

AUGUST 2013 UPDATE FROM FHIA

The past few months have been busy ones for your FHIA Officers. Our agenda at any given point is derived from longstanding work done by previous officers; ongoing discussions with the Town of Ithaca, Tompkins County and Cornell officials; and ideas generated from informal neighborhood discussion or at our bi-monthly open meetings. We are of course a neighborhood of divergent opinion about any given topic and all your officers can attempt to do is have an open process and advance a direction that best fits the prevailing thought. What follows is a brief update about some of the many topics we have been focused on in 2012-13. We hope you will have an interest in some of these and seek to get directly involved. We have a number of informal committees working on some of these topics. In addition, you are always welcome at the bi-monthly meetings that are announced in advance with agendas.

I. FHIA DATES AND ORGANIZING UPDATES:

Upcoming Dates FYI:

Fall Block Party at Forest Home Park: September 14th from 2:00 to 5:00PM (Rain Date: September 28th) - coordinated by Vice President, Bill Arms.

Next Bi-Monthly Meeting: September 19th, 7PM, FH Chapel Dining Room

Annual Meeting: October 24th, 7PM, FH Chapel Dining Room

FHIA Organizing Efforts:

Our secretary, Claudia Fuchs, has been tackling the FHIA need to update our email distribution list, Forest Home Directory and Street Captain capacity. Overtime, we have a lot of turnover in residents and we need to keep current. As she indicated in a recent email, if you know of a neighbor who is not familiar with FHIA, please direct them to our website where they can contact us for sign-up.

II. TOWN AND COUNTY DISCUSSIONS:

Upstream Bridge:

The upstream bridge project could finally get under way this fall! The County has advertised the project, with bids due on August 7. Assuming that one or more satisfactory bids come in within budget, construction is likely to start around the middle of September, and be completed by the end of August next year. Bruce Brittain is currently reviewing the extensive set of specifications and will provide a summary to us of what the project entails. In addition, a pre-construction meeting is planned for the beginning of September. Forest Home Drive, from Warren Road to Caldwell Road, will likely be closed to through vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian

traffic for the duration of the project. However, local traffic will be allowed, and emergency access will be maintained at all times. More updates soon from Bruce.

Forest Home Park:

As you have likely noticed, we have made enormous progress in cleaning up and redesigning what we have taken to calling Forest Home Park (next to the downstream bridge). Our treasurer, Montana Petersen, has been chairing our Forest Home Park Committee and has organized a clean-up day among other activities. We also had some early planning assistance provided to us by Don Rakow at the Plantations. Irene Lekstutis developed a draft landscape plan for the park. Krissy Boys offered her expertise on possible plant materials to use. In addition, Rich Schoch, Town Parks Manager, has been an enormous resource. The Town has done frequent mowing and worked with us on the clean-up effort. They also put the picnic tables in and are working on some park benches. They will soon resume the clean-up of the remaining honeysuckle and work with us on new plantings utilizing a \$5,000 beautification grant that the Town applied for. It's all great news. Thanks to all.

Forest Home Drive Walkway Improvements:

Thanks to the terrific advance work by Bruce and Doug Brittain, the FHIA officers hosted a visit by Town of Ithaca and ITCTC officials to assess our walkway needs. The outcome is that we have recently provided a letter to the Town of Ithaca's in full support of their proposal for NYSDOT funding to construct a new walkway along the northern side of Forest Home Drive between the upstream and downstream bridges. We have long wanted to improve our walkways throughout the neighborhood. The proposed project is in a core area of the hamlet and a logical start in our quest to create satisfactory walkways. We will keep you posted.

Town of Ithaca Comprehensive Plan:

The Town of Ithaca has been proceeding with the development of a revised Town of Ithaca Comprehensive Plan. FHIA comments were based on a review by the officers as well as input from individuals active in Forest Home policy dialogue. Most of our comments provided feedback about individual goals but others were intended for their consideration in drafting the Implementation Strategy. Finally, FHIA also distributed (electronically) a copy of the plan to our Forest Home resident email list and encouraged individuals to submit their own review comments as well. Overall, we complimented the planning staff for developing an outstanding draft plan that is progressive, forward thinking, collaborative, and timely. Our specific review comments are soon to be available on our FHIA website under documents.

Forest Home Drive Speed Limits:

Good news! The state has informed the Town that they intend to approve the request to lower the speed limit on Forest Home Drive from 366 to the hamlet to 35 from 45. As soon as the official paperwork arrives, the Town can begin planning for the change.

III. CORNELL ADMINISTRATION DISCUSSIONS:

Plantations Botanical Garden Redevelopment:

Cornell's Capital Projects and Planning unit has sought Preliminary Site Plan Approval and a Special Permit from the Town for a proposed redevelopment of the Plantations Botanical Garden. The purpose of the overall project is to reinstate and redevelop the gardens and plantings in the Botanical Garden in the areas where existing gardens were removed for the construction of the Welcome Center. Two major gardens are envisioned to integrate the Welcome Center and parking area into the existing landscape. Project details are available at the Town's planning office. FHIA will consult with Plantations staff regarding the project. We have already expressed some concern about a possible fence for the garden and offered some design suggestions if they do proceed with it.

