

## Cornell Heights Residents Seek Moratorium on Development in Historic District

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By Michael Nocella editor@ithacatimes.com |

ITHACA – Cornell Heights Historic District residents [continue to voice concern](#) regarding the proposal of three student residential buildings at what will become 7 Ridgewood Road. At the Wednesday, April 9 Planning and Economic Development Committee meeting, community members proposed the concept moratorium as a logical way to “pause” developer CA Venture’s \$8 million project that will bring 45 units and 114 beds on top of a 2.43-acre wooded parcel that is currently occupied by an abandoned outdoor pool and poolhouse.

Walter Hang, of 218 Wait Ave., submitted a 13-page document to the committee that alludes to the 979 signatures previously obtained from a group of neighbors who wish to halt new housing projects until preservation protections for the historic district are enhanced while also giving an overview of the neighborhood’s concerns, in addition to a “Land Use Moratoria Guide.”

“The concerns we have are very clearly spelled out (in the document),” Hang said. “It’s basically inappropriate development going on in the district.”

Hang said the nature of the apartment complex already under construction at 312 Thurston was the community’s initial concern, describing it as “out-of-scale with the historic district.” However, with that project already in motion, the Ridgewood Road proposal has moved into the spotlight. Initially, in an attempt to safeguard large-scale development in the area, the committee was ready to change local zoning to R-3aa. However, R-3aa zoning would only intensify density in Cornell Heights. After instant local outcry, that proposal was recently withdrawn. Several residents thanked the committee for that decision.

It was not clear Wednesday night if the residents will have the same luck in their pursuit for a moratorium. Resident Michael Decatur reasoned that having a moratorium makes sense “so we can pause and take a moment to figure this out together.” Decatur said it is difficult to make progress in public comment sessions in which communication can only go one way (board members are prohibited to immediately respond during public comment).

Committee Chair Seph Murtagh agreed better communication between all involved parties will be needed moving forward. He then threw out the idea of an on-site tour between board member and residents.

“I would be willing to meet in a more formal way,” he said. “We are firmly committed to having that dialogue and exploring the possible effectiveness of a moratorium and the legality of it.”

Committee member Graham Kerslick echoed Murtagh.

“We don’t respond to blowback, but we do listen to legitimate concerns – which we’ve heard tonight,” he said.

City of Ithaca attorney Ari Lavine cautioned that a moratorium, while effective, carries significant legal risks that instantly creates a “tight time frame,” which if missed, becomes problematic. He described moratoriums as the “most severe landuse restriction option.”

Contention from residents will likely continue next week, when the Planning and Development Board is scheduled to host CA Venture representatives at its Tuesday, April 15 meeting at 8:30 p.m. in the Common Council Chambers.

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