CORNELL COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN

phase one - Opportunities and Principles Open Houses
Summary of Comments

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Phase 1 of the Comprehensive Master Plan for Cornell University concluded with two community open houses, where students, faculty, staff and the broader Ithaca community had the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the key findings from Phase 1, including the principles that will guide the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP). The first open house, held in Willard Straight Hall on the Cornell campus, was attended by over 200 participants. The second open house, held in the Downtown Ithaca Hilton Garden Inn, was attended by almost 150 participants. Comments were submitted on sticky notes, comment sheets, by email and through the project website following the open houses. All comments received have been consolidated in this summary. The materials on display at the open houses are available at [http://masterplan.cornell.edu](http://masterplan.cornell.edu).

**Process**

*Participants expressed their gratitude for the open process in the development of the CMP, noting in particular the involvement of residents of the surrounding communities.* Some participants noted that the consultants should persistently pursue student involvement in the CMP, and the findings of the CMP should be integrated with Cornell’s academic programs. These comments were supported by a reminder that the CMP must ultimately support the academic mission of the University.

**Campus Structure**

*Many participants were supportive of intensification on campus to curb sprawl.* Some highlighted the need to protect key open spaces like Dilmun Hill, the gorges, and the orchards and to find a balance between open space protection and increased density. Many participants supported the notion of a unified and consistent campus to increase cohesiveness throughout the core campus and to improve the character of East Campus. Suggestions included consolidating outlying areas into main campus, such as East Hill Plaza and the adjacent athletic fields, to further improve cohesiveness and connectivity. Some supported the notion of creating a mixed use campus and clustering services in high traffic areas.

**Social Experience/Infrastructure**

*Of the comments relating to social experience on campus, improving and expanding existing facilities was repeated the most.* Participants called for more social hubs and amenities on campus, and suggested improvement and expansion of places such as Willard Straight and the Big Red Barn. A number of participants highlighted the need for more amenities at night, and supported the notion of a 24-hour campus. Increased day care facilities were recommended, as well as more support for arts and culture in general, including more public art on campus.

**Natural/Open Space**

*Many participants noted the importance of identifying, protecting, and revitalizing natural and open space.* Specific suggestions included the need to clean Beebe Lake and protect the gorges, possibly through minimum development buffers. On a larger scale, participants recommended participating with the County’s Natural Features Focus Areas initiative, protecting Cornell’s water supply through management of the Fall Creek watershed, ensuring non-central University services develop in or near existing community nodes, and clarifying the notion of the proposed Countryside Line. Many participants expressed an interest in protecting existing greenspace and natural areas on campus, and some suggested that areas such as Cascadilla Creek and Red Bud Woods be restored to their previous natural conditions. Participants recommended creating more open spaces at places such as Bailey Hall plaza, citing existing areas like Ho Plaza and the space between Uris and Olin libraries as examples. The desire for productive agricultural space on campus and sustainable landscaping were also highlighted by some participants.
**TRANSPORTATION & MOVEMENT**

*Transportation and movement was the subject of a significant portion of open house comments.* Many participants called for improvements to the greater transportation system, such as noting improved links to Downtown, improved access to campus for local residents, a transportation system that meets all travel needs (not just work to home), modal integration, a Complete Streets policy, support for existing trail networks, pedestrian and bicycle connectivity and infrastructure, and universal plan for walkability bikeability.

*Walkability and cycling were common themes,* with participants recommending pedestrian priority and improving pedestrian safety on campus. Suggested improvements to pedestrian infrastructure included fixing network gaps, extending the path network to all parts of campus, improving and widening walkways, improving crosswalk safety and slowing vehicular traffic, considering pedestrian needs early in design processes, and improving snow clearance. Many participants highlighted the need for universal accessibility, stressing that pedestrian network gaps are not ADA compliant and that proximity and walkability mean different things to different people. Improved and increased bicycle facilities were a common theme, with participants recommending more bicycle lanes, better connections to Downtown, covered bicycle parking, bicycle lockers at perimeter parking lots, and support for a bike-share program.

*The transit system was another common topic, with many participants suggesting improvements.* Comments included the need to improve TCAT routes and expand the network, including frequent service to Wegmans and better connections to Downtown. Other suggestions included improving non-peak bus service, a comment noted by many; greening TCAT, possibly through electric transit; decreasing transit prices and offering winter months bus passes; point-to-point night service; park and ride facilities; and improved bus shelters that provide real time transit updates, and wayfinding information. A number of participants even suggested that the old trolley system be reinstated. Many participants supported the notion of free, frequent campus shuttles, like the West-Central-Vet Campus shuttle that once existed. Shuttle service was often suggested in conjunction with a peripheral parking system. On a larger scale, it was suggested that the University work to reintroduce rail service to New York City.

