuga Lake has been identified by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation as an impaired water body due, in part, to high levels of phosphorus. As a steward of the south end of the lake, the Town should be very concerned about this status. A coordinated effort to rebuild Cayuga Lake's health is important and necessary. Some of the continuing threats to the lake's good health are:

- Sediment from stream and road bank erosion
- Phosphorus pollution from animal wastes, poorly maintained septic systems and sewage treatment

- Heavy metal concentrations (chromium and lead)
- Coliform bacteria from sewage systems and wild and domestic animals
- Agricultural chemicals in the lake and tributaries
- Invasive species (Eurasian watermilfoil, spiny water fleas, zebra mussels, and more recently, “hydrilla” or “water thyme”)
- Large scale commercial water withdrawal

Another threat is that reduced precipitation, due to climate change, will permanently lower lake levels. It may be hard to imagine significant drops in the level of Cayuga Lake. The much larger neighboring Great Lakes, however, are experiencing just that. The January 2, 2013 Buffalo News reported:

As of Dec. 19, Lake Erie was at 570.3 feet above sea level, which is roughly 6½ inches below the lake’s long-term average for December, according to the Army Corps of Engineers. The corps monitors lake levels....

Ontario, meanwhile, is about 10 inches below normal for this time of year; Superior is more than a foot below normal.

“The worst is Michigan and Huron, which is about 2½ feet below the normal average,” said Paul Yu, chief of water management for the Army Corps of Engineers in Buffalo

This is not likely to change. The paper continued:

In the short term, a good six months of above-normal precipitation will be needed to return lake levels to normal, Yu said.

And based on recent predictions by the Army Corps of Engineers, don’t count on that happening. “It would take a massive amount of water,” Horanburg said.

The Union of Concerned Scientists’ report *Confronting Climate Change in the U.S. Northeast: Science, Impacts, and Solutions*, indicates that, by 2090, the climate in New York State will resemble that of Georgia today (much of the modeling used in this report was carried out by Cornell researchers). It is our responsibility, as a headwaters area that drains to the Great Lakes, to do what we can now to help protect the water resources of our wider region as we undergo rapid climate change.

Our watershed is in danger of losing water from sources other than climate change. The natural gas industry is proposing to drill thousands of gas wells in New York utilizing a process called, “horizontal, high-volume, slick water, hydraulic fracturing”, or more commonly called “fracking.” This industrial process, which is done several times in the life of a gas well, requires 5-8 million gallons of water for every “fracking” of every well. Much of this water remains underground, while that which returns to the surface is too toxic to return to the environment. That is a potential of a tremendous amount of water to be removed from our watershed, never to be returned.

The DEC has recently written “Water Withdrawal Rules,” which will govern water withdrawals from our area starting this spring. These rules were developed (over the protests of many) to aid in

water withdrawal permitting and export of Great Lakes Basin water for gas drilling and “fracking” activities.

New York attorney Rachel Treichler, on her blog, NY Water Law, describes some of the shortcomings of these regulations:

It is the areas of the state outside the Delaware and Susquehanna River Basins [such as Tompkins County] that will suffer most severely from the deficiencies of the new regulations. This is ironic because the principal reason given for the enactment of New York’s new water withdrawal laws in 2011 was the need to adopt regulations to properly protect the Great Lakes Basin, which includes our state’s greatest freshwater resources. Earlier this year, groups throughout the Great Lakes Basin called on the DEC to strengthen the proposed regulations, saying “there are changes to be made before the proposed program can be considered protective and rigorous or to fully implement the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact (the Compact). Given the deficiencies in the draft regulations, we call on DEC to revise the proposals and issue a new draft for public comment once changes have been incorporated.”

It is not just the petroleum industry that threatens massive water withdrawals; we are also a prime target for bottling plants. As drought conditions worsen, people across this continent will be willing to pay more and more for bottled water. We need to put laws in place now, before outside interests start pressuring us to export our water, and/or make destructive, polluting use of it. If we wait until these corporations have bought up property and filed their appropriate applications, it will be too late to say no.

