Adopted by the Board of Trustees, January 27, 1989

COMPREHENSIVE POLICIES
for the
PHYSICAL PLANNING AND DESIGN OF THE ITHACA CAMPUS
of
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT
On May 24, 1972, the Board of Trustees approved a set of policies entitled “Comprehensive Policies for the Physical Planning and Design for the Ithaca Campus of Cornell University” to guide the physical development of the Cornell campus. During the 1987-88 academic year, the Campus Planning Office, advised by the Campus Planning Committee, has been charged with developing a revision of that document. The 1988 revision is intended to serve as the basis for an overall campus plan for the next ten years.

The Cornell campus and its adjoining lands in the Ithaca/Tompkins County area are addressed in these comprehensive policies, which are intended to provide a framework for rational development on the central campus and in the surrounding region including the potential acquisition of new lands.

INTRODUCTION
Ezra Cornell's inspiration bequeathed Cornell a campus unique among all universities. On behalf of generations yet to come it is the responsibility of the inheritors of that bequest to preserve its qualities of greatness yet uphold Cornell's fundamental tradition of innovative response to contemporary need.

The campus, sometimes defined as “a beautiful site partly roofed,” is a physical setting of landscaped grounds, buildings, and circulation networks which together create an environment affecting all who visit, teach, study, work, and play within it. The Board of Trustees reaffirms its conviction that the quality of that environment is vital to the primary purposes of the University and that its excellence is a central concern of all who share responsibility for its development. To guide and discipline that development, the Board adopts the following principles of planning and design for the entire Ithaca campus.
CORNELL CAMPUS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan is the set of policies, drawings, and administrative processes which guide the physical development of the central campus and outlying campus areas. Each year, that portion of the plan composed of those projects considered likely for physical development within a five-year planning horizon will be presented for approval to the Board of Trustees.

Campus boundaries will, of necessity, change over time with the growth of the institution and its zones. It is the University policy to review the boundaries from time to time, formally recognizing such changes.

CAMPUS PLANNING AND DESIGN: ENDOWED AND STATUTORY

The provision of a comprehensive campus plan necessarily combines the physical plant interests of the Statutory as well as the Endowed University. While the architectural design and construction of major facilities for the Statutory Colleges of Cornell University are managed by the State University Construction Fund, it is intended that the following University physical planning policies apply to both Statutory and Endowed projects.

Facilities plans of Statutory units should receive planning and design examination and advice similar to that for Endowed projects, recognizing that review procedures must be coordinated with those established by the State University Construction Fund.

CAMPUS DESIGN

“If there is anything that unifies all great college campuses, it is a sense of wholeness—a sense of place, a feeling that the identities of individual buildings have been played down in favor of something larger. It is not that all the buildings look the same, although often enough they do, but the architect’s more compelling challenge is much subtler than playing a look-alike game, it lies in trying to make coherence out of different kinds of architecture, in trying to bring a diverse range of buildings in harmony.

1. Overall Campus Design

The overall design of the campus should be reviewed and managed in the framework of both two- and three-dimensional plans. While the campus is a continually evolving entity composed of many quite independent sectors or districts, a coherent conceptual system must unify, both visually and operationally, these pieces of the whole.

2. Outdoor Space

More important than the design of buildings, the design of outdoor spaces, their organization and quality, is a conscious act and a disciplined art, the supreme challenge of campus design.

Only rarely does the symbolic importance of a building justify its siting and design as a monument, free standing, focal, and symmetrical. In the context of total campus design, buildings are the principal element which enclose and shape outdoor space. The space so designed can be thought of as a series of outdoor rooms, some focal, some tributary, each sequentially related to others, each with its own scale, texture, and territorial identity, and each with the potential for enriching the experience of those who pass through, places of entrance, of gathering and interaction, places of solitude and intimacy, places of awe and sequences of contrast, surprise, and delight. Such is the stuff of which the human environment, its identifications, its memories are built. Of such is Cornell perceived as a place of being.

3. Vistas/Image of Campus (Views from and of Campus)

From the earliest days of the University and to student and visitor alike, memorable features of the campus have been the long views: across the valley to the west, up the Lake, and down the valley to the southwest. Though modified by the growth of trees and the erection of buildings, both on and off University property, there are still opportunities to recapture and enhance these vistas. Buildings should be sited and designed to preserve and take advantage of these remarkable views for both the pedestrian and the building occupant.

