

The Cornell Daily Sun

Ithacans Criticize Proposed Cornell Heights Development

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By KEVIN MILIAN

Ithacans spoke out against a proposed apartment complex at 7 Ridgewood Rd. at a Planning and Development Board meeting Tuesday evening, citing a lack of finalized plans and concern for the character of the historic neighborhood.

Due to concerns over the “cementious compound” being built in the Cornell Heights historic district, Walter Hang — founder of Toxics Targeting, Inc., a compiler of environmental information in New York State — created an online petition against the development that has reached over 900 signatures. The modern-style apartment complex is planned to be built among Greek houses and other preserved properties in the district.



Attorney Adam Walters defends the proposed Cornell Heights development at City Hall Tuesday. (Michelle Feldman / Sun Staff Photographer)

Adam Walters — an attorney representing CA Student Living, the developers of the proposed project — introduced the project to planning board and described the changes the project has undergone since its inception, including downsizing from one large, connected structure to three separate buildings with mostly interior but some exterior parking.

According to Walters, the developers want to proceed at the planning board level and make any needed changes to the plan before presenting the final plan to the Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission.

“We’ve revised a lot of material,” he said. “Our goal is for you to have all the information you seek to make an informed decision. This last scheme fits well with the footprints required by the ILPC.”

In response to the petition against the development by residents of the Cornell Heights neighborhood, Walters said CA Student Living plans to get input from community members directly.

“Along with the ward members of the Cornell Heights neighborhood, we are planning a one-on-one meeting that will happen before the next planning board meeting,” Walters said.

Bill Demo, a resident of the neighborhood, however, asked the Planning and Development Board to block any additional development in Cornell Heights.

“I will have that many more bottles of beer and piles of vomit when walking my dog in my neighborhood. If the city allows this area to become ‘Collegetown Lite,’ it will not remain as a historic district,” he said. “The Cornell staff and retirees living there will slowly depart and leave a student ghetto behind — and by that I mean unkempt renting properties.”

Other attendees, including Hang, echoed their opposition to the proposed housing development, citing the lack of finalized plans and disregard of traffic impact to the area.

“It would be absolutely inconceivable to me that [the Planning and Development Board] would proceed with outdated plans and no final project,” Hang said. “This project is not ready for consideration in final form, there’s no way around that. Please take no actions, especially when there’s massive support for [the] protection of the Cornell Heights neighborhood.”

According to Hang, CA Student Living has only considered the development’s effect on Ridgewood Ave. and not Highland Avenue, which is adjacent to the property.

Attendees also said they were concerned about the property’s unusual location, since it is not located on higher land like typical Cornell Heights residences, according to Ithaca resident John Dennis.

“We feel the property is unique ... and we can develop it in a thoughtful and respectful way.” Adam Walters

“Its a dank, lifeless hollow. It would be a depressing place for students to live. All other properties on the neighborhood are on slopes, but not this one,” Dennis said.

Dennis also stressed the potential of automobile accidents due to a street curve on Ridgewood Road.

“Putting this kind of density in the neighborhood will create more hazards on an already dangerous road,” Dennis said.

John Schroeder ’74, a member of the Planning and Development Board, said while he agreed Cornell Heights’ zoning needed revisions to better protect the historic district, the board had no legal basis not to proceed with the environmental review.

“Yes, we need some updated plans for the environmental review, but they can be submitted in the coming months,” said Schroeder, who is also the Production Manager for The Sun.

Walters, however, urged the Planning and Development Board to proceed with the project and said that plans will be finalized after input from the community.

“Our goal and job is to listen to legitimate concerns, but we do think the process should start, since it’s a lengthy one. We should look at the overpopulation of students and address the concern; we are quite comfortable with the traffic studies that have been conducted,” Walters said.