



TOWN OF ITHACA
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August 14, 2007

Darcy Binns, President
Forest Home Improvement Association
320 Forest Home Drive
Ithaca, NY 14850

Re: Forest Home Traffic Calming Plan

Darcy
Dear ~~Ms. Binns~~:

At the request of the Forest Home Improvement Association (FHIA), the Town of Ithaca Transportation Committee has reviewed the Draft Forest Home Traffic Calming Plan (the Plan), dated February 1, 2007, at several meetings over the past few months. On behalf of the Transportation Committee, I am pleased to provide FHIA with the following preliminary comments regarding the Plan.

In general, the Plan has many good elements, and should provide an excellent framework for safety and aesthetic improvements for Forest Home. The Committee would like to work closely with the Forest Home neighborhood to further refine the Plan. Members of the Committee and Town staff would be happy to meet with the Forest Home community to discuss the details of the Plan, obtain further input from the residents and other stakeholders, and work with Forest Home on implementation strategies.

Many details of the Plan were discussed by the Committee. There are too many details to include in this letter. The following is a summary of some of the highlights of those discussions.

Streetscape Improvements: The Committee was very supportive of many of the Plan recommendations regarding the addition of street trees, landscaping enhancements, and pedestrian scale lighting consistent with the historic character of the community. One caveat expressed by the Committee regarding the planting of trees was that they be located within acceptable safety parameters.

Mid-Block Features: The proposal for mid-block speed tables (modified to allow for proper drainage off of the road) in locations to be determined is a good safety improvement to pursue in appropriate areas. These can be very effective in slowing down traffic if used in conjunction with other traffic calming features as recommended in the Plan. The Committee was concerned with the Plan proposal to re-introduce vertical contours or crests in some of the area's straighter roads, such as Warren Road. The Committee had concerns with sight distance and visibility with that approach, and would prefer to see horizontal curves established where there is room. An alternative approach on some straight sections of road, where there is room and there are not houses fronting along the entire road, would be to introduce horizontal bump-outs to further restrict the road width. This approach would have to be carefully evaluated to make sure that the road does not become too restricted and that homes are not adversely affected by such features.

Pedestrian Crossings: Many of the Plan recommendations regarding improved crosswalks are noteworthy. More visible and safer pedestrian crossings are important elements of the Plan.

Entrance Features: While the Committee recognizes that entrance features can be an important component of an overall traffic calming plan, the Committee also felt that Forest Home should explore options other than the proposed light pole features. The Committee had some concerns regarding the proximity of the poles and bases to the edge of the road, and felt that other solutions could be looked at, such as special landscaping features and/or signs.

Bicyclists: The Committee had concerns regarding the overall approach to bicyclists in the Plan. The Committee's initial reaction was that accommodations for bicyclists should receive more attention, and that some of the Plan elements, such as textured shoulders and shared pedestrian/bicycle paths (see below), should be further evaluated with safety of bicyclists and pedestrians in mind.

Pavement Edge Treatment: The Committee had some concerns regarding the proposed textured shoulders (e.g., granite "Belgian" block) and vertical curbing in regard to safety for bicyclists. The Committee suggested looking at other shoulder options, perhaps using a smoother, colorized shoulder treatment and angled curbs, providing a safer "escape route" for bicyclists who may not be comfortable being in the normal flow of vehicular traffic or who may be forced to the extreme road edge for various reasons.

Intersection Reductions: In general, the Committee had concerns with the Plan proposal to modify intersections by reducing their size. In many cases, intersections are already quite limited in size and turning radii, and in some cases have difficult topography, and the Committee felt that further reducing some of the area available for turning movements, especially where buses go through the area, could actually reduce safety at certain intersections. The Committee did feel that reducing the amount of road surface at the Forest Home Drive/Pleasant Grove Road intersection warrants further evaluation because of the large open area at this intersection. In many of the other intersections, safer pedestrian crossings could be accommodated by more visible crosswalks and signs.

Pedestrian Facilities: The Committee was very supportive of the overall pedestrian improvements recommended in the Plan. There were several concerns, however. One concern is with three-foot wide pedestrian paths in some areas. The minimum standard for a safe, accessible walkway is four feet, with five feet preferable. The Committee understands that there is limited room in the road right-of-way in many areas of Forest Home, but would like to see at least four-foot wide paths in as many areas as possible. The Committee was also concerned with the specific pedestrian improvements proposed for the Pleasant Grove Road hill. There is very limited room on this very steep hill, and the Committee would like to see further evaluation of this area. Because of the lack of room on the west side of the road (drops off sharply toward the creek), the guide rail and travel lanes would have to be shifted to the east. However, space is very limited on the east by the steep slope adjacent to the road. Although the Plan indicates that there is sufficient paved area on the existing road and shoulders, the Committee felt that the steep and winding nature of the road in this area needs sufficient room for vehicles to safely maneuver in this difficult area. It is possible that the steep slope on the east side might have to be cut back, and a retaining wall installed, to ensure a safe area for pedestrians and bicyclists, especially since this part of the path would be shared by pedestrians and bicyclists. This could be very expensive if this scenario has to be followed.

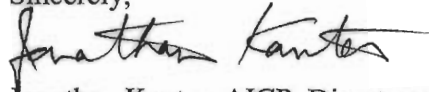
The Plan also recommends that the Town be responsible for constructing and maintaining the pedestrian paths as part of the Town's growing network of walkways and trails. The Plan further indicates that most pedestrian traffic in Forest Home seems to be commuters and recreational runners, rather than local residents. However, the Plan does not include any documentation to support this statement. The Town Board recently adopted the Town of Ithaca Transportation Plan, which includes criteria and

recommendations regarding priorities for pedestrian improvements in the Town. The Town should work closely with Forest Home to determine the appropriate strategies and funding mechanisms for the Plan's proposed pedestrian paths.

Cost Estimates: The February 1, 2007 Draft Plan did not include any cost estimates for features recommended in the Plan. The Committee was provided with a draft Appendix IX, which includes rough cost estimates for some of the traffic calming features. However, these are very general and on a per-foot or per-item basis. Once the Plan is refined and revised, the Town, County and other involved entities will have to work closely with Forest Home to prepare more detailed cost estimates for recommended improvements, and develop a long-term program for when and how these recommendations can be implemented.

In summary, the Committee supports the overall concept of the Plan and looks forward to working closely with FHIA to come up with a final Plan that will work best for Forest Home and the Town.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Kanter, AICP, Director of Planning
(On behalf of the Town of Ithaca Transportation Committee)

cc: Town of Ithaca Transportation Committee
Town of Ithaca Town Board
Ed Marx, Commissioner of Planning & Public Works, Tompkins County