

Forest Home Improvement Association

President's Annual Report October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021

Overview

This was another year with limited possibilities for socializing and no in-person meetings. The usual holiday party at the home of residents was replaced by outdoor activities in the park and a Zoom-based celebration. There was no Spring Potluck and although we hoped until late August to hold the usual September Barbecue in the park, it was replaced by an ice cream social that required fewer volunteers and no shared use of utensils.

I want to extend a thank you to all the people who volunteered for various activities, offered advice, and took initiative on their own to contribute to the community. I have had sterling help from the rest of the board: Connie Stirling-Engman (Secretary); Valerie Hans (Treasurer); and Jeff Holden (Vice President).

Social events

- Instead of our traditional holiday party at a resident's home, two events were organized by Michael Bend and Connie Stirling-Engman.
 - Saturday, December 5. Holiday treat exchange and swag-making in the park.
 - Friday, December 11. Shared readings and seasonal performances on Zoom.
- Ice cream social. Saturday September 11. Coordinated by Caroline and Bill Arms with help on the day from the rest of the board and others.

Speaker series (via Zoom)

- March 30. Elizabeth Mount. Topic: "Spring to Fall in the Garden." Elizabeth talked about the plants that thrive in her Ithaca garden and provide color and visual interest all year.
- April 22 (Earth Day). Tom Campanella. Topic: "The Rise and Fall of the American Elm." Tom provided an illustrated history of the use of avenues of elms and explained why they disappeared.

Other community activities

- Spring cleanup. Mid-April. Picking up trash along our roads. Self-directed, socially distanced, and whenever convenient. Coordinated by Connie Stirling-Engman and Herb Engman, who made tools, gloves, and plastic bags available for pickup any time and were available for assistance on April 17.
- Throughout the year, Connie Stirling-Engman and Herb Engman have kept an eye on plants in the Forest Home park, removing invasives and encouraging attractive native species. Connie reports that the natives Riverbank Wild Rye and White Snakeroot are thriving, forming a carpet and helping to keep out invasives. You may have noticed that the hemlock that was planted in May 2019 to honor the New York State Hemlock Initiative has been looking sickly for the last few months. Connie reported this to Joe Talbut, (Town Parks Maintenance Manager) and he will investigate.

- Virtual meeting with Cornell Community Relations, Wednesday August 11. Update and Q & A for the Forest Home community on North Campus Residential Expansion (NCRE) project and student move-in. This was the only session organized by Cornell Community Relations specifically for Forest Home since August 2020. For sessions organized for the broader community, in particular, monthly Town-Gown Tuesdays and Greater Ithaca Town Halls, see <http://communityrelations.cornell.edu/local-covid19-updates-and-resources>. Recordings of many past sessions are available.

Preparation and printing of FHIA Directory

The Forest Home directory of residents is a valuable reference for new and long-time Forest Home residents. The directory was last updated and printed in 2017, over three years ago, and the information was out of date. Jeff Holden (FHIA Vice President) took on the task of setting up a system for better longer-term maintenance. He will present a separate report on this activity.

Local issues affecting Forest Home

Forest Home Walkway Improvement Project

Summary

During this year, progress on this project was disappointingly slow. However, a final design has been agreed and the necessary easements have been signed. We now hope for the reconstruction to happen in the Spring of 2022.

Prior to 2020

After several years of discussion, in 2019, the Town commissioned an engineering study to develop conceptual designs with the objective of making the Walkway easier to maintain and safer for users. The contractor, Barton & Loguidice (B&L), produced designs for three options (A-C) in August 2019, and an option D in mid-September 2019. COVID-related constraints meant that the project stalled for a year.

Details for 2020-2021

In Fall 2020, the Town signed a new contract with B&L for Final Design and Bid Phase Services associated with the Forest Home Walkway Improvements Project. The final design was to be based on Option D. In 2019, the Town commissioned an engineering study to develop conceptual designs with the objective of making the Walkway easier to maintain and safer for users. The contractor, Barton & Loguidice (B&L), produced designs for three options (A-C) in August 2019, and an option D in mid-September., with some minor adjustments based on input from the community and the Town Engineer.

