

May 16, 2016

Dear Dryden Town Planners and Varna Neighbors,

I think we have a common purpose. We want a world that our children and grandchildren could live in safely and comfortably. We want them to have a friendly community and good neighbors. Keeping housing density at a manageable level is essential to this purpose. Concentrated housing without a good plan can lead to community problems, traffic, policing, drugs, and potential deterioration due to neglect of property. Anonymity leads to people doing things they wouldn't if they knew a neighbor was watching.

Owner occupied housing is one way to ensure that individuals will care for their homes, maybe plant some greenery, feed the birds, clean up after their dogs or remind others to do so, for the good of all. Owner-occupied houses encourage people to get out and see each other - a way to ensure safety and pro-social behavior. Green space around homes encourages dwellers to get out, and maybe say hello, or just see who lives next door. Common green space allows people to meet each other, maybe throw a Frisbee or talk about the weather. A community room as part of a group of living units, an exercise room, a laundry room, these all bring people together.

The current proposal for 1061 works counter to these goals and values. It features living units packed together with few to no windows and only a parking lot to and from which people run. One parking place per 3-bedroom unit is inadequate. With 36 units of 3 bedrooms (for every room used as an office, another room could have a couple), the potential of 98 cars going in and out of a small "curb cutaway" several times a day, not including their visitors, is impossible.

The old railway recreationway which we are trying to complete as a major hike-bike trail is a "free" amenity to the parcel of land. However, the current diagram shows access to this being blocked. There will be many people using this at some point in the future and a water retention pond right next to it may be a safety concern. On the other hand, an unsightly covered area looking industrial rather than landscape-friendly is not the solution.

A Robert Wood Johnson -commissioned Housing and Health Issue Brief discussed neighborhood conditions to promote short-and long-term health and quality of life. Cornell's Gary Evans published research reviewing many studies on housing and mental health, citing the way in which more crowded housing actually increased isolation, how increased noise levels (from so many cars, people, service vehicles such as trash and recycling, etc) contributes to poor outcomes.

This type of research and more led to Tompkins County's identification of 7 principles for planning development in this county. In addition, the hamlet of Varna developed a master plan. The current 1061 proposal is lacking in guidance from these plans and guides.

I propose that the current 1061 Dryden Road proposal be reworked with guidance from our current plans and principles to mallow us to build a safe and friendly community for the health and welfare of all current and future generations.

Thank you, Carol Whitlow, 1067 Dryden Road

Vital Communities Principles



Photo courtesy of Rick Manning, Northeast Greenways

In the past decade, the population of Tompkins County, as in many parts of the Northeast, has grown at a modest rate while the amount of land taken up by homes, businesses, roads, and public buildings has increased at a rate that has far outpaced population. This type of growth puts at risk many of the characteristics of Tompkins County that we treasure. The Vital Communities Initiative is a response to this trend; it is a conscious effort to guide the way our communities develop.

When trying to envision life in the future, one thing is a given: things will change. If past growth patterns give us an indication of future growth, the types of changes we could see include:

- Loss of population (and related loss of businesses and tax base) in the City and Villages;
- More new commercial and residential development along roads in the rural and agricultural areas;
- Increased traffic along rural roads and in the urban areas;
- Increased taxes and fees to pay for additional public services (e.g., water, sewer, schools, police, fire, public transportation, and road construction and maintenance);
- Loss of vitality in traditional community centers;
- Loss of agricultural lands, natural habitats, and open space;
- Increased amount of time people spend in their cars;
- Degradation of the quality and quantity of drinking water supplies, streams, and lakes.

Many local public and private sector organizations are already working independently on these issues, from the development of downtown Ithaca, to the revitalization of our villages and hamlets, to the protection of our rural landscape. The Vital Communities Initiative builds on these efforts by seeking to establish a more comprehensive, coordinated, and community-wide framework for planning in Tompkins County. The Vital Communities Initiative Principles were developed during an 18-month community-involvement process and are based on residents' visions of future growth in Tompkins County.

Although land use regulation authority resides at the town, village, and city levels, it is important that other entities, such as the county, nonprofits, and private interests, also consider land use impacts in their decisionmaking. Decisions such as where to site a housing development, what land to protect, or where to approve an economic development loan all have land use implications and impacts.

Planning for the future is the only way to preserve and enhance the characteristics and attributes of Tompkins County that we most cherish, and to ensure that our communities remain healthy, vibrant, and vital communities. This is what these seven principles attempt to capture.