The list of certain specific views and vistas is to be included in a section of the Comprehensive Campus Plan. Evaluation and review of the list occurs as a part of the annual review of this section.
4. Density of Campus (land coverage, mass, height, and population)

From the beginning the main campus has been marked by a spaciousness considered one of its most distinctive and distinguished characteristics. In recognition of (1) the topographical constraints of the Fall Creek and Cascadilla gorges on the definition of the central Cornell campus, (2) the desired preservation of a compact campus, and (3) ever-present change within the University, issues of density in the central campus (between the gorges) and elsewhere will be rigorously examined such that the overall benefits of proposed additional space outweigh any potentially negative consequences.

Rather than invoking a campus-wide measure of a specified density, it is the policy of the University to manage density selectively, by campus area. Density characteristics of each particular area will reflect comprehensive plan policies and will be established through the development of area-wide design concepts including height and setback limits.

Within the context established by the Comprehensive Plan and University, objectives to preserve designated open spaces and building density on any given site will be managed through the establishment of height limitations, setback limitations, specifications regarding the potential for additions to existing structures, examination of underground construction potential, conventions related to convenient walking distances, general objectives for the creation and maintenance of open spaces, and vigilant attention to both immediate and more distant surroundings.

5. Vertical Development

In the effort to preserve a compact walking campus in periods of change and growth, increased density is inevitable. There will be more persons per acre and consequent pressure to cover more land with buildings. To keep open space it follows that only rarely can we enjoy the luxury of low and generously spread construction. The potentials of the vertical, down as well as up, must be explored and exploited.

Utmost care must be devoted to the design and location of medium- and high-rise structures in relation to both adjacent buildings and open space.

Within the context of the comprehensive plan for the campus, buildings or significant height and visibility should be of symbolic importance to the University as a whole, such as McGraw Tower.

To meet the need for centrally located facilities the potential for underground construction, where rock formation, soil conditions, and drainage permit, should be fully explored, measured, and inventoried. The slopes, plateaus, and sharp breaks in grade of the campus offer opportunities for the capture of useful square feet. Sensitively designed, such construction need not detract from but, in fact, can enhance the environmental quality of the central area. Herein may lay the key to the preservation of compactness and convenient walking distances.
6. Legibility of Campus (the Campus, its Boundaries, and Entrances)

It is University policy to enhance the ease with which users can orient themselves, become familiar with, and find their way around the campus. Some of the means to implement this policy include clearly defined campus boundaries and entrances; a consistent system of route, building and other locational signs; locational maps, directories, etc., located at important decision points; a clearly defined and easily comprehended circulation system; a system of distinctive campus districts; and a system of landmarks visible from the major routes of the circulation system. Lighting and landscaping systems should be designed to reinforce the legibility of the campus by making major routes and locations apparent.

LAND-USE PLANNING

1. Land-Use

Campus land use is the allocation of lands and building for the purposes of the University. Land should be allocated so as to make most effective overall use of University resources, and should account for topography, visual characteristics, views and vistas, ecology, desirable relationships between functions of the campus, student faculty interaction, circulation distances, and utilities distribution. Land use and planned development must be considered for the long range, beyond currently apparent thrusts of growth, to provide reasonable options for the future. Twenty-five or fifty year anticipation of needs is not too long for major land use and real estate decisions.

The land use planning process should include frequent review of allocations and needs for reuse and be linked to real estate decision processes.

2. Designation and Protection

Until the Special Areas Committee has developed a new list, the following spaces and buildings continue to be protected under this policy, as under the 1972 Comprehensive Policies for the Physical Planning and Design of the Ithaca Campus of Cornell University, Section F, PRESERVATION:

The Arts Quadrangle
The gorges and the edges of the banks flanking them
Library Slope
Beebe Lake surface and banks
Sage Chapel
A.D. White Mansion
Uris Library and Tower
Morrill, McGraw, and White Halls
Designated Areas

From its beginning the Cornell campus has been marked by a spaciousness considered one of its most distinctive and distinguished characteristics. To protect those characteristics for future generations, it is University policy that specified areas of campus landscape remain open and undiminished. Designated areas approved by the Trustees will be placed in a protected category. Revisions to the list of designated areas must be approved by the Board of Trustees.

