

## **University Hill Neighborhood**

**320 University Ave.**

**Ithaca, NY 14850**

April 24, 2002

### **An open letter to President Rawlings and the Trustees of Cornell University**

President Rawlings, Ladies and Gentlemen:

We write to you as residents of the city of Ithaca and homeowners in University Hill, the neighborhood that borders Cornell to the west. Many of us are associated with Cornell as alumni, faculty, staff or students and we support Cornell's effort to improve residential living. All of us, however, are profoundly opposed to the University's plan to demolish Redbud Woods and install a parking lot.

In March, we learned that Ithaca's Common Council was considering a request to change the zoning of Cemetery Woods, a triangular piece of land that borders the historic City Cemetery on the southwest corner of Stewart Avenue and DeWitt Place. This rezoning request was prompted by Cornell's offer to sell the land to a local landlord for multiple housing units. We are grateful that this offer has been withdrawn. While investigating this change, however, we discovered the existence of Cornell's plan to replace Redbud Woods with a surface level parking lot.

Redbud Woods is two acres of trees and shrubs on the southeast corner of University Avenue and Lake Street that have grown up on what had been the great lawn of the historic Treman Houses. The primary value of the woods does not lie in its inherent beauty, but rather in its service to the neighborhood as a buffer between our homes and the noise, pollution, and disturbance of dense campus housing. Redbud Woods keeps our neighborhood from becoming Collegetown.

To learn more about the University's plans for this area, we asked our Alderwoman, Carolyn Peterson, to arrange a meeting with Cornell representatives to learn what the tentative plans for the woods were. On Thursday, April 11 a number of us met with:

John Gutenberger, Director, Community Relations

Bill Wendt, Director, Transportation

Jean Reese, Project Leader, Residential Initiative

John Kiefer, Associate Director, Planning, Design and Construction

Laurene Gilbert, Landscape Architect, Planning, Design and Construction

Katherine Wolf, Trowbridge/Wolf, Landscape Architects

Bob Corby, Bero Architects

We were dismayed to discover that plans were far from tentative. The University had already completed, or was in the process of completing: an historical analysis, an archeological analysis, a traffic study, a vegetation study, and a landscape design. The West Campus site plan is scheduled to be submitted to the City of Ithaca Planning Board this June, and construction of the parking lot on Redbud Woods is targeted for completion by the end of the calendar year. Many trees are already marked with pink ribbons. All of this has occurred without consulting — or even informing — any of the

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neighbors. We are a vibrant, well-organized neighborhood of long standing. It would have been incredibly simple to talk to us.

In the meeting that we requested, we learned that the parking lot is being proposed in conjunction with the West Campus Initiative. While there will be no increase in the number of student beds (1,800), the space allotted to each student would increase significantly from approximately 280 sq. ft. to 370 sq. ft. The existing lot on the southeast corner of Stewart and University that accommodates 200 cars would become a residential site. After construction of the new buildings, demolition of the existing Class Halls, and elimination of parking, the green space contained in the West Campus block would be significantly increased. However, the parking would be moved west to Redbud Woods, which would be cut down, thus decreasing the green space in our neighborhood. A few rare specimen trees and a border of plants (deep on Cornell's side; narrow on the community side) would be preserved.

When we asked the Cornell representatives what alternatives to cutting down the woods had been considered, we were told two options had been rejected:

1. Placing a parking lot at Gun Hill because, "Students wouldn't walk that far."
2. Placing the parking underground because, "It would be too expensive." When we asked for exact numbers, we were told they were not available.

We are appalled at the plans for Redbud Woods because we think removing the woods will be an environmental disaster for many reasons:

1. The off-site impact of noise from maneuvering cars, slamming doors and car alarms;
2. The off-site impact of noise from late-night pedestrian traffic walking to and from the new lot — we are a community that is quiet after dark;
3. The off-site impact of parking lot light poles;
4. The off-site impact of moving car headlights;
5. The on- and off-site impact of litter;
6. The impact of additional traffic on University Avenue and of more traffic attempting to drive to and from the new lot through our neighborhood;
7. The impact of increased parking on University Avenue (why pay for parking when you can walk an extra 30 feet and park for free?);
8. The likelihood that the construction process and addition of pavement on the east side of University Avenue will exacerbate water drainage problems already affecting houses on the west side of the street;
9. The permanent damage that will be inflicted on the historic Treman family compound and the landscape design created for that compound by noted American landscape architect Warren H. Manning;
10. The forfeiture of any realistic possibility that the beauty of the Treman homes and its landscape could ever be restored;
11. Loss of bird and small animal habitat.

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Cornell's West Campus is the most densely populated residential block in the entire county with a total population — including the fraternities — of about 1950 people. Thus the remaining green space in our neighborhood is both precious as an environmental and aesthetic resource, and necessary as a buffer.

In Cornell's brochure, the "New West Campus" is touted as embodying "a sense of community and intellectual engagement." While we applaud Cornell's efforts to build a stronger sense of community on campus, we encourage the University to apply the same values to dialogue and planning with the Ithaca Community. The one community should not gain at the expense of the other.