An agreement had been reached with Cornell in principle that it would grant an easement to use the current alignment at the zig-zag. In return Cornell asked the Town to install a crosswalk in a different location near the intersection of Forest Home Drive with the western end of Arboretum Road (formerly Plantations Road) near Beebe Lake.

At the Town's December 15, 2020 Public Works Committee meeting, all Forest Home residents were invited to provide input on the final design. On December 21 the Town hosted a Zoom meeting with the adjoining property owners. Permanent easements are required with two of the

adjacent property owners, with Bill and Caroline Arms (200 FHD) for the very bottom of the Walkway and connection between existing drainage channel for 200 FHD and the new drainage channel for the lower section of the Walkway and with Cornell for the area near the zig-zag where the current path goes across Cornell property.

In early February, the Town provided the latest set of plans, a cost estimate, and a table of comments from recent opportunities for feedback with responses from B&L. These documents were to be the focus of an agenda item for the Town Board meeting scheduled for February 8, 2021. Rod Howe, Town Supervisor, indicated that the plan was to field any last-minute comments and make final updates for a future board resolution to authorize bidding once the RFP package was complete. The Town encouraged Forest Homers to attend the Town Board meeting and provide comments. After consultation with the board, I spoke at the meeting, indicating that the FHIA Board would consider funding a bench part way up the Walkway at a point the Town had suggested in an earlier design iteration.

At the meeting of March 8, 2021, the Town Board authorized the extension of the contract with B&L to prepare drawings for the two easements required for the Walkway, with Bill and Caroline Arms and with Cornell. Drawings for the Arms easement were delivered to the property owners on March 17. There was no rush to finalize the Arms easement, because it was proving harder to reach agreement with Cornell, but by July 20, the Arms easement terms were agreed. On August 9, the Town Board approved the two easements. By early September, a bid process for the reconstruction had yielded two responses at costs substantially above the budgeted amount. At the Town Board meeting on September 13, the Board decided not to award the contract immediately, but to put the contract out to bid again early in 2022. Several Forest Homers spoke stressing the importance of keeping the Walkway usable and safe this winter. In particular, we requested that the rope handrail that had been removed from the lower section as part of a brush-clearing effort in preparation for the reconstruction be replaced, with support preferably reaching a few feet further up than previously. The Town performed the repairs as requested two days later. The trees marked for removal may be taken out any time.

Cornell's North Campus Residential Expansion (NCRE)

The North Campus Residential Expansion involves construction of dormitories for 2,000 students with associated community facilities. Construction began in the summer of 2019 and students moved into the Phase 1 dormitories in August 2021. The Phase 2 dormitories are scheduled to be ready for Fall 2022. See: <https://ncre.cornell.edu/ncre-news>

A part of the overall project that is particularly significant to Forest Home will be a redesign of the intersection of Cradit Farm Drive and Pleasant Grove Road (PGR). This project is funded by Cornell, but the design has been developed in conjunction with the Highway Departments of the Town of Ithaca and Tompkins County. The tentative design, for a roundabout, was presented at an August 2020 ZOOM session hosted by Cornell Community relations. The construction will not happen until after the completion of the Phase 2 dormitories, scheduled for Fall 2022. FHIA will be watching for signs of detailed planning for the roundabout and work on PGR by Tompkins County, hoping for associated improvements for pedestrians and cyclists on the steep stretch into our hamlet.

Town of Ithaca LED Streetlight project

After a decision to convert streetlights in the Town to LED three years ago, exploration of options took place in 2020 in coordination with Tompkins County and other local municipalities, using the New York Power Authority (NYPA) for advice and design. The Town's November 2020 newsletter said, "The Town is making progress with its LED streetlight upgrade, which will reduce electricity and maintenance costs, GHG [GreenHouse Gas] emissions, and improve lighting quality. The Town is currently working toward purchasing approximately 270 streetlights we currently lease from NYSEG. At the same time, like several municipalities in our county, we are working with New York Power Authority to implement the design, purchase, and replacement of the streetlights. The project is scheduled for completion in 2021."

