

Forest Home Improvement Association

President's Annual Report October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020

Overview

This was an unusual year for obvious reasons. The Fall and the Winter holidays were normal, but our usual Spring Potluck had to be cancelled and so did the September Barbecue in the park. The Town of Ithaca had to make substantial adjustments to its operations because of COVID-related restrictions on the staff who maintain roads, parks, and trails and budget uncertainties. Adjustment to remote work, school closures, and necessary changes in how we shop and interact with our neighbors affected all of us.

I want to extend a special thank you to all the people who nevertheless volunteered for various activities, offered advice, and took initiative on their own to contribute to the community. I have had sterling help from the rest of the board: Connie Stirling-Engman (Secretary); Heather Beasley (Treasurer); and Jeff Holden (Vice President).

Social events

- Holiday party. 127 Warren Road. Saturday, December 14, 2019. Hosted by Michael Bend and Valerie Hans
- Scavenger Hunt. Saturday September 12, 2020. Organized by Heather Beasley and Jeff Holden

Community activities

- Spring cleanup. Picked up trash along our roads. April 8-18. Self-directed, socially distanced, and whenever convenient.
- Weeding garlic mustard. Stimulated by Connie Stirling-Engman, many of us worked on pulling garlic mustard and other invasive weeds in our yards, in the park, and along neighborhood streets. If needed, Connie picked up bagged garlic mustard for delivery to an appropriate disposal site.
- Throughout the year, Connie Stirling-Engman and Herb Engman have kept an eye on plants in the Forest Home park, removing invasives and encouraging attractive native species.
- Tom Campanella planted petunias in the flower box attached to the sign in the park. Thanks also to Seneca Blakely-Armitage and Connie Stirling-Engman for watering them as needed.
- Virtual meeting with Cornell Community Relations, Tuesday June 9. Update on North Campus Residential Expansion (NCRE) construction (including truck traffic) and on Cornell reopening plans.
- Virtual meeting with Cornell Community Relations, Wednesday August 19. Topics were: the planned redesign of intersection of Cradit Farm Drive and Pleasant Grove Road; safety for pedestrians and cyclists on Pleasant Grove Road; and an update on Cornell re-opening plans.

Preparation for next FHIA Directory

The Forest Home directory of residents is a valuable reference for new and long-time Forest Home residents. The last time the directory was updated and printed was 2017, over three years ago, and the information is out of date. In the summer of 2019, Amita Verma, then FHIA vice president, started the update process before moving to Vietnam in July. She asked the FHIA street captains to update the information for their street or block. By this time last year, after I took over the coordination task, the first two or three street captains, out of nine, had responded with updated information, and more responses came in during the Fall. Meanwhile, Jeff Holden, the incoming vice president, took on the task of setting up a system for better longer term maintenance, entering the old data and what new information had already been provided.

Jeff and I continued the effort to clean up the data in 2020 and add the updates that we knew about, but we are conscious that the information is not complete. The data is now standardized and there is a reasonable process for updating it. We need volunteers, three to four, willing to take responsibility for a portion of the data and work to ensure the data is as accurate as possible prior to printing. Please contact Jeff at jtholden@gmail.com to volunteer by 10/31, so that we can jointly figure out the best process to be ready to print a new directory by the end of the year.

Local issues affecting Forest Home

Forest Home Walkway

The Walkway from the Downstream Bridge up to Warren Road has always proved challenging for the Town to maintain. In 2019, the Town commissioned an engineering study to develop conceptual designs with the objective of making the Walkway easier to maintain and safer for users. The contractor, Barton & Loguidice (B&L), produced designs for three options (A-C) in August 2019, and an option D in mid-September. Option D keeps to the current alignment at the zig-zag, which strays from the land owned by the Town and goes across Cornell property. The associated cost estimate was lower than the earlier options, largely due to changes in material costs for railings. For more details, see last year's President's Report at https://fhia.org/wp-content/uploads/Minutes/2019/FHIA_2018-19_PresidentAnnualReport_2019-10-22.pdf

After discussions at Public Works Committee (PWC) meetings on September 17 and October 15, 2019, it was decided that the next step would be to negotiate an appropriate easement with Cornell that permits retention of the current alignment of the Walkway and adopt Option D as the best basis for the next phase, recognizing that some design details would need modification. It had been agreed that the alignment at the bottom should remain the same as at present. Decisions on other design details were deferred.

This year, operating under COVID-related constraints has been challenging for the Town's Public Works Department and financial constraints have required budget adjustments. We are grateful that behind the scenes the Town has been preparing to pick up work on this project.

