
CHAPTER FOUR:
Alternatives to the Proposed Action

CHAPTER FOUR: ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

4.1 Alternatives to the West Campus Plan

The following sections discuss alternatives to the proposed west campus plan.

4.1.1 Renovation of the Existing Facilities

Various studies were conducted to test the feasibility of renovating the Class Halls. The current configuration of the Class Halls and Gothic residence halls has double loaded corridors, group bathrooms, small student rooms and few community/program spaces. It was viewed as undesirable by many upperclass students who demand a greater level of privacy in suite or apartment style housing. It is unlikely that the university would achieve full occupancy on west campus without substantive facilities changes, particularly in the Class Halls. All renovation scenarios studied resulted in a compromised program and site plan. The existing buildings are too narrow to support the desired suite configurations included in the WCRI program and the floor-to-floor spacing greatly limits the ability to install the required new mechanical equipment. Furthermore, should one try to link the buildings, the location and varying elevations of the Class Halls create awkward interior circulation patterns and undesirable building shapes.

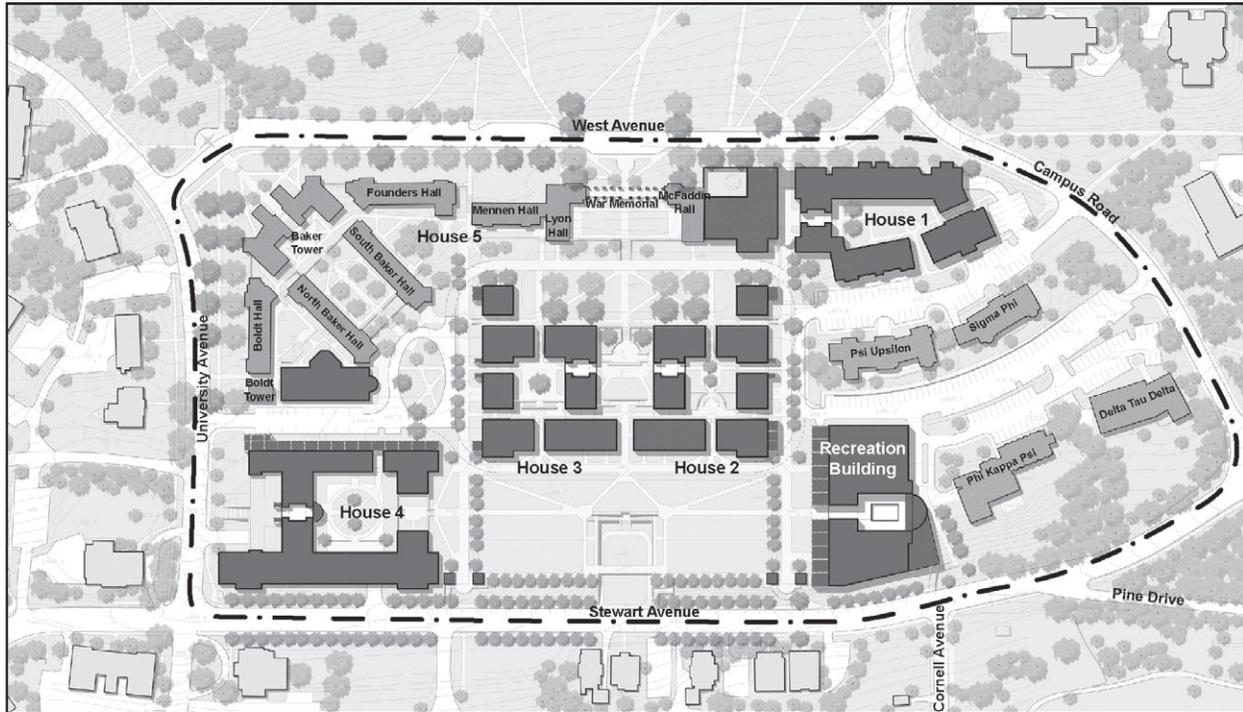
Consideration was also given to renovation of Noyes Center. The current use of Noyes as a central dining facility is obsolete in the context of a house program which incorporates dining into each house. Consideration was given to renovating Noyes Center into the Community Recreation Center. The building structural system uses numerous, regularly spaced interior columns that are not compatible with the large, open spaces of the proposed Community Recreation Center.

Finally, the current site layout and topography present extremely difficult constraints to creating a residential campus accessible to persons with mobility limitations.

