

October 8, 2013

To: Members of the Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission
From: Walter Hang
Re: Proposed Apartment Housing Project Adjoining 312 Thurston Avenue

Greetings:

I write respectfully to request that the Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission (ILPC) rescind its certificate of appropriateness for the proposed apartment housing project at the above-referenced location. I also request that the proposed project not be permitted to proceed.

I make this request because I believe that the proposed project clearly cannot fulfill applicable approval requirements mandated by the proceeding. I write today to document that concern.

Certificate of Appropriateness Requirements

It is my understanding that certificate of appropriateness approval for the proposed project must take into consideration two issues:

“What is the impact of the proposed alteration on significant features and elements of the property, on neighboring properties in the district, and on the overall character of the district itself?

Is the proposed alteration or new element compatible (i.e., capable of existing harmoniously) with the historic resource and its environment in terms of size, scale, massing, placement on the site, color, texture, and materials?”

I believe that the proposed apartment housing project cannot fulfill a critical requirement:

“The range of existing footprint sizes in the immediate vicinity should inform the new design: a new construction project that has either a **significantly larger** (emphasis added) or a significantly smaller **footprint than is common in the area would be considered inappropriate** (emphasis added).” See page 99 of The City of Ithaca Historic District and Landmark Design Guidelines (2013).

This determination is demonstrated by a Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis of the percentage of various parcels covered by structures in the Cornell Heights Historic District. The proposed apartment housing project would cover more of its parcel than any structures not grandfathered in when the Historic District was established.

Cornell Heights Historic District

It is my understanding that the Cornell Heights Historic District was established in 1989 in response to potential development activities that could have dramatically altered its architectural and historical significance. According to the Historic District’s significance statement:

“The Cornell Heights Historic District is architecturally and historically significant as an exceptional intact example of a turn-of-the-century planned residential suburban development placed in an

outstanding natural setting along the northern rim of Fall Creek Gorge overlooking the City of Ithaca and the southern tip of Cayuga Lake. The district's curvilinear street plan, lavish landscape features, dramatic geographical setting, strictly residential character (developed on large private lots) and its historical pattern of development place it within the romantic tradition of the 'ideal' residence park developed in the second half of the nineteenth century and popularized by Frederick Law Olmsted after the Civil War."

Once the Cornell Heights Historic District was established, existing structures were grandfathered in, but requirements were established to preserve the character of the area as a whole. I request that those requirements be strictly enforced.

The Cornell Heights Historic District is illustrated in Figure One. The proposed apartment housing project is located entirely within that district.

Existing RABCO Highland House Apartment Building

The existing RABCO Highland House apartment building is an example of a structure that would not have been authorized to be constructed after the Cornell Heights Historic District was established because it is enormously larger than all the other buildings common in the area.

The RABCO Highland House apartment building is located at 312 - 324 Thurston Avenue and is immediately adjacent to the site of the proposed apartment housing project.

See Figure Two.

Proposed Apartment Housing Project

The existing RABCO Highland House apartment building covers **22.6987%** of its parcel. That is the highest percentage of any parcel covered by a structure in the Cornell Heights Historic District.

As illustrated by Figure Three, the proposed apartment housing project structure would cover **13.6229%** of its parcel. This calculation is based on the revised project proposal.

There are only two other properties in the Cornell Heights Historic District with a greater percentage of the parcel covered by a structure than the proposed apartment house project. They are:

Thurston Court Apartments are located at 223 Thurston Avenue. The structure covers **16.1245%** of its parcel.

Westbourne Lane Apartments are located at 120 –128 Westbourne Lane. Structures cover **17.1709%** of the parcel.

The three parcels with structures that cover a greater percentage than the proposed apartment housing project are illustrated in Figure Four.

Based on a review of historic Sanborn maps and aerial photos, I believe that structures on these three parcels were built prior to the establishment of the Cornell Heights Historic District. See attachment.

Conclusion

The proposed apartment housing project clearly does not warrant a certificate of appropriateness because it would cover a larger percentage of its parcel than all other structures in the Cornell Heights Historic District with the exception of structures grandfathered in when the district was designated.

Given that concern, I request that the certificate of appropriateness be rescinded and approval for the proposed project be withdrawn.

I also request that the ILPC strictly enforce The City of Ithaca Historic District and Landmark Design Guidelines (2013) in all matters with particular regard to the concerns I have documented herein.