In the event that the State is unwilling to protect our valuable water resources, we as the residing stewards need to do so. What is really needed is a Cayuga Lake compact; where the Towns and Counties that are a part of the Cayuga Lake watershed enter into binding agreements to protect the future health of the lake.

In 2000, a “Restoration and Protection Plan” for Cayuga Lake was issued by the IO (Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization), to be the basic planning document for that process. In the years since, other priorities and budget demands took over, and the vision of this plan has faded; however, the IO, Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, Town of Ithaca and others have discussed renewing this process in 2013. The original document is downloadable here:

<http://www.cayugawatershed.org>

It is vital that all municipalities are on board with such a program, and that such an agreement be in place as soon as possible. The Town of Ithaca ought to take a strong leadership role in creating such a compact, and the proposed Plan ought to reflect that commitment.

Another topic, which is only discussed in closed rooms, is the merging of the Town of Ithaca with the City. Virtually everybody in elected office agrees, in private, that this is a good idea. There is a shared opinion among elected officials that they would get voted out of office if they talked about merging in a more open forum. This discussion needs to be brought out into the open. Given the topography, the economic interdependence, the numerous shared services, and the residents’

general lack of understanding of the boundary between the two, it makes sense to eliminate this artificial boundary. The resulting savings for both communities would be substantial.

The largest outstanding issue is not burdening the Town taxpayers with the large debt the City has accumulated. Ignoring the fact that a significant amount of this debt is a result of people choosing to live over the line so they can enjoy the services provided by the City while not having to pay for them, it is easy to structure the merger so that the debt burden does not transfer to the town residents.

The Comprehensive Plan should propose that the Town build a relationship with the Cayuga Nation. Though the power to make treaties rests with the Federal Government, the Town must recognize that we are living on land that once belonged to the Cayuga Nation. The proposed Comprehensive Plan only refers to the Cayuga as a historical people; it does not acknowledge that they are still alive and have an organized Nation. The Cayuga have a long and continuous history with this land and that relationship continues today. A solid, positive relationship between the Cayuga Nation and the Town would be beneficial to both peoples.

In conclusion, the suggestion that the Town Comprehensive Plan not merely look at the Town as an isolated municipality, but adopt a much more regional approach, is not just the idea of a minority block on the Comprehensive Plan Committee. It is also a suggestion that the New York Legislature felt so strongly about that it wrote it into New York State law:

§ 272-a.3 Content of a town comprehensive plan. The town comprehensive plan may include the following topics at the level of detail adapted to the special requirements of the town.

(b) Consideration of regional needs and the official plans of other government units and agencies within the region.

A New Approach

Although the Plan adopts some Smart-Growth principals, it ignores others which are fundamental (e.g., all of the incentives for Smart Growth are focused on large parcels of opens space, the very places that the plan purports to be protecting from development.). It examines the Town as an isolated entity, not as an interactive member of a larger community. It does not address the drastic problems we are facing: peak oil/resources, climate change, economic instability, etc. which are all going to force our community to change. These are fatal flaws: the proposed Comprehensive Plan neither fixes the problems of the previous Plan nor does it prepare us for the changes we are facing. The 21st century is going to be a time of unprecedented change for humanity; the communities that embrace this change early are the ones that will be the strongest as finite resources run out.

During the almost 5 years that the Comprehensive Plan Committee met, the Chair regularly stressed that we needed to complete the work of the Comprehensive Plan Committee so that the Town Board could start implementing the policies we were discussing and stop the sprawl that is so problematic for the Town. There was no disagreement that it was, and still is, urgent that the Town change its development patterns immediately. The disagreements at the committee level were not about how quickly we should proceed, but instead about how we should proceed. Unfortunately, it was the minority opinion to take a dramatically different approach to planning than what the 1993 Plan recommended. The majority wanted only minor changes. The fact that the proposed Comprehensive Plan did not take any drastic departures from the previous plan insures that its implementation will not result in significant changes either: open space will continue to be replaced with sprawl development.

