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Dear members of the Dryden Planning Board and Town Board,

There are issues concerning the proposed INHS development at the corner of Freese Road and Rt 366 that I would like to make sure you consider in your deliberations about possible approval of this project. I have listed these concerns below, and in an addendum, I have included my summary of a discussion I have had with Lynn Truame, Director of Real Estate Development at INHS in which she explained many relevant details of INHS's intent for the project. While it is not my intent to argue vehemently against this proposal, it is very important that you require firm commitments from INHS on several issues to make sure this development adds a positive to the Varna community instead of a serious negative.

We all want to see well-managed moderate to low income housing opportunities expanded in Tompkins County. Of course, as an immediate neighbor, I am not thrilled with such large development going in next door. That said, I recognize that we need this type of housing, and if not placed here, on a bus route and serviced by water and sewer, where is a better place for it (although the residents still will not be able to get to a food store with transferring buses)? It's going to be someone's neighbor. The responsibility of the permitting process is to ensure that (1) this development is sized in a way that is absolutely necessary considering funding constraints yet still fits in to the Varna hamlet, and (2) is managed so that it does not bring problems to the Varna hamlet.

My concerns are with:

1. The total number of units in this proposal, and especially with a hulking 3 story building for me and my neighbors to stare at, particularly when the leaves are down. The Varna Plan envisioned smaller developments of about 20 units instead of the 53 apartments proposed here. I understand that INHS is convinced that they could not secure the necessary funding for building the development and for operating it unless it contained at least 50 units. They should be asked to provide documentation that this is indeed the case.

This includes the necessity for providing documents as to why a 3-story building, with square footage (11,000) over twice as large as what is envisioned as the normal goal (5000) in the town's zoning. You can grant them a special permit for going over this goal, but the Board's ability grant such a special permit was never envisioned to allow blowing the square footage goal out of the water.

2. Can INHS maintain a general level of safety within and around the development? The lower income ArtHouse project, built by another developer, has had reported problems of crime and vandalism that have not been dealt with. Like INHS, the developers of that project promised to have a supervisor on site every day to make sure that when these problems started developing they would be dealt with immediately. However, I have

been told that they have not followed through on that promise at ArtHouse, and consequently the development has created problems for the community and residents that may be larger than the problem it was trying to fix. Detailed commitments from INHS are needed to make sure this situation does not happen here.

3. I talked with the real estate manager at INHS about this issue, and she made the same promise to have a supervisor on site every day to deal with any problems. They need to be held to this promise, and to identify strict procedures they will follow to fix issues if they started occurring.
4. I have talked to neighbors of the Hancock Street INHS development, and they said that the development has been a better neighbor than they anticipated. However, they said that there are still incidents of vandalism to neighborhood properties, mostly cause by unsupervised teens and younger children. INHS needs to specify exactly how they will act to minimize such impacts on the neighborhood in Varna.
5. There is always the concern with the potential impact on Fall Creek, with its banks only 100 feet away. We've already had to deal with partying at the Creek, with all the noise and trash being left that goes along with it. I've worked at being as protective of the Creek as possible, purchasing several parcels of land to create as much of a buffer as possible, but the Creek remains vulnerable to the kind of abuse that can come from a dense population living right near its shores.

Thanks for the time and attention, and, hopefully, strong considerations of these issues in the Planning Board deliberations.

David Weinstein

## Summary of meeting with Lynn Truame of INHS concerning proposed 59-unit development

May 20, 2024

I met with Lynn Truame of Ithaca Neighborhood Housing (INHS) yesterday to discuss their proposed 59-unit (53 apartments and 6 houses for sale) development at the corner of Freese Rd and Rt 366.

General comments about the project.

1. I believe that given that the Town of Dryden had already approved the Mayfly development, 15 single family homes (2 and 3 bedrooms each), and 32 apartment units (65 bedrooms it is unlikely that the Town is not going to approve this one for 6 single family homes, (4 2-bedroom + 2 3-bedroom, and 53 1 and 2 bedroom apartments (65 bedrooms).

