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Dear Dryden Town Board,

The following letter is a detailed response to each point made by Kimberly Hansen of Trinitas Ventures in her letter to you of Oct 23rd, 2018, in which she attempts to meet the Town Board's condition that Trinitas demonstrate how they are in compliance with the Varna Community Development Plan (Varna Plan) of 2012.

In sum, Trinitas did not make any reasonable argument that they have complied with the Varna Plan. As they have throughout this discussion over the past year, Trinitas has made little attempt to acknowledge the goals identified in the Plan, and have once again tried to pick and choose little bits of words here and there that they thought they could frame into a statement of compatibility with the Plan.

Below are details of how Trinitas has failed to meet the condition set by the Town Board.

1. Trinitas Statement: "As described in the Plan, the subject site, commonly known as Varna II, LLC, for the proposed Village at Varna is recognized as one of two primary underutilized sites listed as "Development Opportunities" within the Hamlet of Varna due to the site's proximity to major roads and existing infrastructure (p.19)."

Critique: By recognizing the site as a primary "Development Opportunity", the Plan in no way was indicating that any and all development proposed for this site was acceptable and welcomed. The rest of the Plan goes to great lengths to spell out the kind, magnitude, and scale of developments the community is looking for. The Trinitas letter specifically avoids addressing how their development proposal for this underutilized area helps the community meet the rest of its articulated goals that "the character of the community is maintained or shifts slowly, not in dramatic steps" (page 40), balance between home ownership and rental, "encouraging home ownership" (page 40), maintenance of rural character that "reflects the rural, pastoral feel of the hamlet" (page 46), etc.

The incorrect implication is that if Dryden does not jump at whatever development proposal is put on the table for this underutilized site, it is not in keeping with the Plan. This notion is completely wrong. The community and the town went to great lengths with the creation of this Plan to identify many specifics about the type of development it is seeking. Nowhere does the Plan state that it is critical to accept any and all proposals to fill the underutilized sites as quickly as possible to keep the community in a good state of health.

2. Trinitas Statement: "Furthermore, the Plan's Summary of Existing Conditions notes that these underutilized sites when developed can incorporate public green spaces that "cater to a family and student community" (p. 20)."

Critique: Trinitas has made minimal effort to create public green space within the development. With 47.3% impervious surface and not achieving the minimum green space requirement (see below), Trinitas cannot claim to have made an effort to produce green space. Their offerings consist of (1) a playground

that unnecessarily duplicates one that already exists nearby at the Varna Community Center, one that the community has already invested heavily in, and (2) a community garden that unnecessarily duplicates the community garden on Freese Road that already is available for anyone to use. In order for these facilities to be considered benefits to the community, Trinitas would have needed to conduct a survey to see how many people of the community find the current playground and community garden too inconvenient, and would utilize the new playground and garden. Without doing this assessment, Trinitas has no business advertising these as community benefits. In fact, if the garden plot is as underutilized as it might be, it would turn easily into more of a net eyesore to the community than a benefit.

An easement for one-half of the trail has already been granted by the current owner, so that, too, cannot be counted as evidence of Trinitas' going out of their way to provide needed benefits to the community.

The Varna Plan statement of wanting green spaces that "cater to a family and student community" is being interpreted by Trinitas as a welcoming invitation for a large student-dominated development. The Plan indicates that students are welcome as part of our community as a part of a well-mixed environment containing home-owners, families, students, professionals, retirees, etc. A proposal to introduce an enormous student population that will then dominate the rest of these groups runs completely counter to the message the plan conveys.

For Trinitas to claim that plenty of families will be willing to live in the midst of an overwhelmingly student-dominated environment, it needed to provide evidence from other comparable developments that this has happened. No effort to provide this evidence has been made by Trinitas, and we can only speculate as to why, especially since they have indicated throughout their discussions that their primary target for their development is 18 to 24-year-olds.

3. Trinitas Statement: "Trinitas has put considerable effort into site design to ensure green space is maximized to over sixty percent of available land and public access to green space amenities is readily available. These design items include: public trail access and parking along Mt. Pleasant Road for the Varna Trail,"

Critique: Providing 60% of the site as green space is a requirement, not a demonstration of the interest by Trinitas in adding to the community's rural open-space character. Further, Trinitas was able to meet this goal (by their calculation) only by claiming that 1800 linear feet of sidewalk that winds through the project, connecting parking lots to its buildings, is trail access because the last several hundred feet connect the upper buildings and parking lots to the trail.

