

FHIA Meeting Minutes: January 30, 2019

Location: Forest Home Chapel

Present: Caroline Arms (FHIA President), Bill Arms, Tom Campanella, Heather Beasley (treasurer), Ruth Mahr, J. Latham, Ari Lavine, Linda Copman, Doug Brittain, Bruce Brittain, Jack Blakely, Nanette Blakely

I. Cornell North Campus Residential Expansion discussion:

Question raised about what the neighborhood has done or should do

- A couple of people voiced concerns about the traffic load and danger to cyclists and pedestrians
- Additional load on sewer system voiced as another concern: when, where, how big will improvements need to be?
 - Answer: Upgrade along Thurston Ave. in the order of \$100Ks and CU recognizes it will need to be major contributor, with work starting this year or next
- Caroline Arms, as FHIA president, submitted letter to city planning board on October 23 (see Attachment #1). The City of Ithaca engineer gave detailed input on traffic/transportation issues (see <http://www.cityofithaca.org/DocumentCenter/View/9233/LET-Re-NCRE-CityEngHathaway-2018-09-12>).
- At this point, nothing to stop the project other than suing the City, which is the Lead Agency for Environmental Review of the project.
- Short of this, it was suggested that our approach be to clearly articulate specific concerns for FH and stay in communication with the Town of Ithaca, requesting that they advocate on our behalf for specific FH concerns/
 - Further recommendation that we keep this issue separate from the issue of what to do about Forest Home Drive
- Ruth Mahr offered to start drafting another letter to send to the Town of Ithaca.

II. Forest Home Drive updates

- Caroline Arms provided summary of history of the issue:
 - About 2 years ago, FHIA heard from Herb Engman that a very high estimate (around \$1 million) had been made for improving the stretch of FHD from Judd Falls Road to the City of Ithaca line
 - Due to the expense, the Town was considering closing the road but no clear reasons for why it was so expensive were given. More recently we understand that part of expense was for acquiring property adjacent to road
 - Oct. 2018 – At FHIA Annual Meeting, Bill Goodman said it would come up again in 2020 and be considered as a capital improvement project

- Few weeks later Bill Goodman got in touch with Caroline to request another meeting with FHIA, which was held on December 5, where he gave notice that the Highway Superintendent was likely going to close the road for safety reasons. The proposal would be made at the Town Board meeting on December 10.
- About 30 Forest Homers attended the Town Board meeting on December 10, with 15 speaking for their allotted 3 minutes (in the "persons to be heard" session at the beginning of the meeting, all arguing against closure.
- Caroline Arms submitted a letter (see Attachment #2) and spoke on behalf of FHIA.
- When the Town Board discussed the topic, they were against closure and referred the issue to the Public Works Committee.
- Several people who attended the Town of Ithaca Public Works Committee meeting on December 18 shared their impressions of what occurred, including the following:
 - Highway Superintendent, Jim Weber, made distinction between widening the pavement (which he did not propose) and widening the edges of the road.
 - Jim had not closed the road but stressed that he had the authority to do so.
 - Jim is inclined towards a major project, with an RFP to get engineering firms to come up with designs for the road to address what he sees as problems.
 - The Public Works Committee members asked whether it was feasible to fix the guard rail now and Jim agreed to gather information.
- General consensus, and consistent press from those present, that FH would like simple plan to keep FHD as it is rather than a big project to 'modernize' the road and change its character. Fixing the guard rail is recognized as necessary by those in attendance, preferably including closing the gap by the old steps across from Jon and Rebecca's after checking with them about it.¹
 - Someone noted that this stretch of road has no reported accidents
 - Someone wondered if we could include request for pedestrian solution/improvements at the bottom of Judd Falls Road – after discussion, general consensus was that we focus on advocating for plan to maintain this stretch of FHD as it is and at a later point advocate for sidewalks (keeping two issues separate for now to maintain focus on advocating for our vision of maintaining the character of FHD)

¹ Jon Miller has communicated that he has no use for the gap in the guard rail by the old steps.

- Someone noted that narrow, winding road is in line with the Forest Home traffic calming report from about a decade ago. [See <https://fhia.org/traffic/>]
- Someone else noted that Dan Thaete (Town Engineer) has not been involved at all with Jim's plan for FHD.
- Someone else noted that traffic calming plan is also aligned with best practices in the field and represents what progressive transportation agencies are doing
- FHIA will invite board to tour the neighborhood at their convenience

Attachment #1: Letter sent by FHIA President to City of Ithaca Planning Board after FHIA Annual Meeting on October 22, 2018

Date: October 23, 2018

To: City of Ithaca Planning & Development Board

From: Forest Home Improvement Association

Re: Cornell's NCRE Project

At last night's annual meeting of the Forest Home Improvement Association (FHIA), residents of Forest Home expressed great concern about the adverse impact of Cornell's proposed North Campus Residential Expansion (NCRE) project on traffic conditions in the neighborhood. A particular area of interest is Pleasant Grove Road from the intersection with Cradit Farm Road to the intersection with Forest Home Drive, across the downstream bridge on Forest Home Drive, and Judd Falls Road between Forest Home Drive and Tower Road.

As the student population increases, so will the number of faculty and staff needing to reach the campus. Even without the NCRE project, the vehicle traffic at peak periods has been increasing steadily at the intersections on either side of the downstream bridge. Traffic accumulates and those of us who live near the intersection of Pleasant Grove Road and Forest Home Drive observe near accidents frequently. The safety of pedestrians, including a large number of students out running, and of cyclists is a major concern.