2. One of my objections to Mayfly was that the project was way out of scale for the hamlet, far outpacing the latest development of 42 apartments (Cayuga Ridge) and the developments before that on the west side at the bottom of the hill next to Hillside Acres, the one going up the hill on the east side, and the new Planned Unit Development at 1061 Dryden Road. In addition, I pointed out that the Varna Plan suggested that the goal for new developments was to keep them on the smaller side, about 20 or so units each. The proposed development is equally out-of-scale to the existing developments in the hamlet. It would be preferable to reduce the number of units closer to this 20-unit mark, but Ms. Truame indicated that it would be extremely difficult for INHS to find necessary funding for the project if the number of units was below 50.

3. There will be lights from the back windows of the apartments, particularly with 3 stories and 11,000 sq ft in the building facing Fall Creek. This situation will create an environmental disturbance to neighbors and to the Cornell Botanic Garden's Fall Creek nature preserve. While being unable to do anything about that, Ms. Truame assured me that no safety lights will shine off the site, only directed downward, although there probably will be at least 2 street lights in the parking lot, or the minimum required to provide adequate lighting, as determined by the electrical engineer.

4. Another of my objections was about the disturbing visibility to neighbors and Freese Rd travelers of the 3-story particularly in the winter when the trees are leafless. The Varna Plan indicates, "*New construction should be or appear to be a maximum of two stories in height.*" As stated previously, the building will be so out of proportion to anything else in Varna. The Varna Mixed Use zone for this parcel limits the size of an individual building to 5000 square feet unless they receive a Special Permit from the Town, and this building will contain 11,000 square feet. Asking for a Special Permit that allows doubling the standard square footage seems to violate the goals behind the 5000 square foot regulation.

5. I acknowledged that this development will provide a lot of affordable housing, which in the new Town Comprehensive Plan (2022) is listed as one of the highest priorities for the Town.

INHS does not yet know what the 6 houses will sell for. The cost could be around \$175,000 each, but this is currently based on a rough estimate of the sales price of a two-bedroom home affordable to a family earning 80% of the area median income; a three-bedroom home that's affordable at 80% AMI would be priced closer to \$195,000. Again, these are very rough estimates at the moment and will almost certainly change.

Although INHS has not yet settled on the rents for the apartments, they probably will rent in the general range of \$500/month to \$1600/ month depending on the income of the renter, whether it is a 1-bedroom (most of the apartments are), or whether it is a 2-bedroom. This is an estimate subject to change. The rent charged can be determined only after an update once INHS has an idea of what the utility and other operating costs will be.

6. It is important that affordable housing is being created, as long as the development is being carefully supervised and the occupants are being required to live up to a reasonable standard. In my conversations with Lynn Truame, she outlined lot of procedures that are designed to make sure few problems arise in the development. It will be up to the Dryden Planning and Town Boards to commit INHS to make sure they implement and maintain all of these procedures, and are capable dealing with problems going forward.

7. Total cost of the project is currently estimated at \$22.5 million. Cost per square foot of construction is \$276/sq ft; cost per square foot of the total project is \$363/sq ft. INHS is estimating that the equity from Low Income Housing Tax Credits will cover 64% of the cost of the project. The balance is covered by loans from the State of NY, a \$100,000 grant from the Tompkins County Housing Development Fund, loans from INHS itself, and a conventional bank loan. The loans will all have a 30 year term. The project is subject to a 50 year Regulatory Agreement, which requires that INHS remains in compliance with all State-mandated operating requirements for the entirety of that period.

#### WHY DOES THE DEVELOPMENT HAVE TO BE SO LARGE.

1. Why switch from 15 houses to 6? We both agreed that a “tiny timber” grouping of 15 houses was a great idea to help people buy into the housing market. She said they explored it with the current land owner in 2019, and of course that was the owner’s original idea, but he couldn’t make it work financially. Consequently, INHS had to reduce the number of houses to a bare minimum, supported by the financing they could get from the apartment complex.