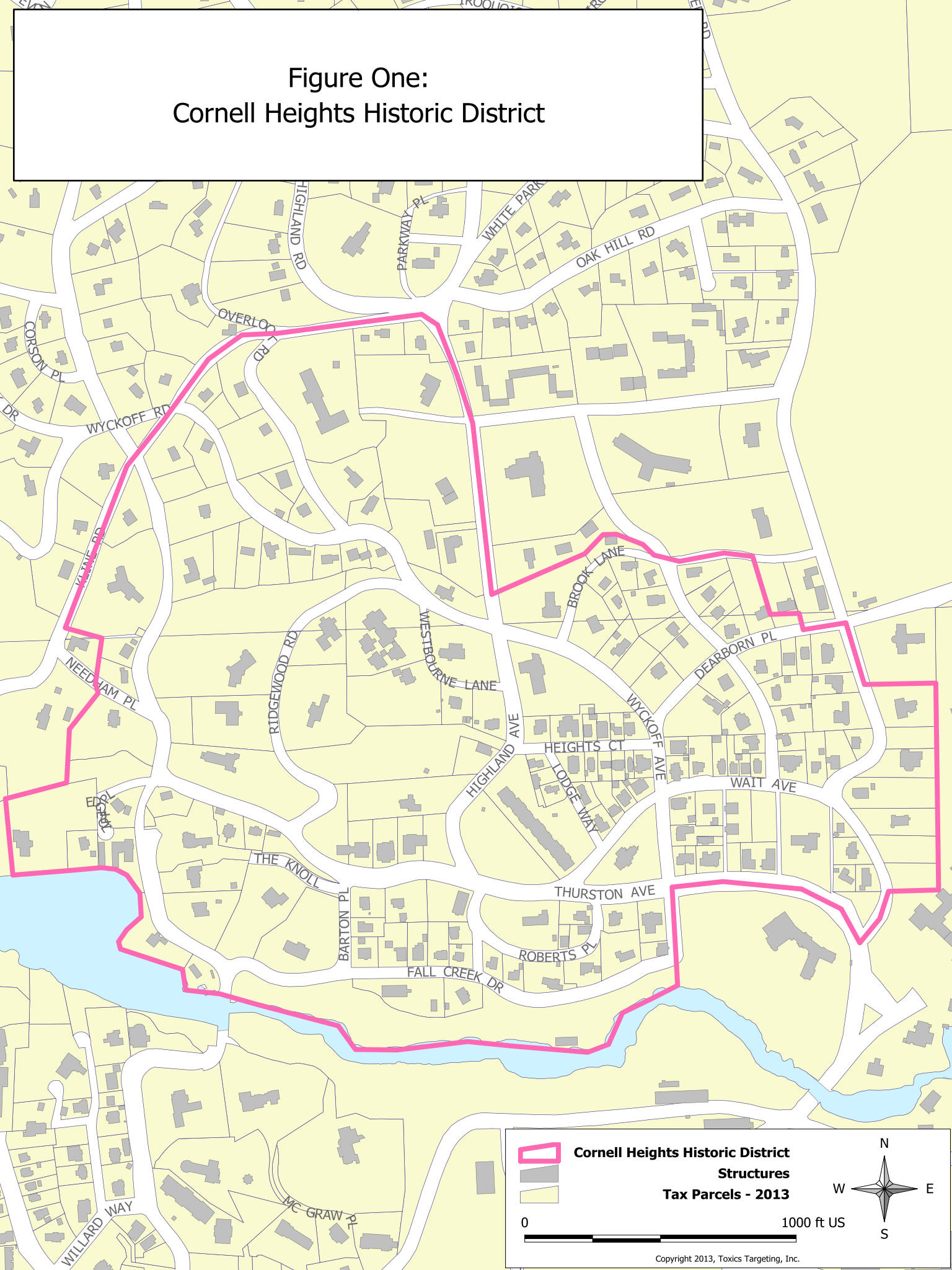
I trust that you will find my request self-explanatory, but please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions that I might be able to answer.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly,