*Car traffic and especially parking emerged as strong themes in the transportation-related comments.* A large number of participants recommended restricting traffic on central campus, with some suggesting that traffic levels are already too high, that cars diminish campus community, and that roads be given to pedestrians during peak hours. Through-campus traffic was noted as undesirable, and suggestions to improve this included road tolls for through traffic, a ring road around campus, and a new north-south roadway east of central campus. Other comments included the need to minimize freight traffic through neighborhoods, implement central receiving, and improve the safety of the Hoy Road entrance to campus. There were many conflicting messages regarding parking, as some participants called for more and centralized parking, while others called for less parking and at the edge of campus. Many supported multi-level parking structures, both in the center of campus and at the periphery. Some suggested parallel parking on streets, more parking next to buildings, and underground parking under all new buildings. Participants also suggested that more staff parking be provided, that the cost of parking be reduced, and that the University move to pay-per-use parking. Others suggested less surface parking, that parking be removed from Tower Road, and that undergraduate parking be restricted or moved to the periphery.
ARCHITECTURE AND BUILT FORM

Participants made a number of suggestions regarding built form, with some suggesting taller buildings to preserve green space and walkability, while others recommended a human scale campus, a 4-storey height limit. It was even suggested that “large footprint” buildings be located off-campus. Recommendations specifically for new building included the need for adaptive buildings, that all should be “legacy” buildings, and that Cornell build “nicer looking” buildings. Many participants recommended that older buildings be revitalized, made more efficient, and adapted to new uses using principles of sustainability. Another participant suggested that Cornell needs efficient and effective ways to construct new buildings while phasing out obsolete buildings. Some participants expressed their desire to see historic artifacts, buildings, and areas retained, highlighting the areas surrounding Ezra Cornell’s original home. More specific comments included suggestions to replace Day Hall, to improve the aesthetics of the Engineering Quad, and improve the North Campus and West Campus residential areas.

SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

Many participants noted the importance of Cornell’s relationship with surrounding communities. Recommendations included considering impacts, including environmental, of activities and development on communities; working collaboratively on land use planning and growth management; supporting economic growth; ensuring predictability through the CMP; and increasing in-lieu-of-tax contributions. Participants noted the importance of protecting surrounding neighborhoods, such as Forest Home, areas west of Stewart Ave., and historic districts in general. Participants also highlighted the importance of the interface between the University and surrounding communities, both praising its unique character and calling for improvement. Some participants imagined East Hill Plaza as a future mixed-use residential community while others supported its current role as a local commercial plaza. Many participants encouraged an even stronger University role in Downtown Ithaca, suggesting more public-private partnerships, University administrative offices, a visitor/welcome center, affordable housing, and other traffic-generating uses that could contribute to further economic development.

COLLEGETOWN

Many participants were supportive of Cornell taking an increased role in revitalizing Collegetown, though it was noted that the University should tread lightly, especially in established neighborhoods. While participants noted that students are happy in Collegetown, others noted that living conditions could be improved and that students must cooperate in property maintenance. There was support for improving and better maintaining public space, noting specifically the space outside of the performing arts building.

HOUSING

Housing was noted by a variety of participants as an important component of the CMP. Some highlighted the shortage of housing for students, especially for graduate and transfer students, and suggested that the University improve existing housing stock and invest in more on-campus housing. Grad student housing was also noted as being expensive. One participant suggested Greek housing be used by the University housing for residential colleges, while another was unconvinced that the Greek system needed direction from the CMP. Downtown was suggested as a location for additional housing, but many participants proposed East Hill Plaza as future location for student, faculty, and staff housing, possibly modeling it as a mixed-use, New Urbanist community. A number of participants recommended that Cornell support affordable housing initiatives and provide homeowner assistance for staff and new faculty. It was noted that any future approach to housing will have implications for sustainability.
**SUSTAINABILITY**

An overwhelming number of participants expressed support for sustainability in the CMP, noting that it cannot be an afterthought and must be detailed and specific. Integrated planning and evaluation methods were identified as tools necessary to support sustainability. Many participants focused on climate change, suggesting that Cornell aim to be carbon neutral. The notion that Cornell could emerge as a “living lab” and world leader in sustainability was suggested, with participants noting the importance of integrating academic and extracurricular activities to achieve these objectives. Many practical suggestions were given, including the need to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, promote efficient use of resources, improve stormwater management, and reduce consumption in general. Many participants suggested that Cornell implement green building standards and that all new buildings be LEED certified. Many others recommended that Cornell explore alternative energy sources such as wind and solar. A participant recommended that the CMP achieve practicality before sustainability, universal accessibility, and other such “lofty” goals.

Limiting campus growth was a central theme. Many participants noted that Cornell should not grow too quickly, especially if the population is not growing. Participants suggested that growth should be considered from a perspective of sustainability and questioned the notion that bigger is better. A number of participants stated that Cornell should stop building and use existing buildings more effectively, with the suggestion that an inventory of existing space be conducted before further growth occurs.

**ATHLETICS & RECREATION**

Participants identified a need to preserve or increase recreational space, noting that health and wellness through recreation should be a priority. It was noted that non-varsity athletic clubs compete for field space and that recreational facilities on North Campus are old and inadequate. Participants had mixed feelings regarding Alumni Fields. Some commented that the CMP should limit future development on the Fields and preserve practice and competition facilities close to campus, noting that the negative impacts of moving athletic facilities should be considered. It was noted that should Alumni Fields be developed, a transportation solution for athletes would be required.

**VISITOR EXPERIENCE**

Participants highlighted the importance of improving the visitor experience of Cornell, many reinforcing the need for a visitor or welcome center. Suggestions included a visitor center at East Hill Plaza to serve visitor traffic via Route 79 and that Cornell could take direction from Harvard’s visitor center. Improving visitor transportation and parking options was noted, as was the need to cater to alumni visiting campus.

**SECURITY**

Participants noted that safety is an important issue, with suggestions ranging from improving lighting deficiencies to adding more blue lights.