

Meeting Minutes
Forest Home Improvement Association
Forest Home Chapel
Dec. 5, 2018

In attendance: Jack Clark, Gary Stewart (Cornell), Bill Arms, Sally Grubb, Jonathan Miller, Tom Campanella, Laure Stroock, John Bowman, Bruce Brittain, Ruth Mahr, Doug Brittain, Pete Loucks, Jennifer Loucks, Francois Elvinger, Linda Copman, Todd Bittner (Cornell), Leslie Schill (Cornell), Keiko Layashi, Rod Howe, David Kuckuk, Andy Galloway, Lars Washburn, Charlie Trautmann, Caroline Arms, Heather Beasley, Elizabeth Sanders, Karel Sedlacek, Constance Stirling-Engman

The meeting started at 7:30 PM.

Meeting opened with Caroline Arms announcing the FHIA participation in the Cornell Christmas Elves project and saying that donations were being accepted on a completely voluntary basis.

Caroline reminded attendees about the upcoming Holiday Party on Dec. 15 at the Arms' home.

Next, Caroline said that she'd like to see a working group formed to handle issues with the Forest Home Walkway and village roads. She asked those present to consider joining such a group.

Next, Ithaca Town Supervisor, Bill Goodman, said that he came to tonight's meeting to update FH residents on the FH Walkway and roads. First, he talked about the FH Walkway. He said that Town of Ithaca (ToI) is sending out a Request for Proposals (RFP) for an engineering study in preparation for repair and improvement of the Walkway, and that signs may be put up stating that people who use it do so at their own risk. Bill stated that the ToI decided to keep the FH Walkway open, after considering the possibility of closing it for the winter. Bill said that many residents had spoken up against the potential closure of the Walkway, because it is heavily used and the only alternative is for pedestrians to walk on treacherous icy, snowy roads with no sidewalks.

Bill said that the Town is contacting outside engineers because the Town Engineer is fully occupied with other projects such as sewer and drainage systems right now. Bill stated that \$25,000 has already been allocated for an engineering study for the FH Walkway.

Next, Bill raised the matter of the deteriorating S-bend retaining wall at 228 Forest Home Drive. Bill said that the Town Attorney's position is that the retaining wall is the property of the home owner at #228 Forest Home Drive, John Foote. Therefore, the Town doesn't think that it is responsible for repairing the wall. Bill said, however, that the Town could consider building a sidewalk as part of the Sidewalk District Project, which would also alleviate the problem with the crumbling retaining wall. He said if a sidewalk were built at the S-curve, then the problems with the retaining wall would be resolved. Bill stated that the Town is hoping to be able to establish a sidewalk district by mid 2019. Bill said that in NY State, towns can create special districts, such as a park or sidewalk district. Such a district can be used to fund

new infrastructure and improvement projects. The Sidewalk District would probably be funded through a bond -- with the annual fee being calculated to (a) repay the bond over several years and (b) cover maintenance (including plowing) of the newly constructed sidewalks. Bill said that this process is similar to the one used to create the FH Lighting District, which covers the street lighting in FH and allowed FH to purchase and install historically appropriate streetlights at the entrances to Forest Home. The discussion continued regarding the progress on creating the Sidewalk District. Bill added that once the districts are established, then ToI could even bill Cornell University for areas of its property that overlap or adjoin with the Sidewalk District.

Bill remarked that the FH Walkway project will proceed ahead of the Sidewalk District project. He said the Town has budgeted \$100,000 for work on the FH Walkway. Regarding the FH Walkway, Bill emphasized that engineers will be in touch with owners of adjacent properties. Caroline Arms had pointed out that 200 FHD shares a drainage problem with the Walkway and they hope to be able to find a solution that is compatible with what ToI does.

Next, Bill addressed #4 and #5 on the attached meeting agenda. He said that the Town is aware of these concerns and that is just one more reason that the Public Works Dept. is considering closing FH Drive.

The next topic of discussion was the possible closure of FH Drive. Bill informed everyone that there will be a Town Board meeting on Mon., Dec. 10 at 5:30 PM at Town Hall. The possible closure will be on that meeting agenda. The beginning of that meeting, which is open to the public, is dedicated to "Persons to be Heard," at which members of the public can voice their concerns.

Bill seemed confident that FH Drive will be closed, but he encouraged residents to attend the Dec. 10 meeting to express their concerns. Bill said if FH Drive is closed, the Byway will remain open, but the intersection of McIntyre and FH Drive will be closed. He said that one of the major safety concerns of the Highway Superintendent, Jim Weber, is that the guardrails along Beebe Lake are weak. Bill reiterated that Jim Weber believes the road must be closed because of safety concerns for traffic, bicyclists and pedestrians. Bill mentioned that there are three possibilities for dealing with this issue:

1. The Town may ask the Public Works Dept. to get another estimate (in addition to the existing estimate) from a third-party engineering firm for how much it would cost to repair the road.
2. Make FH Drive a one-way road and narrow it. The one-way could be scheduled at different times of the day to accommodate traffic going into campus and leaving campus. That is, there would be inbound and outbound traffic, but the flow would be one-way according to a schedule.
3. Closing FH Drive permanently would require Town Board approval.