Walter Hang
218 Wait Avenue
Ithaca, NY 14850

Figure One:
Cornell Heights Historic District

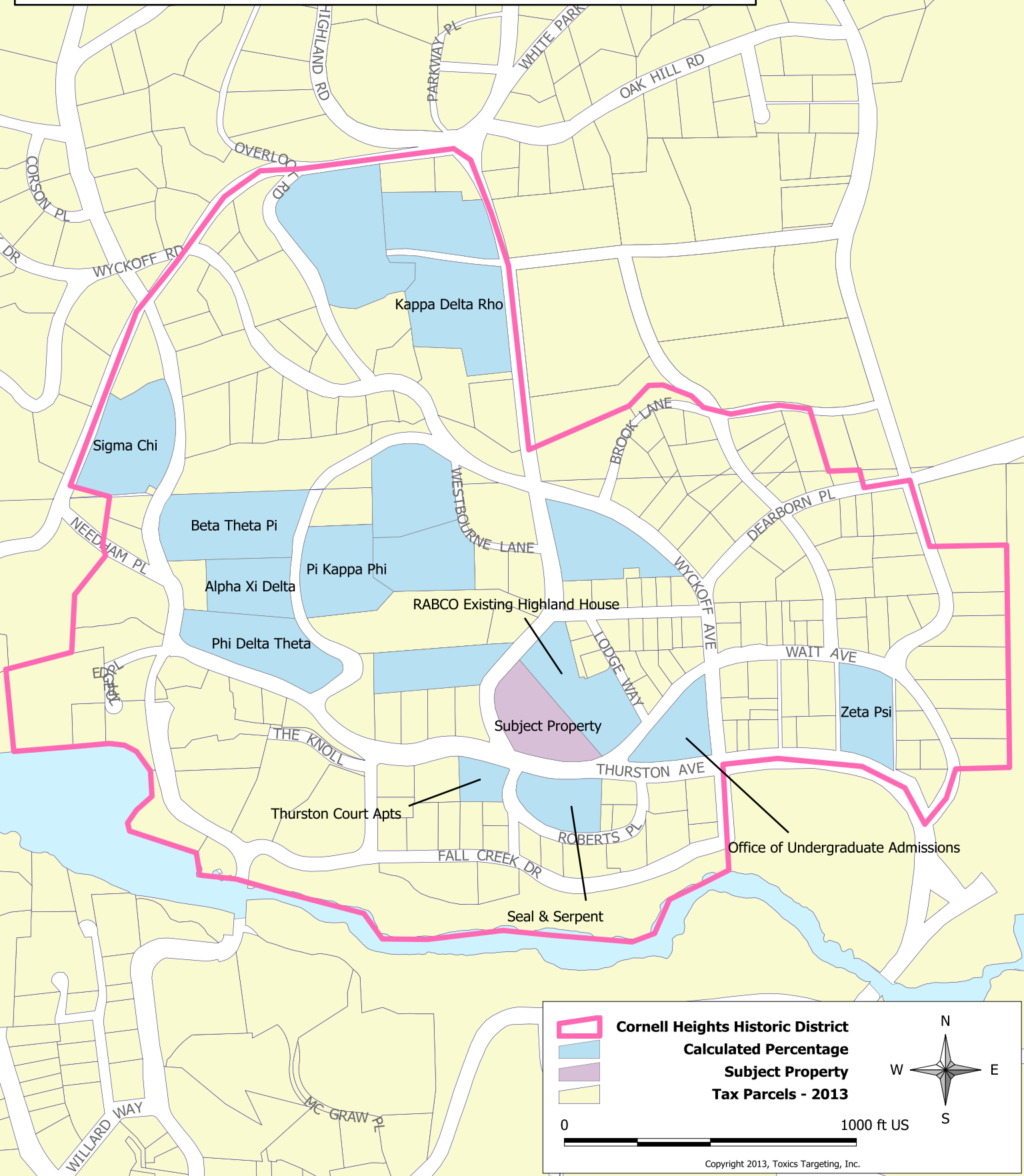


Cornell Heights Historic District
Structures
Tax Parcels - 2013

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**Figure Two:
Proposed RABCO Highland House Project Location
Cornell Heights Historic District**



