

Approved Resolution
Planning Board Comments on the RT 96 Corridor Management Study
September 22, 2009

On a motion by Boothroyd, seconded by Snyder:

WHEREAS: Tompkins County faces a housing shortage, particularly in the urbanized area. It is widely believed that this shortage has contributed to a high rate of in-commuting to the County and relatively longer commutes for many county residents. This additional traffic has in turn resulted in traffic congestion, most notably in the City of Ithaca where all major commuting routes converge and where many commuting destinations are located. The West Hill area is one of the areas where increased housing development has occurred and where additional potential for development exists. Much of this area is served by NYS Route 96 as the primary commuting route. Both the Town of Ulysses and Town of Ithaca are looking at updating their Comprehensive Plans. Route 96 corridor is the location of most of the commercial property in the Town of Ulysses. Planned development in the corridor is seen as crucial to allowing economic growth while mitigating traffic impacts of that growth. It is feared that increased development in this area will worsen congestion in the City and impact traffic flow and livability along the entire corridor, and

WHEREAS: pursuant to General Municipal Law Section 119-o, the County of Tompkins, the City of Ithaca, and the Towns of Ithaca and Ulysses entered into an agreement to complete a corridor management study of New York State Route 96 within Tompkins County to determine current and projected transportation patterns as they relate to development in that corridor and to make recommendations for mitigation of future traffic congestion and safety issues, and

WHEREAS: the City's responsibilities outlined in the agreement included providing matching funds for the preparation of the studies, reviewing and identifying the best proposal from among the responses to the Request for Proposals for a consultant to conduct the study, assisting the consultant in collecting relevant data, and taking the lead in soliciting public comment and participation from within the City with regard to the Study, and

WHEREAS: the purpose of the Route 96 Corridor Management Study is to evaluate traffic impacts associated with development in the corridor from the Village of Trumansburg to the junction of Route 96 and 13, and to look at techniques that could be implemented to mitigate these impacts. The study quantifies existing and projected traffic and levels of service and evaluates how a nodal development pattern with mixed uses, enhanced transit service, access management, other transportation system improvements, including bike and pedestrian facilities, could mitigate the impacts of this traffic and examines the option of promoting development nodes in the vicinity of Cayuga Medical Center and Jacksonville, and

WHEREAS: the study intends to show whether and to what extent a nodal development pattern in combination with access management and other

transportation network improvements can mitigate the impacts of increased traffic in the Route 96 Corridor that would otherwise result from the baseline condition of continuing sprawling development, and

WHEREAS: a consultant team was hired and completed Technical Reports # 1, 2 and 3 with technical information, analysis and recommendations, and

WHEREAS: a survey of residents in the Route 96 Corridor was conducted, focus group meetings with businesses/institutions in the Corridor were held, and two area-wide public meetings were held at the Museum of the Earth regarding the Route 96 Study in 2008, and comments received from the public participation process were factored into the Route 96 Corridor Management Study reports, and

WHEREAS: Draft Technical Report #4 (dated 4/6/09) was prepared by the representatives of the Route 96 Corridor Technical Review Committee, including representatives from the participating organizations. Technical Report #4 draws from the three earlier technical reports to develop an inter-municipal strategy for mitigating the impacts of traffic by promoting a nodal pattern of development in the Corridor and utilizing related strategies of enhanced transit opportunities, improved pedestrian and bicycle connections and systems, better management of access within the Corridor, traffic calming measures, infrastructure improvements, and zoning and land use modifications where applicable, and

WHEREAS: the nature of future development along the Route 96 Corridor will directly affect City of Ithaca residents through associated impacts such as the volume of vehicular traffic passing through City neighborhoods, and

WHEREAS: the City of Ithaca Planning Board has previously reviewed the Route 96 Corridor Management Study at its regular meetings on June 23, 2009, July 28, 2009 and August 25, 2009 and at a Special Meeting on September 10, 2009, **now, therefore, be it**

RESOLVED: that the City of Ithaca Planning Board submits the following comments and recommendations regarding the Route 96 Corridor Management Study:

- The essential concept of concentrating future development in nodes inspired by traditional Tompkins County villages, or consisting of the contiguous expansion of existing county hamlets or villages, while simultaneously preserving farmland and other green space around these nodes, is appealing on many levels and is a desirable planning goal.
- For this concept to work, however, the goal of protecting green space must be as aggressively pursued as the goal of creating concentrated development nodes. Many economic, cultural and political factors combine to encourage linear sprawl along highway corridors, and such sprawl is likely to continue — despite the creation of new nodes — unless strong green-space protection measures are enacted along the highway

corridor outside the nodes. Intermunicipal cooperation to achieve this goal would be highly desirable.