Principle 1

Build strong, cohesive neighborhoods and communities

1. Encourage the development of diverse communities that provide a mix of uses, a variety of employment options, social and recreational opportunities, and an assortment of amenities within walking distance of residential development.
2. Enhance the quality of communities by improving the character of the built environment, including visually appealing architectural elements and streetscapes that encourage pedestrian travel, facilitate community interaction, and promote public safety.
3. Preserve and enhance the distinct identities and historic character of existing neighborhoods and structures, and encourage the development of new neighborhoods that possess their own special sense of place, through attractive design of public places; proximity to schools, parks and other services; and community festivals and events.



Principle 2

Encourage nodal development patterns that build on existing infrastructure and population centers

1. Strengthen and enhance the City of Ithaca's downtown area as the urban center of the County.
2. Strengthen and enhance the villages and hamlets of the County as vital service centers.
3. Increase the amount and density of housing, office, and retail space in the central business districts throughout the County.
4. Promote greater density by encouraging development of existing "gaps" left by abandoned buildings, vacant parcels, and land located behind existing development along roads.
5. Comprehensive plan



Principle 3

Promote choice and affordability in housing options

1. Provide for a variety of living experiences, including rural, suburban, small villages, big villages, and urban, each with its own distinct style and personality.
2. Protect consumers' housing options throughout the County by providing a mix of choices (i.e., location, accessibility, housing types, and neighborhood character).
3. Provide and maintain more quality affordable housing options for very-low, low, and moderate income residents.
4. Promote increased owner-occupied housing within neighborhoods in the County.



Principle 4

Protect natural resources, green spaces, and recreational resources

1. Preserve and protect open space, unique natural areas, wetlands, water and woodland resources, scenic views, areas of natural beauty, and the rural character of Tompkins County.
2. Create, preserve, and enhance parks, hiking trails, active and passive recreation facilities, and historic resources; enhance public access to Cayuga Lake.
3. Provide a system of interconnecting greenways and ecological corridors that connect-agricultural lands, natural areas, and open space.
4. Protect water quality and quantity in the County's streams, lakes, and groundwater and consider the potential regional impacts on water supply and wastewater management for all proposed developments.
5. Protect the areas where crucial aquifers are replenished and avoid new development in flood-prone areas.



Principle 5

Promote agriculture, protect farmland, and protect the rural economy

1. Protect prime agricultural soils and areas of contiguous agricultural activity.
2. Enhance the viability of existing farming operations and agricultural businesses, and encourage new ones to be formed.
3. Encourage development that is designed to preserve open space and valuable agricultural land.
4. Provide for a variety of formal and informal economic activities, such as private timber harvesting, agri-tourism, and home businesses, which support a rural way of life.



Principle 6

Enhance development of a local economy that supports strong communities

1. Concentrate appropriate commercial, industrial, and retail development onto relatively small amounts of land, in close proximity to housing and consumers, in existing areas of concentrated development (through vertical growth, where suitable).

2. Support economic development that employs local workers, provides family-supporting wages and benefits, and offers affordable goods and services.
3. Provide a climate where businesses, particularly locally-owned ones, can flourish by enhancing the County's natural resources, arts and culture, lively urban core, and vital neighborhoods.
4. Recognize the important role played by local institutions of higher education in attracting residents and creating jobs in this area and work with them on quality of life issues in the community.
5. Support tourism in the area by encouraging local institutions, businesses, and facilities to better plan, coordinate, and expand tourism-related activities.



Principle 7

Promote a multi-modal transportation system that encourages economic health and community vitality

1. Enhance and promote the use of bicycles and walking as viable forms of transportation by providing safe public facilities, including multi-use trails, bicycle routes, bicycle lanes, and sidewalks.
2. Enhance transportation options and provide facilities that allow passengers to transfer easily and safely from one mode of transportation to another (e.g., biking to bus service).
3. Ensure that development occurs in a manner that maintains the function and safety of the road network in the area.
4. Provide affordable and accessible public transportation to important destinations among outlying nodes, the Ithaca urban area, and points outside the County.
5. Enhance transportation options, including freight and air service, to support business development, while preserving the integrity of existing communities.
6. Promote a transportation system that supports nodal, compact development patterns and reduces negative environmental impacts.

Commissiononhealth.org. Issue Brief 2: Housing and Health. Sept. 2008.

Evans, Wells and Moch, Journal of Social Issues, 2003, 59:3, p. 475.