Cornell Deer Management Program:

FHIA has long been a supporter of the Cornell Deer Management Program and are kept current about their progress. Recent neighborhood concerns about higher deer tick exposure have heightened our interest in advocating for this program and their goal to reduce the deer population on Cornell lands and adjacent areas. We are meeting with program directors to assess ways to strengthen and expand the program.

Stocking Hall Blue Lights:

One of our neighbors on Judd Falls Road closer to campus has expressed a concern about the blue lights at the windows in the new Stocking Hall. We shared the concerns with our Cornell contact and have learned that "The lights are intended to provide minimal security/egress lighting when the facility is not occupied/in operation while also creating some interesting visual effects on the stainless steel equipment and piping within the facility." They are currently evaluating the lighting level, operational timing needs, and conformity with Town lighting code.

(Also see reference to Cornell input regarding other topics such as the large vehicle issue and Forest Home Park.)

IV. ADDRESSING THE FOREST HOME LARGE VEHICLE ISSUE

FHIA has concluded that one of our biggest safety challenges in Forest Home is large trucks, TCAT buses, and charter buses trying to navigate through our narrow roads, steep turns, hills and one lane bridges.

Our multifaceted approach to address the large vehicle safety problem has a number of elements including:

Reduce the number of large trucks and charter buses going through Forest Home by strengthening existing regulations and postings. We have had since 1988 a 5-Ton Vehicle Weight Limit Ordinance (Town Code 250-8) on Forest Home Dr., Judd Falls Road, and McIntyre

Place; permitting only local deliveries on those particular streets. Discussions are underway with the Town to improve signage and strengthen enforcement.

Encourage Cornell to provide Forest Home-friendly routing information for routine delivery trucks, construction site vehicles, and for campus venue transports. In addition, we have asked them to limit their own campus vehicles going through Forest Home where practical.

Implement the long proposed “T” intersection at Pleasant Grove Road and Forest Home Drive near Hasbrouck Graduate Housing. Pleasant Grove Road would then flow directly into Credit Farm Road on to Thurston Ave. Bridge, the primary gateway entrance to the core campus from the north. The topic has been discussed extensively with Cornell, Town, and County officials as well as ITCTC (Ithaca Tompkins County Transportation Council) including site visits. The hope is that this project will be in the 2015 ITCTC Plan.

Assess if GPS routing information systems do/might prevent charter buses and trucks from entering Forest Home in violation of the 5 Ton Weight Ordinance (or crossing the single lane bridges). We found help at the GARMIN Corporation out in Olathe, KS. They have a cartography unit that has technicians set up to help communities concerned about incorrect (or inadequate) reference information. After providing them Forest Home information including a copy of our ordinance, they confirmed that their data (programmed with nationalized NAVTEQ data) does include our ordinance. “Due to the amount of restrictions in the area, truck/bus drivers would be kept far away from the roads in our neighborhood.” So that is great news. The only problem is that the truck or bus must have a GPS unit intended for large vehicles with their own size parameters entered. Apparently, many trucks/buses navigate without proper GPS units and often without proper settings. Hopefully, we get at least some help with this and we were pleased our ordinance is in the national system.

Reduce the number of TCAT buses (currently estimated to be 80+ each weekday) going through Forest Home by rerouting some of them directly to the core campus using Credit Farm Road. We all support public transportation but the volume of TCAT buses through Forest Home is unnecessarily large. Our combination of narrow roads, steep turns, hilly terrain, and single lane bridge produces a nearly impossible situation for these large buses to navigate. As a result, they cause more congested traffic and significant safety issues for residents, students and alumni visitors alike. Both our Town Supervisor and County representative have (are) making efforts on our behalf. Further, many good folks at TCAT and Cornell have consulted with us the past 6 months but to date we have made little progress. Currently we have made an appeal to three Cornell administrators who are voting members of the TCAT Board of Directors.

V. INITIATION OF AN ENERGY SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT ASSESSMENT

As you may know, the Town of Ithaca has a Sustainability Project led by our former resident Nick Goldsmith. Nick participated in a couple Forest Home meetings last winter and is helping us explore the feasibility of establishing a Forest Home “Energy Sustainability Project.” Using a portion of the Forest Home Park, the general concept is to work with Cornell faculty and

students, the Town of Ithaca, and Cornell to explore the possibility of one or more small-scale hydropower, solar and/or geothermal demonstration projects. Recently, we have contacted several Cornell faculty to see if students could help us explore various energy demonstration pilot scenarios. Members of our hamlet community would work closely with them and help make necessary connections and/or gather information. If you have an interest in this project, please contact Rod Howe, Jon Miller, or Michael Bend who have been leading the discussion.

We hope you have found this update useful and we look forward to further discussion about many of these topics. A PDF copy of this update will be available on our FHIA website. Your President wrote this and is responsible for the content (typos and all).

Have a nice summer.

David Gross, President
Bill Arms, Vice President
Claudia Fuchs, Secy.
Montana Petersen, Treasurer