What do we ask? We believe that there are many alternatives, including but not limited to the following:

1. Keep West Campus parking on West Campus. Any redesign of the area should include on-site parking, which is feedback Cornell has already received from its own student focus groups. If above ground parking is undesirable, seriously consider putting parking underground, possibly by enlarging the underground areas currently intended to support service vehicles. Or, once Noyes Center is removed, underground parking could be placed in the void where this building and its loading area used to be.
2. If the proposed Law School parking lot proves acceptable, allocate space in this area for West Campus vehicles. (The University has not demonstrated a need for both this lot and the replacement lot on University Avenue)
3. Provide additional incentives and transportation to encourage students to use existing remote lots.
4. Exclude the 50 spaces allocated for staff, and bus employees from existing remote lots. Many parts of the Cornell campus do not provide for on-site employee parking.
5. Restrict freshmen and sophomores from having cars on campus and promote this as part of Cornell's environmental ethic.

As a neighborhood, we do not expect to dictate which alternative(s) the University chooses. We do expect that the University will not impose solutions that degrade the surrounding residential community, and we ask that this large green space between us and Cornell, one of the largest within the city limits, be preserved.

At our meeting we were told that the residential housing initiative is President Rawlings' highest priority. We do not think that President Rawlings or you, as trustees, in supporting this priority, intended to cause permanent harm to our neighborhood and our city. But in June of 2003, President Rawlings will step down. Some of you will finish your terms and end your close involvement with Cornell. However, the parking lot, and the damage it will do to our neighborhood, will remain forever.

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In closing, let us state that we would have preferred to work this out less publicly. But Cornell has proceeded so far without consulting us and has given us little indication that it is willing to revisit its plans to create a parking lot in Redbud Woods. Therefore, we felt it necessary to inform the Ithaca community immediately.

We are good neighbors to Cornell and wholeheartedly support its efforts to maintain and improve the quality of the campus. We ask Cornell to be a good neighbor in return and to support our efforts to maintain the quality of our community.

Sincerely,

Residents and Representatives of the University Hill Neighborhood

Neighborhood Contacts:

Kate Lunde  
Homeowner  
320 University Avenue

Lauren Comly  
Homeowner  
206 Dewitt Place

Common Council Representatives:

Carolyn Peterson  
Alderswoman 4<sup>th</sup> Ward  
406 E. Buffalo St

Dan Cogan  
Alderman 5<sup>th</sup> Ward  
112 W Marshall St

Community Property Owners and Residents:

Dorothy Reddington  
Homeowner  
106 Cascadilla Park Road

Ritchie Patterson  
Homeowner  
108 Cascadilla Park Road

Pia Cryzta  
John Cake  
Homeowners  
114 Cascadilla Park Road

Holly Van Sciver  
Gerry Munchel  
Homeowners  
130 Cascadilla Park Road

Cornelia Hill  
Homeowner

136 Cascadilla Park Road

Julia Stiles  
Lauren Stiles  
Homeowners  
144 Cascadilla Park Road

Jane Pedersen  
Dominick LaCapra  
Homeowners  
145 Cascadilla Park Road

David Yearsley and  
Annette Richards  
Homeowners  
156 Cascadilla Park Road

Elizabeth Gillis  
Homeowner  
213 Cascadilla Park Road

Nancy and Chuck  
Wolfram  
Homeowners  
214 Cascadilla Park Road

The 44 Members of  
Delta Phi Fraternity  
Llenroc  
100 Cornell Ave

Carol Devine

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Homeowner  
201 Dewitt Place

Antonia Glasse  
Homeowner  
210 University Ave.

410 University Ave.

Isabel and James Salmon  
Homeowners  
203 Dewitt Place

Joanna Luks  
Frederic Bouche  
Homeowners  
212 University Ave.

Chris Morris  
Renter  
412 University Ave.

Edwin A. Cowen  
Homeowners  
206 Dewitt Place

Barbara and John Hubbard  
Homeowners  
214 University Ave.

David Kramer  
Property Owner  
502, 504, 508 University  
Ave.

Kathleen Lilley  
Homeowner  
111 Lake St.

Jeff Hanavan  
Homeowner  
320 University Ave.

Marty Heresniak  
Renter since 1992  
502 University Ave.

Peter Mattison  
Renter  
115 Llenroc Court

Katherine Granish  
Homeowner  
402 University Ave.

Brent Hannah  
Cara Yates  
Renters  
502 University Ave.

John Schroeder  
Renter since 1977  
618 Stewart Avenue

David Church  
Property Manager  
404, 406  
University Ave

Nick Bawlf/  
Mrs. W. Leveille  
Homeowner  
510 University Ave.

Residents and Alumni of  
The 660 Stewart Ave.  
Co-operative

Patricia and Charles Elliott  
Homeowners

Iman Cheng  
Renter  
510 University Ave.

Cc: Employee Assembly  
Student Assembly  
Faculty Senate  
Mayor Alan J. Cohen  
City of Ithaca Common Council  
City of Ithaca Planning Board  
Tompkins County Board of Representatives  
Citizens Planning Alliance  
The Cornell Daily Sun  
The Ithaca Journal  
The Ithaca Times  
Newscenter 7  
WHCU  
WSKG  
WVBR  
The New York Times  
National Public Radio