

INDEPENDENT SINCE 1880

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## Moratorium Sought for Cornell Heights Projects

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By **SOFIA HU**

Over 900 students, faculty members and Ithacans have signed an online petition calling for a moratorium — a suspension of activity — on housing developments in the Cornell Heights Historic District.

Walter Hang — the founder of the organization Toxics Targeting, Inc., a corporation that compiles and publicizes environmental information in New York State — started the petition in response to proposed housing plans by CA Student Living, a Chicago-based student-housing developer. According to The Ithaca Journal, the company plans to build a 45-unit, \$8 million apartment complex at 1 Ridgewood Rd.

The proposed construction site is in the Cornell Heights Historic District — a nationally designated historic district which encompasses over 130 acres and is located west of Cornell's North Campus — according to the National Park Service.



*A rendering of the proposed apartment complex at 1 Ridgewood Rd. Cornellians and Ithacans alike have signed a petition protesting the Cornell Heights development. (Courtesy of the City of Ithaca)*

Supporters of the petition have criticized the proposed housing plans' large size and incongruence with the forested environment of Cornell Heights.

"One Ridgewood would be 2.5 times as dense as the average lot on Ridgewood Road and desires to be clad in a stamped 'cementious compound,' two qualities among many that would set bad precedent in a primarily wood and stone neighborhood," said Max Weisbrod '16.

Hang echoed Weisbrod's sentiments, saying the proposed housing was "absolutely unacceptable."

"It would destroy the district," he said.

The petition asks the City of Ithaca to implement additional safeguards to ensure preservation of the area. The safeguards the petition requests include changing zoning laws to restrict development in the district and to impose a moratorium on housing developments until the stricter laws are in place, according to Hang.

Both Hang and Weisbrod said the housing issue is relevant beyond the Cornell Heights district.

"The development and zoning policies cover all of Ithaca," Hang said. "These buildings could endure for decades."

Hang cited current construction on 312 Thurston Ave. as an example of how city policy inadequately addresses the need for historic preservation in Cornell Heights.

"After construction on 312 Thurston was approved, there was enormous consternation about the inadequate protection of Cornell Heights," he said. "There is no comprehensive plan safeguarding the area against large-scale development."

The Common Council's Planning and Economic Development Committee discussed rezoning properties following the public backlash against 312 Thurston in February, The Journal said. However, council members did not reach a consensus on how to address all of the concerns, and the issue was put on hold.

According to Weisbrod, the petition seeks to remind Common Council members about "community interest in the issue" and "encourage a participatory rezoning process."

However, according to Alderperson Ellen McCollister '78 (D-3rd Ward), the proposed rezoning protections set forth in the petition would not have prevented either the 312 Thurston Ave. project currently under construction or the proposed 1 Ridgewood Rd. project. In addition, McCollister said the project is currently under review and that the development team of 1 Ridgewood Rd. had "sought guidance about how to adjust the project plans to be more compatible with the historic neighborhood character."

Even so, supporters of the petition called for caution and public discussion before approving the housing development.

"Any major proposal in such a beautiful and historic neighborhood like Cornell Heights should take into consideration the concerns of those most affected by it," said Nicholas Kok '16, president of Pi Kappa Phi, a fraternity located close to the proposed housing development.

At least one-third of the people who signed the online petition explicitly stated a connection to a fraternity or sorority. Out of 47 Greek chapters that have houses in Ithaca, approximately 20 fraternities and sororities are located in the Cornell Heights district.

Hang, who has lived in Ithaca since 1988 and worked on similar housing development campaigns in the past, called the strong Greek response "noteworthy."