In point of fact, Trinitas indicates that 47.3% of the parcel will be impervious surface, leaving only 52.7% as non-impervious, what most of us think of as "green space". This does not demonstrate an interest in preserving the community's rural open-space character.

4. Trinitas Statement: "creation of a community garden with pedestrian access available to all Varna residents,"

Critique: As I mentioned above, their proposed community garden unnecessarily duplicates the availability residents already have to a community garden on Freese Road. That garden is already manured, plowed, and disked each year by Cornell for free for the community. Trinitas has provided no

plan for providing these services for their proposed garden plot, and without these services this plot is likely to turn into an underutilized eyesore.

Trinitas would have needed to conduct a survey to see how many people of the community find the community garden too inconvenient and would consequently utilize the new garden. Without doing this assessment, Trinitas cannot advertise these as community benefits.

5. Trinitas Statement: “construction of a pocket playground along Varna Trail, and proposed dedication of land across Route 366 for a future park adjacent to Fall Creek.”

Critique: As I mentioned above, the pocket playground unnecessarily duplicates a large playground that already exists nearby at the Varna Community Center, one that the community has already invested heavily in and one the community wants to see continued to be heavily used. The dedication of land for a future park is a questionable benefit since it, too, duplicates a nearby public park next to Fall Creek (Park Park, maintained by the Cornell Botanic Garden and open to the public), and since the development of such a park will depend on funds being available from the town, not Trinitas.

6. Trinitas Statement: “In addition to this focus on green amenities, Trinitas has incorporated many of the development characteristics noted in the example communities outlined as "Types of Development the Community Liked" into the design for the Village at Varna (p.27). Specifically, similarities in design can be found between the Village at Varna and all four of the communities outlined in the Plan.”

Critique: Claiming that the Trinitas 219-unit townhouse development, at 13.1 units per acre is similar and should be considered the same as the examples of "Types of Development the Community Liked" shown in the Plan on pages 27-30 makes no sense. These examples of development the community favored consist of (1) townhouses on Forest Home drive, with 20 units at 8 units per acre, (2) townhouses in Varna Hollow with 90 units at 6 units per acre, (3) cottage homes and townhouses on Varna Commons with 50 units at 8 units per acre, and (4) single family homes with a few townhouses on Trailside with 90 units at 10 units per acre. None of them approach either the size and density of Trinitas. Further, none of these examples has more than 6 units per building, while Trinitas has buildings with 28 units, 26, 24, 15, 12, 12, etc.

7. Trinitas Statement: “For example, Trinitas has utilized similar townhome design as seen in the "Forest Home Drive" and "Varna Commons" communities.”

Critique: As indicated above, there is a vast difference between the townhome design shown in these examples where no building contains more than 6 units, and those long linear buildings of Trinitas with 28 units, 26, 24, 15, 12, 12, etc., and without the staggered townhouse design shown in Varna Hollow or the small buildings of Forest Home Drive, or the mixtures of professional office, cottages, and townhouses shown in Varna Commons.

Further, although unfortunately our zoning does not define “townhouse”, the common understanding of the term in which a single townhouse goes from ground level to roof is in sharp contrast to the concept being proposed by Trinitas. Trinitas defines townhouses as two apartments, a flat at ground level and a multi-story apartment above. Further, almost all common definitions of “townhouse” identify it as a single residence that shares walls with other residences. No mention is made of sharing floors. In fact,

most definitions indicate that adjacent townhouses are owned by different people.

8. Trinitas Statement: “These townhomes will provide additional housing options to Varna capable of serving multiple populations including families, seniors, young professionals, and students, as is desired in the "Varna Hollow" design.”

Critique: While it is a nice goal to house a mixed diversity with substantial numbers of each of these multiple populations together, the town must require Trinitas to demonstrate a desire and a mechanism for attracting each of these to live there. For Trinitas to claim that plenty of families will be willing to live in the midst of an overwhelmingly student dominant environment, it needs to provide evidence from other comparable developments that this has happened. No effort to provide this evidence has been made by Trinitas. Without a distinct and viable plan to make this happen, the overwhelming likelihood is that this development will be almost entirely populated by students, who, it can be seen elsewhere, often make it uncomfortable for a family with children to reside in their midst.

9. Trinitas Statement: “In addition, accessible footpaths to connect Route 366 to Varna Trail will exist onsite as was encouraged in the "Trailside" development.”