Legend

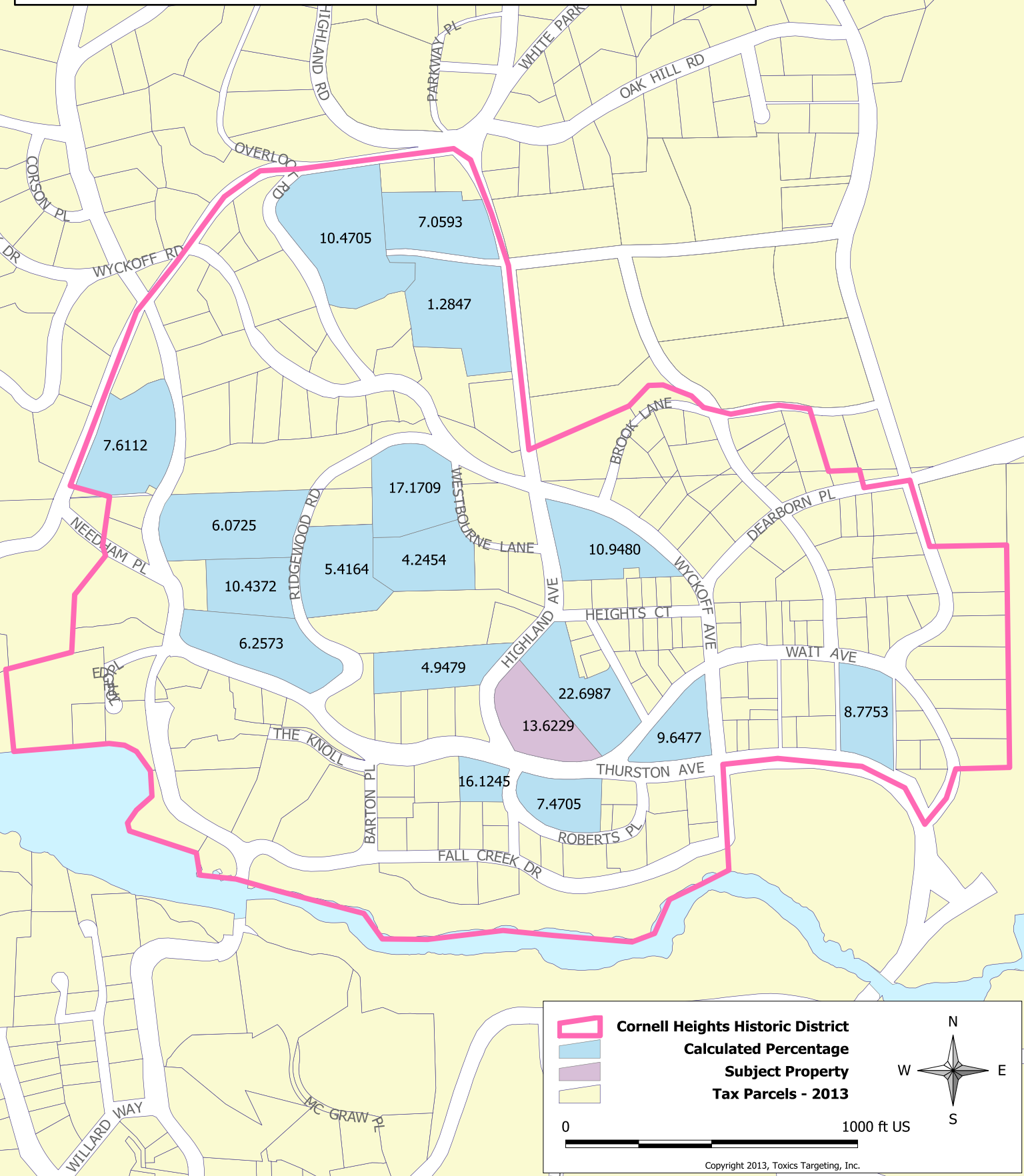
- Cornell Heights Historic District
- Calculated Percentage Subject Property Tax Parcels - 2013
- Subject Property