The rush to finish the report was exacerbated by some very problematic process decisions. In order to speed up the group, process policies were imposed by the Chair that were not only troubling, but cannot be easily discerned from reading the Committee's meeting minutes. It is important to review them in an effort to not repeat them in the future.

The whole report was organized, designed and written by staff. The Committee as a whole reviewed most of the material, especially chapter 2, and recommended changes; however, the first draft was always something prepared by staff. Even when nearly half the Committee members took it upon themselves to draft an introduction, staff completely rewrote it, and it was the staff's work that the Committee reviewed, not the work of Committee members.

Committee members had to beg and beg to get electronic copies of any draft documents. Even then, we were often turned down by staff. One Committee member threatened to file a FOIL request to obtain a document, an act that demonstrated the degree of frustration Committee members felt about this policy. This discouraged rewriting what staff had presented, and also made it difficult for Committee members to share drafts of documents with their constituents. When it came to the proposed Land-Use Map, not only could we not get electronic versions of the document, we could not get staff to add features, such as parcel boundaries, to the maps they did print for us. This made it extremely difficult to understand what was being depicted on the map. Electronic copies were only provided after the sections were voted on.

It took a majority of the Committee members *present* at a meeting to make any changes to the drafts that staff presented. When the base quorum (four out of eight members) of the Committee was present, final decisions were made by a "majority" that was, in fact, a fraction of the whole Committee (three out of eight). Further, when the Committee members at a particular meeting were evenly divided over whether a change should be made or not, the staff's draft was accepted by default. Effectively, staff had the tie-breaking vote, even though when the Town Board appointed the Committee, it chose not to make any staff members voting members of the Committee.

The first time the Comprehensive Plan Committee approved and sent to the Town Board its recommendations, it only sent a partial draft of the Plan. The Committee's vote on December 5, 2012 did not include Chapter 4, "plan implementation". Most, if not all, of the Committee was unaware of this. Staff drew up a very rough draft and shared it with the Committee on May 16, 2012, but it was not discussed in detail, was not included in the draft being voted upon and no further drafts were reviewed. Staff is revising that draft, and submitting it to the Town Board without the Committee's input or approval.

The public was not allowed to speak at Committee meetings. A number of residents came to the December 5, 2012 meeting to express their concerns. A Committee member asked that the group be given the floor for 5 minutes. The Chair refused.

Ironically, weeks later, the Attorney for the Town pointed out that it was not only a good idea to give the public a chance to speak at the end of the process but that a public hearing was required by New York State law [§272.a.6 (b)]. So the Committee was reconstituted, minus one outspoken member, for the sole purpose of holding a public hearing. Staff indicated how carefully

it expected the Committee to consider public comment judging by the e-mail they sent to the newly constituted Committee on January 25, 2013:

Dear Comprehensive Plan Committee Members,

Attached is a revised resolution for the Committee's consideration at the January 28th meeting. This is essentially the December 5th Committee approved resolution with modifications. With the exception of the date change, the proposed modifications are indicated in redline—so you can see what is different. The proposed modifications reflect updated information as well as subtle language changes to reflect requirements in NYS Town Law (i.e. changing “referring” to “recommending”). I will have a clean copy of this resolution available to all of you at the meeting on Monday. The resolution would need to be considered following the public hearing.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Have good weekends and I will see you on Monday.

Thank you,

What is noticeably absent from this e-mail is any indication that anyone is considering changing a single word of the proposed Comprehensive Plan based on the public comment received at this hearing. Public officials need to understand that these opportunities for public comment are more than just formalities; they are an occasion for public officials to hear the comments and concerns of citizens and incorporate them into the document being reviewed.

The public hearing was well attended and members of the public commented on many aspects of the Plan. Topics included the need to support farmers preserving open space in the Town, architecture requirements for new houses, traffic volumes in neighborhoods, especially on West Hill, noise in residential areas, and the need to maintain the character of West Hill in the face of numerous plans for development. Immediately after receiving all this public comment, the Committee voted to recommend the same report voted on in the December meeting to the Town Board. The Chair stated during the meeting that comments received at the public hearing would be passed along with the draft Plan to the Town Board, although the resolution passed by the Committee said nothing about forwarding any public comment.