Critique: Trinitas is providing accessible footpaths from two of the parking lots to the Varna Trail. However, it is not reasonable for them to claim that sidewalks that go to the buildings and parking lots, with an addition part that connects to the trail, should be considered a connector from Rt 366 to the Varna trail. There are other more easily used access points, such as off of Mt Pleasant Rd and the trail behind the Varna Community Center to Hillside Acres that will have a short extension to connect to the trail.

10. Trinitas Statement: “Lastly, care has been taken in ensuring the architectural design of the community fits in well with the character of the existing structures currently located in the Hamlet.”

Critique: The Varna Guidelines for Development state clearly that long linear features, “cookie cutter” repetition, mass buildings, and extensive parking lots should be avoided (page 8). Unfortunately, these features are exactly what is being proposed, with variation largely being created only by slight paint variation (see figure below).



BUILDING 3 - FRONT ELEVATION

The guidelines call for varying lot frontages and depths within each streetscape to maintain the hamlet's random lot pattern.

Further, the guidelines state that it is important to preserve and incorporate existing buildings into new

development when possible. Existing, character-establishing structures should be incorporated into development plans, and/or adaptively reused, where feasible. The guidelines say to retain key facade features of existing buildings (e.g. windows, trim, ornamental details, doors). No attempt to keep existing buildings is being done; they will all be torn down.

The Guidelines indicate that buildings and public spaces should be proportional to pedestrians, as well as the buildings around them. The typical building in this part of Varna is 2 stories high. Even though the Trinitas proposes having building height right up to the maximum building height in the Guidelines of 40 feet in height, but not more than that, the proposal violates the Guideline that buildings should be no more than three stories by having buildings that contain 4 stories (see figure below).



BUILDING 11 - BACK ELEVATION

The Guidelines state “Maintain a mix of housing types of different historic styles to retain the architectural feel of the hamlet.” This development guarantees that the architectural feel of housing diversity within the hamlet will be lost.

11. Trinitas Statement: “The site plan complies with the Varna Community Development Plan adopted December 2012.”

Critique: Below are listed all of the additional ways that the Trinitas proposal continues to conflict with the Varna Plan and therefore contradicts the above statement made by Trinitas.

ADDITIONAL CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE TRINITAS PROPOSAL AND THE VARNA PLAN

1) The Varna Plan cites among its most important goals, “regulating hamlet transformations so that the character of the community is maintained or shifts slowly, not in dramatic steps” (page 40).

The Trinitas proposal violates this goal by a near-doubling of the population of Varna overnight. This intensity of growth through one development is a very drastic, sudden, and dramatic step.

2) The Varna Plan mentions in many places that maintaining and protecting the character of the hamlet is the highest priority, including such statements as “many of the very specific recommendations have to do directly with continuing the character of a hamlet as described here” (page 40). The Trinitas proposal shows no appreciation of the current character of the hamlet as described in the Varna Plan, and offers no steps to ensure that the character will be continued.

The Trinitas proposal consists of:

- a) a series of long massive linear buildings;
- b) three times the density
- c) “cookie cutter” repetition,
- d) few housing types with little to distinguish one unit from another other than paint,
- e) little variety in setbacks and general design,
- f) extensive parking lots buildings,
- g) surrounded by an area consisting of 47.3% impervious surface,
- h) structures that are built too tall so that they reduce pedestrian's sense of security, and
- i) without buildings that are proportionate to people.

Most of these items are precisely the features that the Varna Design Guidelines warns against because they do not continue hamlet character.

In contrast, the hamlet character surrounding this project consists of, among other characteristics,

- a) 1/3rd the density,
- b) varied setbacks,
- c) small buildings containing no more than 6 attached units,
- d) rural open-space character
- e) buildings that are proportionate to people to maintain the intimate feel of the hamlet.

Nothing in the wealth of documents they have provided mentions the goals of maintaining a sense of rural community, of keeping the feeling of an open distribution of building so you can see the natural green landscape beyond, of striving for a mixture of income levels and a mixture of housing type opportunities.

3) The first goal of the Varna Plan is to “Protect and enhance hamlet character” (page 34), and in particular to “utilize existing infrastructure to potential without degrading or changing overall character” (page 34).

The Plan clearly states, “The primary purpose of this plan is to find the means for encouraging redevelopment and new development in the hamlet, but in a way that compliments, continues and improves upon the current character” (page 37).