Designated Buildings

The University must be especially aware of the importance of protecting its historic and architectural heritage. While age alone is not a sufficient criterion, every effort should be made to identify those buildings deemed to have special merit or significance. Designated buildings approved by the Trustees will be placed in a protected category. Revisions to the list of designated buildings must be approved by the Board of Trustees.

3. Circulation and Parking

Although the many forces of change on the campus generate pressure for both upward and outward expansion, the policy of the university is to preserve the central campus as a pedestrian-oriented area. This concept requires the reduction of vehicular traffic in the central part of campus and the continuing development of pedestrian walks, malls, and plazas. Public transportation systems will augment other changes on the campus in support of the reduction of vehicles in the center.

An important planning priority is the creation of a campus environment conscious of the need for pedestrian safety and the desirability of limited vehicular intrusion on the central campus. University policy provides for restricted vehicular access to the central campus during peak pedestrian movement periods.

A system of circumferential roads should continue to be the model for future development. At the same time, sufficient service and emergency access to all University facilities must be maintained.

Consistent with the planned emphasis on circumferential roads (rather than cross-campus arteries) is a concept of major campus parking development in peripheral locations. Parking sites and structures will be developed along circulation routes which minimize intrusion on campus green space.

Because the circulation and parking system of the campus is an integral part of the overall community and county system, the planning and development of that system must take place cooperatively with the local municipalities and governmental units.
A fundamental factor in the planning of the circulation and parking system for the campus is the coordination of circulation modes. All forms of transportation (pedestrian, bicycles, personal vehicles, public transportation vehicles, commercial vehicles, delivery vehicles, emergency vehicles, service vehicles, and grounds maintenance vehicles) must be considered in the creation of the campus-community transportation network extending across the campus and to major portions of Tompkins County.

4. Utilities

The plants and networks of the University’s utility systems (including communication networks) are a major factor in planning for the physical environment of the campus. Lines must be located for economy of distribution, but grouped in corridors so as to permit maximum flexibility in the location of buildings, and minimum consumption of precious land. Plants for heating, power, cooling, and water filtration must be well maintained and technically current to provide effectively and economically for campus growth. To provide for reliability, redundancy should be planned for plants and distribution systems.

As utility plant siting decisions arise, they should be carefully planned with regard to campus land use and future development, as well as engineering decisions relating to the plants alone.

**BUILDING AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN: Quality, Consistency, and Context of Design**

1. General Building Design Criteria

The buildings of the Ithaca campus have been built over a span exceeding one hundred years. Each represents something of the economy, technology, social values, and aesthetic philosophy of the time that produced it. In this sense, each building was modern in its time and, in some instances, an example of the best architectural thought of its period. Still today each new building should reflect the spirit of Cornell as a pioneering institution and should represent an awareness of its time and place. This is tradition in its truest meaning.

Cornell asks that each new building or renovation not only solve special functional requirements, but contribute respectfully to the coherent whole and, of itself, be an aesthetic statement of lasting significance. For the planning of its campus and the design and construction of its physical plant, Cornell seeks and is entitled to retain the services of the ablest professionals most appropriate to the task and from wherever they may be found.
Only for compelling education needs should the personal and unique requirements of the first user take precedence over the flexibility required to extend the useful life of the space for the tenants who will follow. A building belongs to the whole University and is rarely the permanent preserve of any single individual, discipline, or academic division.

The size and diversity of Cornell’s physical campus make a single consistent style and or design both infeasible and undesirable. Consistency on a smaller scale, however, is of real importance in developing a coherent overall image of the University. Thus, consistency (or at very least, compatibility) of architectural style around quads or within the various campus zones is a significant goal.

Specific functional criteria include the following: energy efficiency, ease of maintenance and repair, durability provision for flow-through traffic where necessary, weather-proof connectors where possible, and required elements to facilitate use by handicapped persons.

2. Landscape Design

Trees, ornamental plantings, lawns, pavings, light standards, kiosks, shelters, outdoor furniture, and freestanding sculpture are all elements of comprehensive landscape design and as vital to environmental quality as buildings. Land design is more than pleasant outdoor decoration. Like buildings well conceived landscaping also contains and proportions space. As in a room it provides the ceiling overhead and the carpet on the floor. It furnishes. It enriches to touch, sound, and smell as well as sight. It guides movement. It is the final essential of the complete campus.