- An item on the agenda for the Town Board on August 24, 2020 was to discuss and consider authorization for the Town supervisor to sign a contract for Final Design and Bid Phase Services for the Forest Home Walkway Improvement Project. The agenda package included a proposal from Barton & Loguidice (B&L). Concerned that the package did not provide a mechanism for community input, and also did not include mention of the need for detailed changes and decisions based on the Fall 2019 PWC meetings, Bruce and Doug Brittain and Caroline Arms raised concerns in messages to the Town Supervisor and senior Public Works Department staff. In response, the item was removed from the agenda and referred to the PWC for further consideration.
- The Walkway was the first agenda item at the PWC meeting on September 15, 2020. The meeting was held by ZOOM and had at least 20 participants, including representatives of Cornell, B&L, and the Forest Home community. The Brittain brothers and I were invited to offer views and we reiterated the key points from our earlier written communications. It was agreed that all concerned, including B&L, recognized that some design details in Option D, such as the choice of materials for hand-railings, would need further clarification during the upcoming phase of the project. Other important decisions include the location of railings and the difficult choice of whether to incorporate steps, which are safer and more comfortable for pedestrians, but would complicate maintenance, particularly for removing trees (either deliberately or after they fall, which they do every so often). It was agreed that community feedback would be possible through a future PWC meeting.

Current Status of the Forest Home Walkway Improvement Project

- The Town's Tentative 2021 Budget includes \$150,000 in the Capital Improvement Plan for the Forest Home Walkway, shifted from the 2020 budget. See [2021 Tentative Budget](#). The 2021 Budget approved on October 19 includes this item.
- The Town has signed a contract with B&L for the Final Design and Bid Phase Services.
- FHIA will encourage people to take the opportunity to offer feedback when the Town notifies us of the PWC meeting where we hope B&L will present design options for the Town's consideration.

Cornell's North Campus Residential Expansion (NCRE)

See: <https://ncre.cornell.edu/project-announcements> and <http://www.town.ithaca.ny.us/major-projects/ncre>

The North Campus Residential Expansion involves construction of dormitories for 2,000 students with associated community facilities. Construction began in the summer of 2019. Construction paused in mid-March 2020 because of COVID-19 but was allowed to restart in late April. The original schedule is still in place. Phase 1 (near the intersection of Triphammer Rd. and Jessup Rd.) is intended for sophomores and is intended to be open for Fall 2021. Phase 2 (between Appel Commons and Pleasant Grove Road) is for freshmen and expected to open in Fall 2022. ZOOM sessions hosted by Cornell Community Relations in June and August provided updates. As of October 2020, the exterior of the buildings in Phase 1 are largely complete; work now focuses on the interior. The structures for Phase 2 have been growing rapidly over the last few months.

One significant part of the overall project will be a redesign of the intersection of Credit Farm Drive and Pleasant Grove Road. This project is funded by Cornell, but the design must be developed in conjunction with the Highway Departments of the Town of Ithaca and Tompkins County. The tentative design, for a roundabout, was presented at the August ZOOM session hosted by Cornell Community relations. The call included Jeff Smith (Tompkins County Highway Director) and several representatives of the Town of Ithaca, including the Town Supervisor and Joe Slater, the new Director of Public Works. Forest Homers on the call asked a few questions on details, but no-one raised general objections. The project will re-install the Forest Home entrance feature between the roundabout and the steep section of Pleasant Grove Road.

The August ZOOM call was also an opportunity for the community to raise concerns about safety on the steep section of Pleasant Grove Road. No commitments were made, but the community's views on the need for better protection for pedestrians and cyclists were heard.

Action on miscellaneous issues related to traffic through Forest Home

- During the NCRE demolition phase, almost all the construction trucks used the official route away from the building site, heading away from Forest Home along Pleasant Grove Road. However, during the last year we have seen a substantial number of trucks coming through Forest Home and running into trouble at the S-curve near 228 Forest Home Drive. Many, but not all, have been related to Cornell construction or deliveries. We know this because of the efforts of David Kuckuk, who lives on the outside of the S-curve. In April, David established a Facebook page for [Forest Home Trucks and Traffic](#) and started to distribute information about incidents caught on camera to the Town, Cornell, and Welliver, the contractor for the NCRE project. When a truck can be identified as NCRE-related, the contractor takes steps to stop it happening again. Reporting trucks delivering food, etc. to Cornell has also had some useful effect, with the departments to whom the deliveries go

being told to instruct drivers to avoid Forest Home. But some trucks are just passing through, led by their GPS.

We are grateful to David for his efforts. If you have photographs or other post-able content related to truck incidents anywhere in Forest Home please forward them to him. (dkuckuk2@gmail.com).

- In June, the Town installed a guide-rail round the S-curve as a short-term measure, to prevent further damage and protect pedestrians pending a longer term solution. Also in June, Rod Howe, Town Supervisor and Forest Home resident, reported that the Town had made contact with GPS vendors to try and incorporate information about the weight limit on Forest Home Roads into their systems.
- Weight limit signage. A weight limit applies to most of the roads in Forest Home. In April 2019, FHIA submitted a 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 agreed that the signage needed to be updated, but it took a long time to sort out the details. In June 2020, the first updates appeared, primarily updating the legends on existing posts. Later in the Summer, a sign at the intersection of Caldwell Road and the 300 block of Forest Home Drive was installed. There are still locations where the original request asked for signs to be installed in locations where there used to be signs or for existing signs to be moved to a more appropriate location. For some months, the PWC agenda has included under Future Agenda Items the item "Review Emails About Additional Forest Home Related Signs."

Future meeting ideas

- Reschedule the meeting planned for last Spring on practical experience with recent solar panel installations.

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

Caroline Arms
President
October 21, 2020