4.1.2 Alternative Residential Design

In the Spring of 2001, Michael Dennis & Associates, Boston, MA, developed a comprehensive site plan for west campus. Figure 4.1.A: Alternative Residential Plan, illustrates the Michael Dennis scheme. Upon analysis, this plan had a number of deficiencies or undesirable consequences:

- Each House was about 4600 net square feet short of the program. Building massing would have to increase to achieve the full House program. In summary, it did not meet the program.
- The Gothic halls were treated as a separate entity and are not effectively incorporated in a cohesive neighborhood of Houses. The Gothic halls were left with little community/public program space to support the House requirements.
- There was no suitable solution to building service access nor was service access accounted for in the budget, nor was improved service accounted for. The proposed surface access plan creates the undesirable combination of pedestrian and service traffic on the interior of the site.
- Though orderly, this rectilinear plan opposed topography rather than interacting with it.
- The historic Baker view axis would be terminated by the placement of House 3.
- The proposed 4-sided quads may be dark and unappealing - especially in winter months.
- The location of the Community Recreation Center was not ideal in terms of visibility/accessibility from central campus.
- The plan would result in undesirable impacts to historic resources.



Existing Building

Proposed Building

Note: Proposed buildings are conceptual. They reflect the intended size and scale, but not actual designs.

Project Boundary



Figure 4.1.A:
Alternative Residential Plan
 West Campus

- The Houses relate primarily to themselves (inward & fortress like) rather than to other houses or to the west campus neighborhood.
- Public spaces in the Houses are less visible and accessible than is desired.

For these reasons, further development of the Michael Dennis was not pursued.

4.1.3 Smaller West Campus Project

Implementation of a smaller project would not have achieved a number of important university goals set forth in President Rawlings' Residential Initiative.

Provide a residential program attractive to upperclass students

Cornell wishes to maintain a competitive position with peer institutions and continue to attract the best students. Many colleges and universities have had great success with residential colleges (or House systems) characterized by live in faculty, in-house dining and other program spaces such as seminar and conference rooms, libraries and computer rooms. Transforming west campus to provide a House system requires a substantially greater ratio of square feet per student and results in larger buildings.

In addition, an important part of today's college experiences for both men and women is recreational facilities and programs. The new Community Recreation Center is necessary to meet the recreational and fitness expectations of today's students.

Provide residential facilities attractive to upperclass students

The Class Halls comprise 1200 of the approximately 1800 beds on west campus and provide small double rooms along a corridor with shared group bathrooms. Upperclass students prefer a greater level of privacy (single rooms/ semi-private baths) and an ability to live with friends (suite arrangement). Conversion of the Class Halls to provide such amenities would result in a loss of beds and/or awkward interior configurations of space. Key program goals of the WCRI (above) would also not be met.

Extend the guarantee of housing to sophomore and transfer students who wish to remain in university housing

In order to house all sophomore and transfer students who wish to remain in university housing, the capacity of west campus must not fall below about 1700 beds. Construction of fewer houses or conversion of double rooms to single rooms in the class halls would result in an unacceptable decrease in bed capacity.

4.1.4 No Action -- West Campus

The no-action alternative occurs if the project is withdrawn by Cornell University or if the City of Ithaca Planning Board does not approve the project. Either of these actions would terminate the project.

Advantages of the no-action alternative:

- There would be no construction related inconveniences on the surrounding neighborhoods (e.g. construction traffic, noise and dirt).
- Materials required for the construction of the project would not be consumed.
- Non-recyclable materials from the demolished Class Halls and Noyes Community Center would not go to a land fill.

- It would not be necessary to locate displaced parking spaces off site.
- Vegetation would not be removed from the site for construction.
- There would be no new impacts to nearby historic resources or view sheds.

Disadvantages of the no-action alternative:

- A primary requirement of the Residential Initiative – to provide facilities that support the House system – would not be realized.
- Cornell could fall behind many peer institutions which are offering an enhanced residential program for their upperclass students.
- An attractive new building complex utilizing high quality architectural design and materials which would add to the visual quality of the area, would not be constructed.
- Pedestrian routes would not be improved and made more safe.
- The site would not be made substantially more accessible to persons with mobility impairments.
- A legible, coherent and cohesive composition of buildings would not be achieved.
- Restoration of the historic Baker Hall axis view would not be achieved.
- Improved landscaping including extensive new plantings and site features would not be achieved.
- Hundreds of construction jobs would not be created, and the benefits to the local and regional economy due to those jobs would not be realized.
- Pedestrian improvements along Stewart Avenue would not be constructed.

