

Forest Home Improvement Association

President's Annual Report October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019

Overview

This has been a busier year than I expected when I offered to stand for President. Much of this written report relates to three topics related to Forest Home infrastructure that occupied my attention for much of the year. I have provided a recap here because Forest Home has a substantial number of new residents who may benefit.

I want to extend a special thank you to all the people who have volunteered for various activities and offered advice. I have had sterling help from the rest of the board: Connie Stirling-Engman (Secretary); Heather Beasley (Treasurer); and Amita Verma (Vice President). Unfortunately for us, Amita and Rohit Verma have moved to exciting new jobs in Vietnam.

Social events

- Holiday party. 200 Forest Home Drive. Saturday, December 15, 2018
- Spring potluck. Forest Home Chapel. Friday March 22, 2019
- Fall barbecue. Forest Home Park. Saturday September 21, 2019. Celebration of 225 years of Forest Home.

Proposed date for upcoming Holiday Party is Saturday, December 14, 2019.

Community activities

- Spring cleanup. Saturday April 13, 2019. Picked up trash along our roads. Some weeding of garlic mustard, etc.
- Mulching trees in the park. Saturday June 8, 2019. Removed protective wire cages around trees, weeded, and applied mulch. Replaced cages.
- Throughout the year, Connie Stirling-Engman and Herb Engman have kept an eye on plants in the park, removing invasives and encouraging attractive native species.
- Working through the Cornell Elves program in December 2018, sponsored the holiday wishlists of four sisters, aged between 4 and 14, from the Ithaca area.

Preparation for next FHIA Directory

Amita Verma (FHIA Vice President) put effort into this before moving to Vietnam at the end of July.

- Updated list of Street Captains.
- Street Captains have been contacting neighbors for changes. If you have not yet been contacted by your Street Captain and know that the entry for your address needs a change from the 2017 edition, please get in touch with them or send email to foresthomenews@gmail.com.
- Hope to print new edition in early 2020.

Local issues affecting Forest Home

Forest Home Drive (FHD) between Judd Falls Road and McIntyre Place.

The recently installed guide-rail on this stretch of road is the conclusion of a 2018-9 activity that involved activity (even activism) on the part of many Forest Homers.

- December 5, 2018. FHIA meeting with Bill Goodman, Town Supervisor. Bill had requested this meeting to give us an update on various Town of Ithaca matters affecting Forest Home. He revealed that Jim Weber (Highway Superintendent) was proposing to close this stretch of road for safety reasons.
- December 10, 2018. With about 30 other Forest Homers, attended Town of Ithaca Board meeting to hear discussion of proposal by Jim Weber to close this stretch of road. Delivered letter prepared by an ad hoc group formed after the December 5 meeting to request that the road be kept open. Spoke to make the same points. About 15 other Forest Homers spoke and Town Board members appeared supportive.
- December 18, 2018. Attended Public Works Committee (PWC) meeting, with 6 other Forest Homers. PWC Chairman Rod Howe, opened the meeting by stating that the Town Board agreed that they wanted FHD kept open, with 2-way traffic if possible. It was decided that accelerating the existing plan for major work (capital improvement with design work to begin in 2020) on this stretch of road was not feasible. Focus would switch to what was needed to keep the road open without major work.
- January 30, 2019. FHIA community update and discussion on this topic.
- February 11, 2019. Attended Town Board meeting. Spoke to convey points emerging from Jan 30 meeting, including, "Following the consensus at a recent FHIA meeting on the topic, I urge the Town to find a solution that involves replacing the guard rail without reshaping the road in any way that adversely affects the traffic-calming advantages of its current layout."
- Starting on February 26, 2019, several PWC meetings have discussed replacing the guard rail (aka guide-rail). Thanks to Bruce and Doug Brittain for attending them all and pushing for a design that was not too obtrusive but provided adequate protection.
- Between 9/30 and 10/14, this stretch of FHD was closed to replace the guide-rail and patch the road.

Current status:

- From the Capital Budget in the Preliminary 2020 Town of Ithaca budget, there is currently no capital improvement proposed for this section of Forest Home Drive. See the top item under the Documents tab on <http://www.town.ithaca.ny.us/>. The Capital Budget is on the final few pages of the Budget document. It appears that a project had been included for 2021 but was recently struck out.

Forest Home Walkway

Another saga from the past year relates to the Forest Home Walkway. The Walkway has always proved challenging for the Town to maintain. For several years, the Town had talked about having an engineering study to see how it could be made easier to maintain and safe for users.

- November 19, 2018. After a warning that the Town of Ithaca Public Works Department was considering closing the Forest Home Walkway for the winter, a number of people attended the next Town Board meeting to argue for keeping it open. The Town Board members agreed (a) that forcing people to walk down Warren Road in snowy conditions was undesirable and (b) that the Town should be supportive of people who want to walk to work rather than drive. Public Works agreed to explore options for immediate fixes that will make it easier for them to clear the Walkway when it snows this winter.
- The Town committed to keeping the Walkway open for the 2018-9 winter, with the understanding that the Parks and Trails department would give priority to clearing snow from other trails first.
- February 1, 2019. The Town of Ithaca Public Works Department issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a "Design Option Analysis and Detailed Construction Drawing(s) Preparation" for the "Forest Home Walkway Improvement Project."
- February 11, 2019. Disappointed that the RFP had gone out without any opportunity for input from the community, a small number of Forest Homers went to the Town Board meeting and spoke. Others sent emails emphasizing the importance of the Walkway. While making individual points, everyone stressed the need for community engagement. I pointed out that there were two important

groups of stakeholders: adjacent property owners (the only group mentioned in the RFP) and users of the Walkway.