The project budget for every new building should include funds for landscaping adequate in amount and as inviolate as any other budget item. Beyond common design considerations and their ecological and environmental consequences, special attention should be given to the impact of Ithaca's severe climate, the abrasion of increasingly heavy human use and abuse, and design for mechanized maintenance requiring minimum hours of labor.

3. Cost-Effectiveness of Materials and Equipment

The cost of ownership over the total life of a project, not merely first-cost, should heavily influence project design and all decisions regarding the subsequent selection of materials and equipment. When justified by sufficient reductions in long-term operating or maintenance expenses, initial project design should include all appropriate future cost savings features, including high quality materials, energy conservation and efficiency measures, and plans that recognize maintenance requirements. These long-term features should not be compromised during project design to accommodate other program exigencies.
4. Personal Safety and Security

Issues concerning public safety and security are to be given careful attention in the planning and design of the campus and its buildings, including (but not limited to) night time lighting along normally traveled routes for both vehicles and pedestrians, secure locks, gates or other barriers against criminal passage, and designs that provide convenient security against theft.

5. Life Safety and Environmental Quality

The design and review processes will include thorough attention to matters affecting life safety, including conformance to applicable codes and provisions for emergency access. Facilities plans also will identify and address potential deleterious effects on the environment. Environmental quality is to be considered as a factor in general planning and site selection as well as specific site and building design; environmental quality professionals will be included in site and building planning and design review processes.

A section of the Comprehensive Plan will include detailed standards and guidelines relative to environmental health.

6. The University and the Community

The University is not a walled enclave. Mutually dependent, the local communities and University share the same general environment. It is, therefore, the policy of Cornell to encourage and support, in any way reasonably open to it, a high standard of design and environmental quality outside as well as within its own borders. To this end the University will continue to cooperate with all concerned and appropriate public and private agencies.

The University shall involve appropriate community representatives in annual discussions of the Campus Plan to enable joint planning and the exploration of opportunities (or problems) as they may arise in areas of common interest.

7. Process for Design Development and Review

Program documents will be developed in a separate process from the development of the actual design documents. In addition, program documents will be reviewed by selected individuals and groups to ensure that the various University constituencies and objectives are appropriately considered.

A University checklist will guide the planning and approval process for all major facilities and landscape projects by ensuring that all appropriate steps are taken at each stage for the project from concept through completion.
The University is committed to conducting a post-occupancy evaluation of each building constructed on campus and post-occupancy training for building occupants and service and maintenance staff in the effective and safe use of those buildings.

G. Signage AND GRAPHICS

As institutions grow in size and complexity, the need becomes more compelling for a consistent system of signage and graphics for directions and information both outdoors and in. From highways to buildings to rooms people must be directed and their conduct guided for their own convenience and safety. Though seemingly a minor detail such a system is functionally important, costly, and has a significant visual impact especially on visitors new to the campus. In recent years, signage has joined graphics as a highly developed art deserving of the University's careful attention. Cornell does not now have and needs such a comprehensive system.

H. FINE ARTS

As a responsible cultural institution, Cornell encourages the incorporation of appropriate works of art in buildings and on the grounds. Sculpture out-of-doors and paintings and sculpture within buildings establishes a climate which builds itself into student consciousness and is remembered after many things, considered more “practical,” are long forgotten. Project budgets should carry an allowance adequate to provide works of art for buildings and, when appropriate, for the site.

J. ENVIRONS OF THE UNIVERSITY

The University is not a walled enclave. Mutually dependent, the town, country and University share the same general environment. It is, therefore, the policy of Cornell to encourage and support, in any way reasonably open to it, a high standard of design and environmental qualify outside as well as within its own borders. To this end the University will continue to cooperate with all concerned and appropriate public and private agencies.

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REFERENCES

As approved by the Executive Committee, Board of Trustees, May 24, 1972, p. 8049:

36. PHYSICAL PLANNING AND DESIGN POLICIES: Voted to recommend to the Board of Trustees for adoption a statement of “Comprehensive Policies for the Physical Planning and Design of the Ithaca Campus of Cornell University.” The comprehensive policy statement, as developed by the Buildings and Properties Committee, is attached to these minutes as Appendix E.

Voted to express appreciation to the Buildings and Properties Committee and particularly to Chairman Will for this very thoughtful policy statement.