2. Why go from 32 apartments all the way up to 53? The reason is centered in the means of funding. I believe Mayfly was going to fund the project by paying back the loans they secured through charging \$2500/month to \$3500/month for each apartment. They were a profit-making entity, while INHS is non-profit. Mayfly may have been willing to rent 3 and 4 bedroom apartments to groups of college students, which is a more lucrative enterprise.

INHS has to follow rules set by the State and Federal Governments to get grants and low interest loans to supplement money that they were able to raise from private equity investors. INHS is a non-profit organization, but the private equity investors are in the financing business to get tax credits from building low-income housing as the “profit” from their investments. These private

equity investors will provide funding only if the development exceeds certain thresholds, which in this case is 50+ apartments.

Note that while Mayfly was going to average about 2 bedrooms per apartment, a total of 65 bedrooms, INHS will average only 1.2 bedrooms per apartment, a total of 65 again. I noted that I disliked it when developers sought to squeeze out every last unit allowable under the zoning rather than size a development so that it fits in with the scale of the rest of the community, but she said they didn't have much of a choice in this case. The total number of bedrooms, including the houses, will be 79, whereas with Mayfly it could have been over 100.

In this zone, they are allowed to have 6 apartments per acre, plus 4 apartments with a green bonus, plus 4 apartments for a redevelopment bonus (which they can claim because houses formerly occupied the site). That gives a total of 14 apartments per acre, so on 4.18 acres (excluding the acres for the 6 houses) they can have 59 apartments, so 53 is less than this amount.

#### WHAT FEATURES WILL ALLOW INHS TO GET THE GREEN DEVELOPMENT BONUS?

To qualify for the subsidies, they have to meet the requirements of the Enterprise 2020+ Green Community Standards. These will include air-source heat pumps for heating and EV charging stations.

Enterprise Green Communities 2020+ is just one of the "green building" layers INHS has to comply with. Their State funding agency also has their own sustainability requirements and it is they who require the EV charging stations (as well as all-electric buildings).

#### WILL THERE BE AN ON-SITE MANAGER? HOW WILL COMPLAINTS BE HANDLED? HOW WILL INHS POLICE "BAD ACTORS" IF THERE ARE ANY?

There will be a property manager, hired by INHS, who will have an office on site and who will be in residence at least once a day. Ms. Truame stated, "INHS wants to be good neighbors, and wants the development to be a positive contribution to the Varna community." The Varna community members who have problems or concerns with things like excessive noise, garbage being deposited in the surrounding area, bad behavior, etc., can go to this person to lodge a complaint. INHS maintains a strict code of conduct and will work closely with the residents to make sure any problem can be readily resolved.

Ms. Truame emphasized that the property manager really puts a lot of effort into getting to know the residents and working with them to resolve personal problems (loss of job leading to being behind in paying rent, etc.) before they become major issues. Ms. Truame did say that INHS has had to allow residents to skip months for rent paying if they feel the circumstances and good faith of the renter warrant it. She did emphasize that if problems continue, they make it clear that eviction will follow, and they have had to evict folks infrequently.

INHS has a rigorous process in which they review the applications of those wanting to live in the residence. They conduct background and credit checks, police records, employment history,

comments from previous or current landlords, etc., to make sure that “bad apples” are not allowed to rent. They are quite concerned with the possibilities of individuals disturbing the peace and want to prevent them from getting the chance, according to Ms. Truame.

The INHS application review is entirely governed by the requirements of our major funder, New York State Homes and Community Renewal. History of drug use is not something they are permitted to screen for, but illegal drug use can be a cause for eviction.

They do not rent to students, and everyone has to sign a lease. Everyone who moves in has to be on the lease. No single renter is permitted to invite a significant other to later move in with them and share the apartment. Families are allowed into one bedroom apartments when they have very small children, but when the child reaches a young age they are required to have their own bedroom.

In talking with someone who lives close to the INHS Hancock St development (and who loudly opposed the development in the first place), the report is that the development is better than was expected, but problems with excessive noise, partying, and some window-breaking vandalism from youths still remain. It is important that INHS find ways to reduce these types of problems.

INHS will partner with another agency to provide support for the residents of the eight special-needs units in the project (the support person will not be an INHS employee).

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