- Adjustments for more community engagement were discussed at the pre-bid meeting for potential bidders on February 15 and made to the terms of the study once a contractor had been selected. The selection of Barton and Loguidice (B&L) was made in mid-April. The Town indicated that the contract would require the consultant(s) to attend two meetings with stakeholders.
- Both meetings were conducted on site, combining walking up the Walkway with group discussion. The first, for adjacent property owners, was on Tuesday June 18. The second, with Connie Stirling-Engman and Herb Engman handling the organization for FHIA, was on Wednesday, July 17. Key community input at both sessions was a desire to retain the current alignment, which is partly on Cornell's property, rather than follow the inclination of Jim Weber (in his role as Director of Public Works) to keep to the land that the Town actually owns.
- In mid-August, the Town shared three "concepts" (A-C) for the Walkway improvement for public comment. Thanks to all who provided input. Option B, the one that kept to the current right-of way would be considerably more expensive because of the need to shore up the walkway with substantial walls. Since then, given that the projected cost for all three options exceeded the budget envisaged by the Town, B&L have produced a 4th concept (D). This corresponds roughly to concept A, but without railings on the flattest part of the walkway.

Current Status of the Forest Home Walkway Improvement Project

- Based on PWC meetings on September 17 and October 15, the current intent is to negotiate an appropriate easement with Cornell that permits retention of the current alignment of the Walkway and adopt Option D as the basis for the next phase.
- The Town's Preliminary 2020 Budget includes \$150,000 in the Capital Improvement Plan for the Forest Home Walkway. See the top item under the Documents tab on <http://www.town.ithaca.ny.us/>.

Cornell's North Campus Residential Expansion (NCRE)

See <http://www.town.ithaca.ny.us/major-projects/ncre>

NCRE requires approvals from three local government entities, the City of Ithaca, the Town of Ithaca (which includes Forest Home), and the Village of Cayuga Heights. The City of Ithaca is the lead agency. The approvals were in two phases: Based on a Long Environmental Assessment Form (LEAF) and various environmental studies related to the project, and following opportunities for public input, the City issued "a negative declaration of environmental significance" in December 2018, allowing the project to continue to the second phase, for which Cornell submitted in February 2019 a Preliminary Site Plan and associated documentation about the proposed construction. The Planning Boards of the three local government entities had separate opportunities for considering the site plan in the light of their own zoning regulations and imposing conditions. By late June, the project had the necessary approvals to begin construction.

Actions taken on behalf of Forest Home included

- October 23, 2018. Sent letter to City of Ithaca Planning Board expressing concern about effects of increased traffic on Forest Home and requesting (a) re-alignment of the intersection of Pleasant Grove Road (PGR) and Cradit Farm Drive (CFD) to lead traffic into campus and (b) improvements to the steep section of PGR to make it safer for pedestrians and cyclists.
- April 2, 2019. Attended Town of Ithaca Planning Board meeting relating to Preliminary Site Plan Approval and Special Permit for NCRE. Cornell's preliminary site plan did include re-alignment of the intersection of PGR and CFD. Spoke to express gratitude for the proposed re-alignment, to request that the Forest Home entrance feature installed near the intersection as part of the Traffic Calming Project be retained or relocated appropriately and that the steep section of PGR be improved to support safer pedestrian use and a climbing lane for cyclists. A clause was added to the Planning Board's resolution approving the site plan: "That the Planning Board recommends to the Town Board

that the Town, Tompkins County, and Cornell University (1) explore adding a pedestrian walkway and bicycle climbing lane on the Pleasant Grove Road hill between the Forest Home downstream bridge and the project, and (2) explore retaining the speed hump and stone column traffic calming features near the relocated Pleasant Grove Road/Cradit Farm Drive intersection."

[See <http://www.town.ithaca.ny.us/meeting-minutes/PB%20Minutes%202019-04-02.pdf>]

- June 11, 2019. Met informally with Bill Goodman (Town of Ithaca Supervisor), Jeffrey Smith (Tompkins County Highway Director), and Shawna Black (our representative in the Tompkins County Legislature). Explained FHIA concerns about safety for pedestrians and cyclists on Pleasant Grove Road, which is a County Road.

Current status of re-alignment of intersection

- The Town of Ithaca, Tompkins County, and Cornell had a preliminary meeting about the re-alignment of the intersection during the summer. Cornell is committed to the re-alignment but has no proposed design ready to share. The County intends to defer any work on PGR until after construction of the re-aligned intersection, likely in 2022 or 2023.
- The heavy equipment traffic involved with demolition and site preparation has (so far, at least) been kept away from Forest Home, in line with the construction route established in the site plan. A flagman oversees trucks as they enter and leave the site. If you do see construction traffic in Forest Home, contact ncre@cornell.edu

Parallel activities related to potential effects of NCRE and other traffic issues

- March 20, 2019. Presented Bill Goodman with a letter expressing concerns related to effects of NCRE on traffic and safety other than on Pleasant Grove Road. Thanks to Ruth Mahr for drafting this.
- April 25, 2019. Submitted request to Town of Ithaca (Public Works) for updated signage to deter trucks from coming through Forest Home. Thanks to Bruce and Doug Brittain for surveying the existing signs and making detailed recommendations. In principle the Town has agreed that the signage will be updated, but some details remain to be worked out.

Future meeting ideas

- Meeting with Town of Ithaca about issues expected to affect Forest Home in 2020.
- Meeting with Shawna Black, our representative in the Tompkins County Legislature.

Please send your suggestion for a meeting to foresthomenews@gmail.com, particularly if you are prepared to help organize it.

Caroline Arms
President
October 22, 2019