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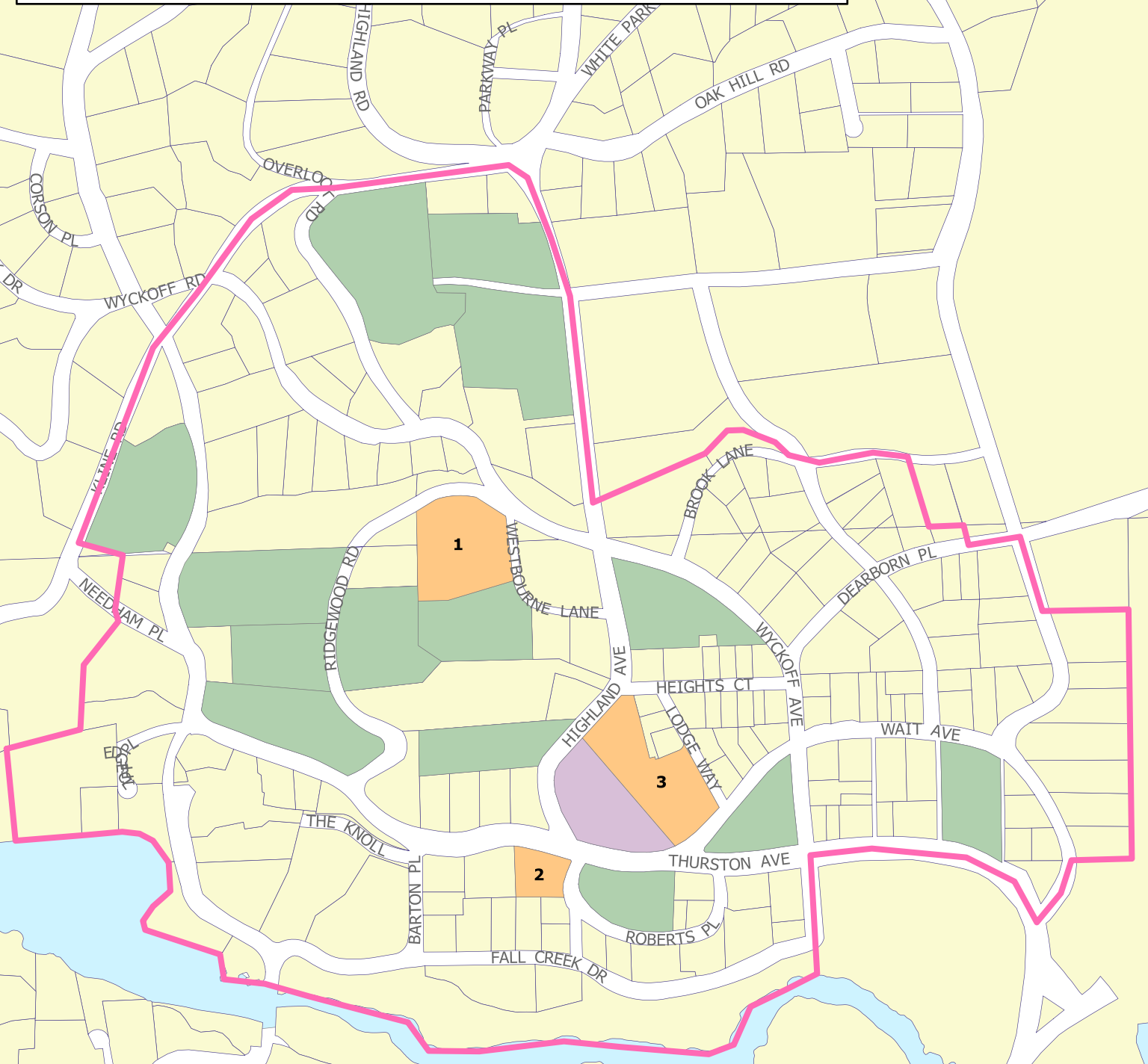
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Figure Three:
Approximate Percentage of Parcel Covered by
Proposed RABCO Highland House Project and
Selected Buildings in Cornell Heights Historic District



**Figure Four:
 Building Parcel Coverage Greater and Less Than
 Proposed RABCO Highland House Project
 Cornell Heights Historic District**



**Cornell Heights Historic District
 Percentage Lot Coverage by Buildings
 Greater Than Subject Property
 Less Than Subject Property
 Subject Property
 Tax Parcels - 2013**

- Cornell Heights Historic District
- Greater Than Subject Property
- Less Than Subject Property
- Subject Property
- Tax Parcels - 2013

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1. According to Historic Sanborn Maps, the property contained a fraternity house (Theta Chi) in 1961. Converted to apartments sometime between 1961 and 1971.

2. According to Historic Sanborn Maps, a residence was demolished and the current apartment building (Thurston Court Apartments) was constructed between 1929 and 1961.

3. According to Historic Sanborn Maps, a fraternity house (Phi Kappa Psi) was demolished sometime between 1961 and 1971. A portion of the current building was constructed sometime between 1961 and 1971.