4.2 Alternatives to University Avenue Surface Parking

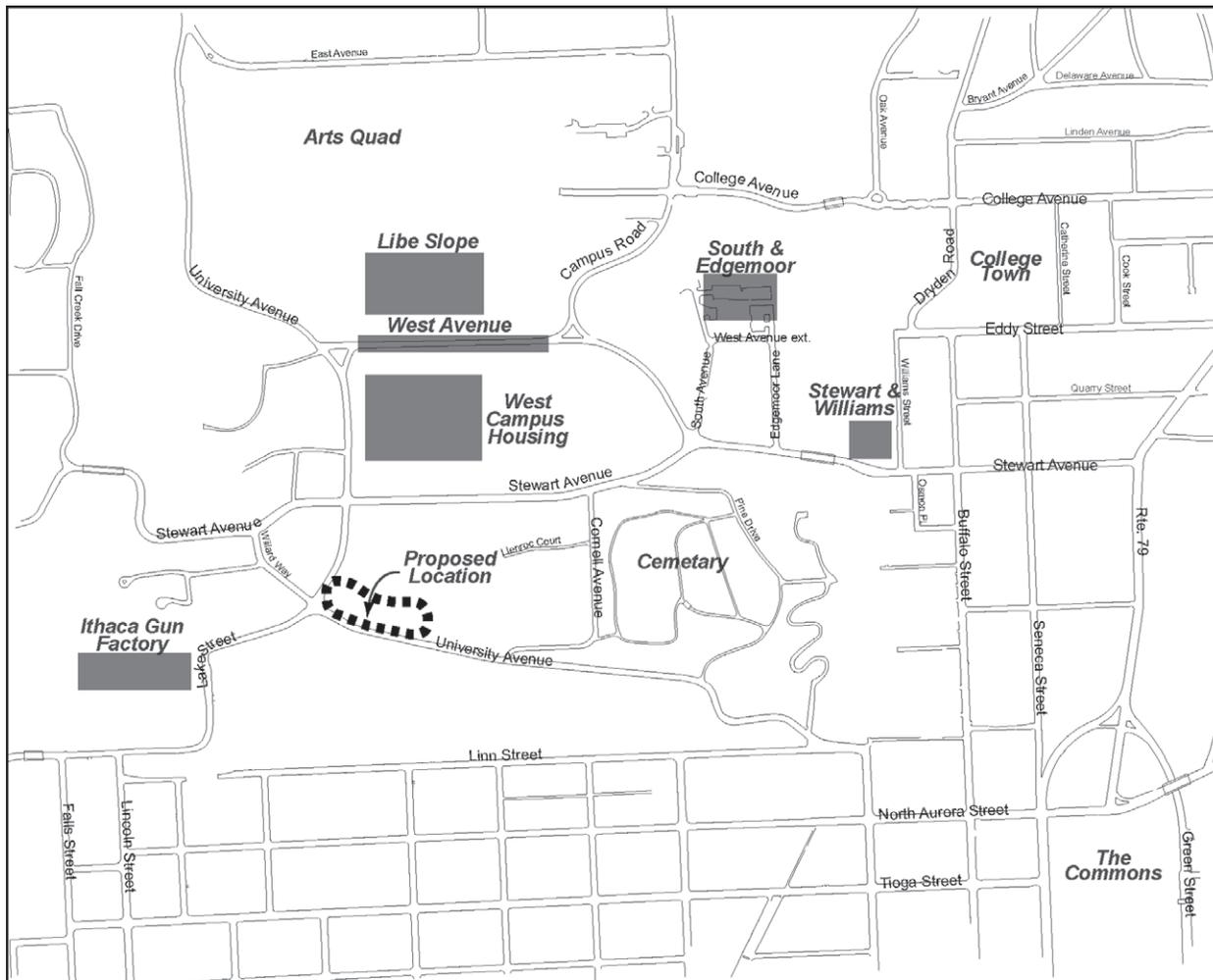
The University Avenue parking lot is intended to serve contractor employees during construction of the WCRI and Cornell employees and students after construction is complete. No-build alternatives to construction of the University Avenue Parking Lot must include alternatives for contractor parking and for long-term replacement of parking spaces lost due to construction of the WCRI projects.

4.2.1 Alternative Locations for Parking

Figure 4.2.A illustrates the locations of the alternatives described below.

Build a parking garage under Libe Slope.

The approximately 200 west campus parking spaces lost due to the WCRI projects could be replaced by building an underground parking facility in the Libe Slope Area. Underground parking facilities are the most expensive alternatives for parking. Compared to surface parking garages, they require deep excavations, shoring during construction, extensive foundation walls and moisture protection, mechanical ventilation and require mitigation of personal security concerns. Underground parking is estimated to cost approximately \$50,000 per space. This is approximately double the cost of parking garage spaces and seven to eight times more expensive than surface parking. Construction of parking facilities under Libe Slope was rejected for cost reasons.