- It is not clear that the political will exists to create and enforce the strong green-space protection measures that would be required to truly preserve existing open space along the Route 96 Corridor, outside of the existing or proposed nodes. If new Route 96 Corridor nodes are created and "business as usual" linear sprawl continues along the highway as well, the likelihood is that already-substantial traffic impacts on existing neighborhoods along that corridor, and in additional City of Ithaca neighborhoods as well, will only be exacerbated. There has been a history in Tompkins County of land once officially designated as "agricultural" being easily and rapidly converted into sprawl development, often with the active support of local political leaders.
- With respect to the above issues, the proposed "Cayuga Medical Center Node" is particularly problematic. A string of linear sprawl already extends from the City to the hospital area, so this proposed "node" might be more accurately referred to as a proposed "bulge" along an existing sprawl corridor. It might make more sense to integrally and contiguously expand the Ithaca urban area northward (with urban, rather than sprawl, development patterns, to the greatest degree possible) rather than to attempt the creation of a "node" so close to the City.
- Focusing development at the "Jacksonville Hamlet" node, on the other hand, seems much more consistent with the study's premises: here is an historic community which could be sympathetically expanded with new mixed uses and new neighborhoods in a location along Route 96 where it is indeed feasible to protect and preserve surrounding farmland and open space.
- Much more emphasis should be placed on the concept of the City of Ithaca being an appropriate existing node in which to focus increased housing and job development, thereby lessening the pressure to develop greenfield sites outside the City, including along the Route 96 Corridor. Initiatives such as the proposed new neighborhood in the City's Southwest area, for example, could substantially increase the amount of housing available in the City directly adjacent to existing commercial uses. While urban development is harder to produce than development in the countryside, it also offers many environmental and planning benefits.
- The Study does not clearly describe criteria for "success" of the proposed nodes. Would the primary criteria for success be traffic reduction? Or creation of mixed-use centers? For any such criteria, is the envisioned size of the nodes sufficient to make successful outcomes likely? Would the likelihood of success be increased if nodal development consisted of the densification or contiguous expansion of existing historic communities (such as the City of Ithaca, the Village of Trumansburg and Jacksonville hamlet), rather than the creation of new nodes?
- The Study would benefit from a detailed analysis of how housing in proposed nodes could be effectively targeted to address the needs of

those Tompkins County demographic groups / income levels with the most limited current housing opportunities.

- A contradiction exists in the Route 96 Corridor Management Study between the way the proposed nodes are described verbally, as opposed to the way they are depicted graphically. The broad overall language describing the intended character of the nodes evokes the best qualities of traditional Tompkins County villages: true communities with vital mixed-use centers and close-in neighborhoods that together provide a mix of housing types in a pedestrian, bicycle and transit-friendly atmosphere. However, graphic aerial depictions of conceptual new development at the "Cayuga Medical Center Node" and the "Jacksonville Hamlet" node depict many elements typical of conventional sprawl development patterns, such as:
 - Lack of a highly-connected pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly network of streets that weaves the whole community together (think of a traditional city or village street grid, as opposed to access roads leading off arterial highways to essentially separate suburban development "pods").
 - Traditional neighborhood development patterns feature a high level of "connectivity" within the street network, while typical suburban development patterns have poor connectivity.
 - A tendency for the illustrated conceptual new development to avoid, rather than embrace, the main road (Route 96), resulting in odd voids within what is supposed to be an integral, village-like community (note how development hugs Route 96 within the historic Trumansburg commercial center and within the City of Ithaca).
 - Poor connections between new and existing development, between one side of Route 96 and the other side, and between the overall conceptual nodal development and the illustrated new "mixed-use centers."
 - An avoidance of the frequent street intersections (block by block) that effectively communicate to drivers that they are in a true community, and no longer in the countryside, and now need to slow down and drive with special care.
 - While it is understood that these graphic aerial depictions are only conceptual, they are nevertheless likely to create confusion about the characteristics that separate community-building from suburban sprawl — a topic on which too much confusion exists already.
 - There is also a contradiction between the broad overall language describing the intended character of the nodes and some specific verbal recommendations, such as those calling for maximizing the distance between access roads or otherwise limiting access from Route 96 within the proposed nodes. A traditional village "main street" has a progression of intersections that collectively require vehicles to slow down and that provide the frequent connections ("connectivity") essential to creating an overall sense of community. Without a sufficient number of such intersections, Route 96 will functionally divide the proposed nodes into

discrete halves, rather than serving as a "main street" knitting the two sides of the highway together into a greater whole.

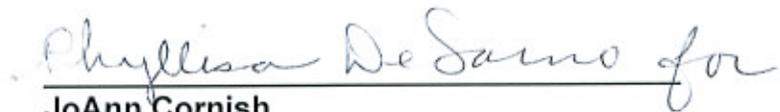
Unanimously Approved (Absent: Kay & Tripp)

STATE OF NEW YORK
COUNTY OF TOMPKINS
CITY OF ITHACA

SS:

I, JoAnn Cornish, Planning and Development Director of the City of Ithaca, do hereby certify that the foregoing resolution is a true and exact copy of a resolution duly adopted by the Planning and Development Board of said City of Ithaca at a regular meeting held on the 22nd day of September, 2009, and that the same is a complete copy of the whole of such resolution.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and the Corporate Seal of the City of Ithaca, this 12th day of March, 2010.



JoAnn Cornish
Planning and Development Director
City of Ithaca, New York