Nick Goldsmith, the sustainability planner who works for both the Town and the City of Ithaca, made presentations at the Public Works Committee (PWC) meetings on November 17 and December 15, 2020 and responded to questions from the committee and members of the public, including some from Forest Home. Several comments presented via Zoom or in writing, requested consideration of moving the light at the intersection of Pleasant Grove Road (PGR) and Forest Home Drive (FHD) to provide better illumination for pedestrians using the crosswalk. See, for example, [minutes for Dec 15 PWC meeting](#).

For reasons of cost, the decision was a 1-for-1 replacement of the 272 streetlights it currently leases from NYSEG. Once the new lights, which will be owned by the Town, are installed, requests for changes can be considered. FHIA was encouraged to submit a request for moving the light at the intersection of PGR and FHD, which was done on January 27, 2021. Joe Slater, Director of Public Works, acknowledged receipt of the request and encouraged patience.

Implementation details were finally settled by April 2021. Since then, the Town has been pursuing the necessary formal approvals from NYSEG and the NYS Public Service Commission (PSC). See the [October 7, 2021 authorization](#) by the PSC for the transfer of street lighting facilities to the Town of Ithaca for a sign of progress. It seems likely that the conversion work will slip into 2022.

Action on miscellaneous issues related to traffic through Forest Home

- **Monitoring large trucks causing problems at the S-curve.** David Kuckuk, who lives across from the S-curve near 228 Forest Home Drive continues to maintain his Facebook page for [Forest Home Trucks and Traffic](#) and distributing information about incidents caught on camera to the Town, Cornell, and Welliver, the contractor for the NCRE project. When a truck can be identified as NCRE-related, the contractor takes steps to stop it happening again. Reporting trucks delivering food, etc. to Cornell has also had some useful effect, with the departments to whom the deliveries go being told to instruct drivers to avoid Forest Home. But some trucks are just passing through, led by their GPS. We are grateful to David for his efforts. If you have photographs or other postable content related to truck incidents anywhere in Forest Home, please forward them to him. (dkuckuk2@gmail.com).
- **Signage for weight limit, etc.** A weight limit applies to most of the roads in Forest Home. In April 2019, FHIA submitted a request to Town of Ithaca (Public Works) for updated

signage to deter trucks from coming through Forest Home. Thanks to Bruce and Doug Brittain for surveying the existing signs and making detailed recommendations. In principle, the Public Works Committee agreed in July 2019 that the signage needed to be updated, but it took a long time to sort out the details. In June 2020, the first updates appeared, primarily updating the legends on existing posts. In Fall 2020, the focus turned to installing new signs where some had been removed entirely over the years and then to other minor changes. By June 2021, as many signs as had been requested were in place, although not always in the exact location suggested. In particular, there was no sign at the intersection of Judd Falls Road with Tower Road. Following a request made at recent Planning Board reviews for a new building on Tower Road, a weight-limit sign was installed at this location last week.

Based on conversations with truck drivers near the S-curve, David Kuckuk sent a persuasive letter to the Town in June suggesting that the "Except Local Delivery" legends on the weight limit be removed because they were counter-effective. Those legends have been removed.

In late July, following a suggestion by Bill Arms, based on observing driver behavior at the intersection of Pleasant Grove Road and Forest Home Drive at the northeast end of the Downstream Bridge, legends were added to the two STOP signs. They read: "Traffic from right does not stop" and "Traffic from left does not stop."

Cornell's proposed new building on Tower Road.