The character of Varna is defined as described in (2) above, and the Plan adds to this description by indicating that the Varna hamlet, like other hamlets, “has a defined boundary and you can often see the surrounding open space from almost any point in the hamlet area; there is no street pattern or grid, and buildings are arranged linearly along a main road with one or more crossroads. The buildings are well spaced lending to a feeling of openness, and there is a mix of uses scattered along the roadway” (page 36).

The Trinitas proposal does not have buildings that are well-spaced, and therefore do not lend to a feeling of openness. Further, the Trinitas proposal does not allow site lines where the surrounding open space can be seen from almost any point. Consequently, instead of maintaining the elements of the hamlet character, it deteriorates that character.

4) The Varna Plan's Goal #3 is to "protect and improve the quality of life in the hamlet" (page 35). The objectives for reaching this goal included:

☞ "Identify limits of development relative to traffic, bulk and density of buildings" (page 35).

☞ "Create landscape standards that are in keeping with a relaxed, quaint country hamlet i.e. low maintenance, basic landscape standards" (page 35).

A nearly doubling of the population of Varna in one project is not a recipe for "standards that are in keeping with a relaxed, quaint country hamlet".

5) The Varna Plan cites among its goals, "encouraging home ownership". The Trinitas proposal does not encourage home ownership, but instead removes a parcel from potential development that the Plan identified as an opportunity to add a community of single-family homes in a Traditional Neighborhood Design arrangement.

6) In the Dryden Zoning Law, Section 701: Design Guidelines and Standards: it states, "All development and re-development of Lots and property in Varna shall comply with the Varna Design Guidelines and Landscape Standards". The Guidelines (page 8) state, "Maximum building height for buildings should be no more than three stories and 40 feet in height". The Trinitas Plan, with a building façade that clearly appears to be 4 stories tall, is in conflict with both the Design Guidelines and the Dryden Zoning Law.

7) In the Varna Plan, in Buildings and Form Recommendations (pg. 69), it states, "Each new house or townhouse should face open, green space to encourage healthy, active living that is consistent with the existing character of the hamlet."

In the Trinitas Improvement-Site-plan, almost all of the buildings face a parking lot, and almost none of the buildings face substantial open, green spaces. Almost all of these parking lots do not have so much as a small bit a green center median.

8) The Varna Design Guidelines & Landscape Standards, page 2) states that, "despite physical appearance, the character of Varna is defined by a variety of building and lot forms, patterns, and configurations which contribute to the resident's sense of community". "Unlike conventional developments, hamlets typically retain housing and development patterns similar to many nineteenth-century neighborhoods—unintentional varying lot sizes and setbacks. Common hamlet characteristics include a commons or central green, dominant civic/institutional buildings (such as a church, court house, etc.), with predominantly single-family residential homes and limited mixed-use buildings adjacent to the community center."

In the Trinitas Site plan", there is none of the variety of buildings and patterns, with the exception of the smaller U-shaped area on the most southerly corner of the parcel. The Trinitas proposal contains almost no single-family residential homes, completely upsetting any efforts to bring the hamlet back to a reasonable mix of single-family homes and rental apartments.

9) The Varna Plan presents an example of a development the community liked on the parcel on which

Trinitas seeks to place 219 student townhouse/apartments. Pictured in the Varna Plan (page 28) are approximately 90 “single-family home development with townhomes at 10 du/acre”. The emphasis of this site design is single-family homes with alleyways so that each building fronts green space. This type of development is commonly referred to as Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND)”, and would include a variety of single-family houses, with a small amount of townhouses and duplexes, “to create quaint neighborhoods that fit into the landscape” (page 69).

The Trinitas proposal ignores following any aspect of this example, with the exception of the townhouses. They propose to develop the site at a higher density and a number of units more than double of that pictured.

10) The Varna Plan describes the character of Varna as “a quaint rural suburb” that “affords a quality of life that has kept many residents in the area for years, while attracting new families, professionals and students” (page 31).

The Trinitas proposal seeks to provide housing nearly exclusively for students. As mentioned above, the Plan welcomes students as a part of the community, not an overwhelming majority of the community.

11) In the Varna Plan, it states as a goal to, “allow growth to occur in such a way where building footprints, new uses and amenities fit in to the existing fabric of Varna” (page 31). It further states, “. . . the general plan is to find the means for encouraging redevelopment and new development in the hamlet, but in a way that compliments and continues the current character” (page 66).