Next, Bill asked for opinion of those present. Many residents vociferously expressed their concerns and shock at having just been informed of what many considered a radical proposal. Many residents stated that FH Drive has immeasurable scenic and historic value and that it is already designated as a scenic byway. People said that it is a high point of their daily commute to be able to enjoy the natural beauty and serenity of FH Drive and Beebe Lake, and that closing the road would deprive them of the quality-of-life experience. Others expressed concerns about declining property values and increased traffic congestion if FH Drive is closed. They said that traffic would only increase on other roads, and we already have problems with traffic congestion in FH. Residents also expressed alarm about how a

closure would make it even more hazardous, or impossible, to get out of FH during inclement weather and storms. Since much of the egress out of FH is on uphill roads such as Warren and Pleasant Grove, which can be dangerously slick and impassable in a snowstorm, vehicles might become trapped. People said that emergency vehicles might not even be able to get into FH Drive in a severe winter storm if FH Drive is closed, because that road is the only flat, accessible road both into and out of FH. Others mentioned that even FH Drive by the upstream bridge, going to Varna, has slopes and can easily become covered with snow in a major storm. They said that the only truly flat, accessible road into and out of FH is FH Drive past the downstream bridge leading to Thurston Ave. Many people argued that closing it would make FH less safe, create more traffic congestion, increase wear and tear on already fragile roads and degrade the historic and scenic beauty of Forest Home.

Linda Copman insisted that a traffic study is essential before taking the extreme step of closing FH Drive along Beebe Lake. She said we must understand how a closing would affect the people who live here. She added that traffic circulation problems would only increase and we already have enough of that.

Tom Campanella stated that he teaches an architecture class at Cornell, and that closing FH Drive would lower the historic, aesthetic and natural beauty value of the community. He said it could cause property values to decline.

Resident Elizabeth Sanders remarked that closing FH Drive would destroy the ambience of the community and the accessibility and ease of walking, biking or driving along the road to appreciate the beauty of the four seasons. She said she was shocked at the way this issue was abruptly presented to FH residents as an impending major change in the neighborhood without their input.

Many residents were adamantly opposed to closing FH Drive. They remarked that the Public Works Dept. and Highway Superintendent weren't taking a holistic view of safety in the community, and that they are ignoring quality of life and historical neighborhood issues. They said that people decide to purchase homes here partly because of the access to natural beauty and historic significance, and that taking that away is unacceptable. They said that FH Drive is an integral part of the character of the community.

Many residents vehemently opposed the possible installation of a "hammerhead" turn-around area at the intersection of FH Drive and McIntyre, saying that would be ugly and degrade an area of such natural splendor and historic significance.

Many residents agreed that safety would, in fact, be decreased with the closing of FH Drive because emergency egress would be difficult – if not impossible -in a severe winter storm. Several residents (Lars Washburn, Sally Grubb and Ruth Mahr) asked about changes to school bus stops along a route that already has some blind curves and inadequate turn-around room on narrow, historic roads. Ruth said that she knows of a school bus driver who takes the detour down McIntyre and along FHD to avoid taking the awkward/dangerous right turn at the bottom of Judd Falls Rd. Lars mentioned that the school bus used to stop outside the Botanic Garden (Plantations) building near the FHD intersection with Judd Falls Rd. Sally asked if anyone knew where the school buses stop this year.

Bill again reminded those present about the upcoming meeting on Dec. 10. He also said that email comments would be considered important and would be taken into account as "persons to be heard."

Bill said that by the following weekend (Dec. 15), results of the Dec. 10 Town Board meeting should be posted to the Town website.

Next, Bill said that he'll provide a summary to the Town Board to let them know the level of opposition to the potential road closure and depth of feeling for the historic quality of the road and neighborhood. Bill remarked that he sensed that FH Drive is an integral part of the character of the community.

Bill responded to these fears and concerns by reminding everyone that the Highway Superintendent can close a road without Town Board approval, citing safety concerns. He added that if this happens, the next step would be that the Town Board would immediately start a study of how to fix the road and sending out RFPs.

Funds for installing guard rails on FH Drive are not in the 2019 budget, Bill said.

He also mentioned that the Public Works Committee meets every 3rd Tuesday of the month at 9:00 AM at the Public Works Bldg. on Seven Mile Drive. Bill said that the meeting is open to the public.

The meeting closed with an update on the timing of the Sidewalk Districts Project. Bill said he hopes to have them created by mid-2019. He said that the Town may start working on them sooner and be reimbursed. He added that an increase in taxes, similar to that for the Lighting District costs, would first appear on tax bills in Jan. 2020.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Constance Stirling-Engman, Secretary FHIA

ATTACHMENT

Tentative agenda for meeting with Bill Goodman on Dec. 5 – handed out by FHIA President Caroline Arms at the Dec. 3, 2018 FHIA Board Meeting in preparation for the Dec. 5 FHIA Open Meeting with Bill Goodman

1. Deteriorating condition and possible closure of Forest Home Drive (FHD) between Judd Falls Road and McIntyre Place.
2. Forest Home Walkway. Updates on short-term plans and scope for planned engineering study.
3. Update on ideas for a fix to protect corner and footpath at the S-bend by 228 FHD.
4. Danger for pedestrians between downstream bridge and Judd Falls Road and on Judd Falls Road when it snows.
5. Danger for bicyclists on FHD near Beebe Lake related to storm sewers which have pits a foot wide to the left of the grates (if you are traveling towards Cornell).
6. Update on plans for establishing Sidewalk Districts within the Town of Ithaca, including for Forest Home.