Cornell is planning to build a new building (originally termed the Multidisciplinary Building but now called the Atkinson Building) on Tower Road. It will be located just east of Rice Hall and involves the construction of a 100,000+/- square foot, 4-story building that will replace the parking lot adjacent to Rice and Bruckner Halls. The new building will house Cornell's Center for Cancer Biology and Immunology, Department of Computational Biology, Masters of Public Health Program, and the Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future. It has been discussed at recent Planning Board meetings at which Caroline Arms, Bruce Brittain, and Doug Brittain made comments, with the primary concerns being noise from fans in rooftop air vents and truck traffic. Since these Planning Board meetings, the Town of Ithaca has installed a weight-limit sign on Judd Falls Road at the intersection with Tower Road. See [PDF with plans as of August 9](#). Residents of McIntyre and the upper part of Judd Falls Road might benefit from attending future meetings on the project, since they are most likely to be affected by any increase in noise level.

Modification to intersection of Forest Home Drive with Arboretum Road near Beebe Lake

As a consideration for Cornell granting the Town an easement to allow the Forest Home Walkway to continue to use its current route, the Town agreed to install a crosswalk at the western side of this intersection, near the City line. To comply with current code, this would require six yellow crosswalk warning signs. After some discussion, incorporating comments by Bruce Brittain, Town staff determined that the intersection satisfies requirements for an All Way Stop, which would be much safer for pedestrians trying to cross FHD from the Beebe Lake side and remove the requirement for the yellow signs. The Public Works Committee has passed the recommendation for an All Way Stop to the Town Board. This design is consistent with the recommendation in the 2007 Forest Home Traffic Calming Plan [see <https://fhia.org/traffic/>]. Two old mid-block crosswalks on FHD, one on each side of the intersection will be removed.

Upgrades to sewer and water systems in Forest Home

The Forest Home #1 Sanitary Sewer Lift Station (usually referred to as F.H. P.S. #1), located in the gravel triangle at the west end of the Forest Home Park, is to be upgraded during 2022 or 2023. A contract has been awarded for engineering analysis and design. The project will require digging up some of Pleasant Grove Road (PGR) and may be coordinated with work associated with the construction of the roundabout planned for the intersection of PGR and Credit Farm Drive as part of Cornell's North Campus Residential Expansion (NCRE).

At the other end of the 200 block of FHD, Bolton Point is currently looking at options to run a second 18-inch transmission water main under Fall Creek. For the past several years, Bolton Point has been constructing secondary mains under roadways and waterways that could impair timely repairs. Such work is not scheduled yet and is probably a year or two away.

Formation of joint Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission

At the Town Board meeting of January 25, 2021 the Town Supervisor was authorized to sign an MoU with the City of Ithaca to explore opportunities to enact a Landmarks Preservation Law that mirrors that of the City and that potentially establishes a joint City and Town of Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission [see [minutes](#)]. A working group was formed consisting of members of the existing City of Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission (ILPC), supplemented by two individuals with preservation credentials appointed to represent the Town. On August 18, Bryan McCracken, the City's Historic Preservation Planner, shared with the city's Planning and Economic Development Committee (PEDC) a draft of an updated City ordinance which was also designed to serve as an addition to the Town of Ithaca code. That draft, which was circulated as a PDF to the FHIA email list on September 12, in a message with subject "Update on the Town of Ithaca's plans for historic preservation" is accessible online at https://www.cityofithaca.org/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_08182021-2361. Some later updates were listed in the message sent to the FHIA email list on October 8, with subject "Information session on proposed legislation on historic preservation: 10/14/2021 at 4pm."

Reactions in Forest Home to the proposed legislation reflect individual perspectives on the constraints the proposed legislation places on owners of individual locally designated properties or properties within a locally designated historic district. Some react primarily to the burden of paperwork and possible delay in pursuing even very small changes to the exterior of their house. Others focus appreciatively on the control the proposed legislation would impose on their neighbors. Either way, my recommendation is that you follow the legislative process closely and take advantage of public information sessions, starting with the [recording](#) of the session on October 14. The [main web page for the existing City ILPC](#) does not provide access to information about the new proposals, but following the link to "Most Recent Agenda" will often let you see an example of how the process works.

Future meetings or activities

Please send your suggestion for a meeting or activity to foresthomenews@gmail.com, particularly if you are prepared to help organize it.

Caroline Arms
President
October 26, 2021