

## Cornell Heights Student Housing Tabled for Possible Downsizing

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By Michael Nocella reporter@ithacatimes.com |

Developer CA Ventures has opted to table its proposal for a 45-unit, 114-bed apartment complex at 7 Ridgewood Road in Cornell Heights after Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission (ILPC) described the project as being too large to qualify for a certificate of appropriateness during its public meeting on Tuesday, May 20. The developers will revise their proposal and continue discussions with ILPC next month. The commission's decision is the latest development in the Cornell Heights neighbors' efforts to stop the development completely.

Cornell Heights residents met with City of Ithaca Planning and Economic Development Committee members on Friday, May 23 for a walking tour of the 7 Ridgewood Road property, and its neighboring environment. Walter Hang of 218 Wait Avenue, who previously submitted a 13-page document to the committee with nearly 1,000 signatures of neighbors who wish to halt the new housing projects until protections for the historic district are enhanced, said the walking tour was a way to show city officials where the neighborhood's inspiration comes from. Hang mentioned the apartment complex already under construction at 312 Thurston Ave, slated for completion by spring 2015, as added motivation to stop similar projections from entering Cornell Heights.

"Nearly a thousand people have requested a new housing development moratorium until a comprehensive land use plan is adopted both for Cornell Heights and the city as a whole," Hang said. "So we're here to meet with the key members of the planning and economic development committee to try to persuade them that our historic district has already suffered irreparable harm because of the gigantic development at 312 Thurston. So we're now fighting very, very hard to preserve this absolutely spectacular forested glen, and we're very thankful their coming here to look at these historic buildings and spectacular setting and hopefully understand what we're fighting for."

Hang told the *Ithaca Times* that his personal work schedule let the 312 Thurston project slip under his radar until a point where it was too late for him to do anything about it. He said he does not plan to let the same thing happen with the Ridgewood Road proposal, which would be built in a 2.43 acre wooded valley that is currently occupied by an abandoned outdoor pool and a slate-shingled poolhouse. Hang added that although the project is technically moving forward, he remains optimistic.

"The most important thing is that the project is still moving forward—but we're attacking it on multiple fronts," he explained. "We just had a hearing with the Ithaca Landscapes Preservation Commission (ILPC), and that commission—we believe—failed to preserve the character of Cornell Heights with regard to 312 Thurston. So hopefully we'll be able to persuade ILPC the proposed (Ridgewood Road project) is simply too large. And at the other night's hearing, that was the clear consensus, and the developer basically tabled the application."

ILPC member Lynn Truame, who also attended the walking tour, said the commission has not made any kind of decision regarding the proposal, but did tell CA Ventures it preferred projects in Cornell Heights to be smaller.

"The developers submitted an application for a certificate of appropriateness," she recalled, "and there was a three-hour meeting on it where the ILPC asked a lot of questions, and raised a lot of concerns about how large the project was and how it was not particularly compatible with the environment—because it was very large.

"At the end of the conversation," she continued, "the developer asked that we table the applications, so it will come up for discussion again at our next meeting on June 10. They wanted to provide more information about visual impact, screenings, and things like that. But we haven't made any decisions about it one way or the other."

During Planning and Economic Development Committee meetings in March and April, Cornell Heights residents voiced concern regarding CA Ventures' \$8 million project, suggesting it would be out of scale with the historic district. At that time, committee member Seph Murtagh said better communication between residents and the committee would be a crucial part of the process moving forward. He was happy to have the chance to keep that promise on the walking tour.

"I think it was helpful for me, just speaking personally," he said. "To come up here and actually see the neighborhood and get a feel for the landscape—I wasn't very familiar with this part of town so it was really helpful to get a feel for what everything looks like. I think what you see is there's a combination of fraternities and dormitories and apartment buildings, and some single-family homes. I think we all knew that, but it's always helpful to kind of see it in a more of a concrete way instead of talking about stuff on an abstract level."

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