The Trinitas proposal fails to demonstrate how any aspect of its development fits into the existing fabric of Varna. It proposes development that neither compliments nor continues the current character. Trinitas’ idea, as presented in their proposal, is that all that is needed to compliment the current character of the hamlet is to have wood-like horizontal-slatted exterior siding and a peaked dormer over the entry way. The architectural and landscape character of the current hamlet is much more than that.

12) The Varna Plan states that, in referring to specific zoning controls involving regulating the bulk and area requirements of a site, “These controls should still be a minimum standard, something that the development community should seek to not only meet, but to exceed in form and character and performance” (page 43).

The Trinitas proposal attempts only to meet the minimum bulk and area requirements, with no effort to exceed these minimums in either protecting local character or performance.

13) Although the Trinitas proposal offers a small amount of commercial space, and in the Varna community “there was also a desire for the return of some local services that did not require using the automobile”, the Varna Plan specifically indicates that the hamlet does not need additional population in order to support these services should a developer seek to provide them. It states, “Fortunately, Varna has the population to support such services to a limited extent, which is subsidized by the higher traffic counts on Route 366” (page 66).

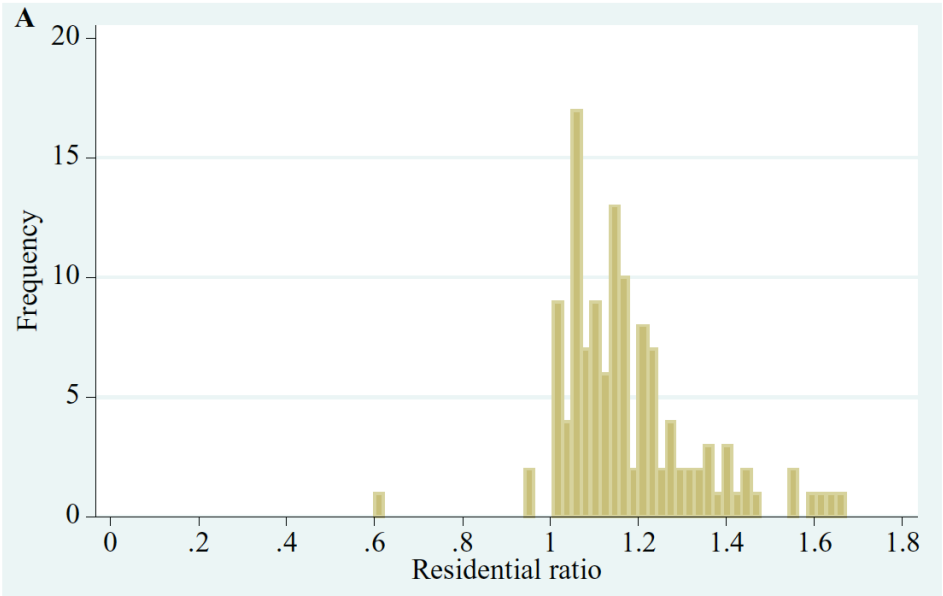
Therefore, any claim that Trinitas might make that it is only through this density of development that Varna can meet its stated desire for a return of some local services is incorrect. The Plan indicates that between current population and the high traffic counts, Varna can already meet this need.

14) Finally, the Trinitas proposal fails to acknowledge the widely-verified scientific finding that residential developments such as this one are very likely to cost the taxpayers of Dryden money for road repair, added police, fire, and emergency services, etc. A recent review of such developments throughout the United States found only 3 communities of the 125 studied in which municipal expenditures by the community were less than the amount brought in through revenue. (Kotche, M.J., and S. L. Schulte. 2009. A Meta-Analysis of Cost of Community Service Studies, International Regional Science Review, Volume 32 Number 3: 376-399).

Here is the results table from their review of 125 communities from a wide variety of community types. The average community had to spend 20% more funds than they received from revenue of residential projects, and for some communities, 70% more.

Given this likely high cost to taxpayers of Dryden, Trinitas must be required to demonstrate how this high cost will be worth the taxpayers of the town subsidizing the development.

Figure 2
Frequency Distributions of Cost of Community Service Study Ratios for Residential, Commercial/Industrial, and Agricultural/Open-Space Land Uses



Ratio of expenditures over revenues for residential land uses

Frequency=number of studies finding this ratio