FHIA strongly urges the Planning Board to require that the NCRE project include:

- a. re-alignment at the intersection of Pleasant Grove Road and Cradit Farm Road to lead traffic approaching campus from Community Corners directly into campus.
- b. enhancements to the steep section of Pleasant Grove Road and the intersection with Forest Home Drive (i.e., between Cradit Farm Road and the downstream bridge) to make them safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into your deliberations.

Sincerely,

Caroline Arms, President, Forest Home Improvement Association

Attachment #2: Letter submitted to Town of Ithaca Board, December 10, 2018

To: Ithaca Town Board
From: Forest Home Improvement Association (FHIA)
Date: December 10, 2018
Re: Forest Home Drive (FHD)

The stretch of Forest Home Drive along Beebe Lake is a special feature of our community, a winding scenic road that is both part of a historic district and a New York Scenic Road. Once Route 13 and then 392, FHD connects the community of Forest Home directly to destinations to the west, including Cornell University and downtown Ithaca. Indeed, it affords the only level way out of the hamlet of Forest Home.

FHIA had already scheduled a meeting last Wednesday with Town Supervisor Bill Goodman to discuss various issues related to Forest Home. At least 25 of the 140 or so households in Forest Home, from every street in the community, were represented. We were dismayed to learn that there is a plan to close the stretch of Forest Home Drive between Judd Falls Road and McIntyre Place. Those attending expressed outrage that this proposal should be sprung on the community with so little notice and the strong consensus view was against closure, not only because of inconvenience, but also because of negative safety impacts elsewhere. The guiderail has been allowed to deteriorate and should be fixed, but that does not merit emergency road closure and a major roadway rebuild. Particular issues that were brought up at the meeting are listed below:

Value to the community

- This stretch of Forest Home Drive (FHD) provides a connection to nature and history. It is the old Route 13 and is designated a New York State Scenic Road. Forest Home is on the National Register of Historic Places¹; regulations of the New York State Historic Preservation Office must be considered.
- FHIA has made the Town aware in the past that the Forest Home community values road design that deters drivers from speeding. The Forest Home Traffic Calming Plan (developed in conjunction with the Town of Ithaca) and the Town Transportation Planⁱⁱ both call for narrow roads in residential areas in order to elicit good driver behavior. The current rural appearance and winding configuration of this section of road serves that objective well.

Safety

- The single biggest safety issue may be the effect on pedestrians if FHD were closed. The traffic that currently uses this section of FHD does not negatively affect pedestrians, since they are on a completely separate facility. But if that traffic were to be diverted to Judd Falls Road (JFR) or McIntyre Place, it would negatively affect pedestrians on those roads. In those locations, pedestrians are immediately adjacent to the road, or in the winter, often directly in the travel lane.
- This section of FHD is the only flat route out of the community unless you want to go east. All other routes involve steep hills on which vehicles get stuck in wintry conditions.
- Closing the road would reduce the options for access to Forest Home for fire-trucks, ambulances, etc. This is a real life-safety concern, especially if other roads in the neighborhood are occasionally blocked or otherwise impassable.
- Intersections directly affected by the proposed closure and re-routing of traffic could have difficulty in safely handling the additional traffic. These include the intersection of McIntyre Place with JFR, and both ends of the "jug handle" (where JFR crosses Plantations Road).

- Closure would reduce the options for safe places for school buses to stop. Three locations that have been used would seem to be precluded by the proposed closure: on McIntyre Place; on FHD at McIntyre; and outside 130 FHD (between The Byway and the bottom of JFR).

General concerns

- Any potential future rebuilding of FHD (or any other Town infrastructure within Forest Home) should be planned in consultation with the FHIA and would need to be consistent with the Town Transportation Plan, the FH Traffic Calming Plan, and the community's status as a National Historic landmark.
- Inconvenience to the community due to general disruption of the traffic flow. Many Forest Homers use this road daily.
- Concern over the expected impact of Cornell's North Campus Residential Expansion, both during construction and once completed. FHD is used as a connector between North Campus and Central Campus. Closing it when traffic generated by students, faculty and staff is expected to increase would be counterproductive, as this additional traffic would be diverted to other roads in the neighborhood.
- Inconvenience for Cornell employees and other commuters who use the Forest Home Drive parking garage.
- Diverted traffic would increase congestion elsewhere in the system, particularly on Judd Falls Road and the "jug handle" that connects JFR and Plantations Road.

In conclusion, the Forest Home Improvement Association strongly urges the Town Board and the Department of Public Works to keep this section of Forest Home Drive open. The Association also respectfully requests that any legitimate safety issues be efficiently addressed, rather than allocating money for an RFP in anticipation of a major reconstruction project.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Caroline Arms (President, FHIA)
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ⁱ National Historic Places Register Reference Number: 98000999

ⁱⁱ Excerpt from the Town of Ithaca Transportation Plan (June 25, 2007)
Volume III: The Design Guidelines (p 15)
Streetscape Design: The Roadway and Shoulder
Roadway Width

In general, the total curb-to-curb width of the roadway should be minimized, while taking into account safety and livability needs. A narrower street width reduces vehicle travel speeds, the amount of impervious road surface area, and the distance that pedestrians must cross. Lanes should be no wider than required to serve their role in the streetscape. Travel lanes on low-volume residential streets, such as those internal to a subdivision, can be 8 - 10 feet wide, depending on circumstances (such as shoulder and drainage conditions). Travel lanes on other roads can be 9 - 12 feet wide, again depending on circumstances. Roadway design should not impede emergency access.