In the end, the Committee seriously failed to discuss any of the comments from the public, let alone incorporate them into the draft it recommended to the Town Board. Further, it failed to complete its mission and, instead, voted to recommend an incomplete draft.

The changes from the 1993 Plan that the proposed Comprehensive Plan calls for are minor, rarely challenging the status quo, especially with regard to developers. It is clear from the discussions at Committee meetings that many members of the Committee, as well as many staff members, are uncomfortable telling large land owners that the Town is no longer interested in allowing farms to be converted into townhouses. While Committee members and staff are recommending that the Town only make minor policy adjustments, other communities are taking the lead in making changes that were unthinkable a few years ago.

If the Town of Concord, MA can ban the sale of plastic water bottles within the town, a law that went into effect on January 2, 2013, then the Town of Ithaca can take some equally strong steps. The City of San Francisco received national attention when they not only banned the use of plastic bags, but required that all retail stores charge at least 10 cents for all other bags. This expanded ordinance brings San Francisco in line with 49 other cities and counties in California that ban plastic bags from retailers, according to the City's Department of the Environment. The United States uses 17 million barrels of oil to make the single-use plastic bottles consumed in the U.S. in one year. The planet's resources are finite, and it is time that we start treating them that way.

The Philadelphia Orchard Project (POP), founded in 2007, describes its mission as:

...plants orchards in the city of Philadelphia that grow healthy food, green spaces and community food security.

POP works with community-based groups and volunteers to plan and plant orchards filled with useful and edible plants. POP provides the plants, trees, and training. Community organizations own, maintain, and harvest the orchards, expanding community-based food production. Orchards are planted in formerly vacant lots, community gardens, schoolyards, and other spaces, almost exclusively in low-wealth neighborhoods where people lack access to fresh fruit.

Even in a densely populated city, it is possible to grow at least some of the residents' food locally; initiatives such as the Binghamton study (described on page 41 above) bring fresh produce to communities where such staples are traditionally out of reach. The Town can, and should, play a far more active role in such activities.

Governmental bodies around the country are taking strong, binding steps to severely limit corporate power in their communities. On December 9th, 2002, Porter Township, – a municipality of 1,500 residents an hour north of Pittsburgh in Northwestern Pennsylvania – became the first local government in the United States to eliminate corporate claims to civil and constitutional privileges. The Township adopted a binding law declaring that corporations operating in the Township may not wield legal privileges – historically used by corporations to override democratic decision-making – to stop the Township from passing laws which protect residents from toxic sewage sludge. The state of Nebraska forbids corporate ownership of farmland in their state constitution:

Article XII: Sec. 8. (1) No corporation or syndicate shall acquire, or otherwise obtain an interest, whether legal, beneficial, or otherwise, in any title to real estate used for farming or ranching in this state, or engage in farming or ranching.

The Town of Ithaca should be following these communities' lead, and making it clear that any rights corporations have in our community are subordinate to the rights of the individuals who live in the Town.

On March 17, 2012 the Town of Sugar Hill, NH enacted a local law to establish a local "Bill of Rights", which in part reads:

Section 3-Statements of Law–Rights of Residents and the Natural Environment

(d) Rights of Natural Communities. Natural communities and ecosystems, including, but not limited to, wetlands, streams, rivers, aquifers, and other water systems, possess inalienable and fundamental rights to exist and flourish within the Town of Sugar Hill. Residents of the Town shall possess legal standing to enforce those rights on behalf of those natural communities and ecosystems.

This law was passed in reaction to a proposed power line that was to cut through a section of the community that is a protected National Forest. When the Federal Government indicated that it would not protect this local treasure from development, the locals took action to protect it themselves. Certainly the residents of the Town treasure the natural world around us every bit as much as the residents of Sugar Hill.

Other communities are taking bold , strong steps to change both how their communities are designed and their impact on the planet. The Town of Ithaca can still choose to join these pioneers of a new future. The sooner we do, the sooner we stop the damage that sprawl and our current unsustainable lifestyle are causing our community.

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