■■■■ Proposed location for University Avenue Surface Lot



Figure 4.2.A:
Alternate Locations
University Avenue Surface Lot

Build parking structures under the new west campus buildings.

The approximately 200 parking spaces lost due to the WCRI projects could be replaced by building parking spaces underground beneath one or more of the new west campus residence buildings. This alternative was rejected for cost and complex construction reasons, as discussed above.

Build ground level parking under west campus buildings

The approximately 200 parking spaces lost due to the WCRI project could be replaced by building parking spaces at ground level underneath the new west campus buildings. This alternative would increase the typical building height by one floor level. Parking and circulation would become the dominant land use at the ground level, displacing the majority of the House common space to the second floor where it would be detached from the house green. This also increases the potential for pedestrian - vehicular conflicts. The ground floor would be shaped by standard parking bay sizes, turning radii and clearances necessary for vehicle parking. It would be difficult to construct buildings that are of the smaller scale, massing and proportions of the adjacent historic structures and meet the design considerations for mitigating impacts to historic resources. For these reasons, this alternative was rejected.

Build an underground parking structure beneath West Avenue

A parking garage under West Avenue has been considered by the University in the past, and rejected for a number of reasons. Such a garage would be extremely costly due to the amount of excavation through bedrock that would be required, as well as the need for a roof structure capable of supporting heavy truck and bus traffic on the street above. Although the facility would be underground, it would nonetheless require a number of structures on or above the surface, including structures to house ventilation and other mechanical equipment, elevator shafts, stairwells and vehicular access points. These structures would represent a substantial intrusion of visually incompatible elements into the area immediately adjacent to the historic Gothic halls, as well as the view from the crest of Libe Slope.

Build a Parking Garage at the University Avenue site

The approximately 200 parking spaces lost due to the WCRI projects could be replaced by building a parking garage on the University Avenue site. A garage, while it would take up less footprint space than a surface lot, would be more visually intrusive. An underground structure was rejected due to topography and shallow bedrock.

Build a Parking Garage at South & Edgemoor site

A parking garage between South Avenue and Edgemoor Lane, behind the Law School, if constructed, would be further from the center of the new west campus House complex than is the University Avenue site. This location will better serve the parking needs of the central campus, and will be proposed as a separate university project. It is expected to become increasingly important in the coming years as a location for replacement parking spaces as new building construction eliminates existing surface parking lots at the core of the campus.

Build a Parking Garage at Stewart & Williams site

An alternate site for a parking garage on the corner of Stewart Avenue and Williams Street was considered. The proposed structure could be two levels below grade and up to five levels above grade, and occupy approximately the footprint of the existing surface parking lot on that site. Although this site has been identified as a good future garage location, this alternative was rejected based on its distance from both west campus and central campus. This garage site was deemed more appropriate to serve the needs of the Collegetown neighborhoods. Furthermore, the size of

the site can not accommodate a structure with enough capacity to absorb the anticipated parking needs of both the west campus and central campus population.

Build replacement parking at the site of the Gun Hill Factory buildings

It has also been suggested that the approximately 200 parking spaces lost due to the WCRI projects could be replaced by building parking facilities in the area of the former Ithaca Gun Factory buildings. Cornell University does not own this property. Purchasing the site for parking, assuming it were available for purchase, was rejected for parking because it is too far from the west campus area. The steep slope exacerbates the long walk. It is believed that students would search for closer parking in residential streets rather than use the Gun Hill site.

4.2.2 Alternative Design to University Avenue Parking

Several alternative concepts for the design of the University Avenue surface parking lot were explored in the schematic design phase. Alternative concepts explored included the following:

- Alternative means of accessing the site were explored. One alternative utilized the historic carriage path as an access to the lot from University Avenue. This scheme was rejected because sight lines at the intersection of the carriage drive and University Avenue are substandard due to parked cars along the east side of University Avenue. The parked cars would block views when exiting the site, requiring the elimination of on-street parking. In addition, there is a steep grade as one enters University Avenue at this point. Finally, the widening to the carriage drive required to accommodate vehicular traffic would have a negative impact on the historic character of the carriage drive.
- Another alternative explored for accessing the site that was explored and rejected was the concept of providing access from Stewart Avenue to the site. A positive aspect of this concept is that the access would be closer to the user group, i.e. west campus residents and staff. This would mitigate the perception of the parking being located off-site. The scheme was ultimately rejected because it was felt that the required width of an access road from Stewart Avenue would be too invasive to the historic houses, and would result in unacceptably high construction costs.

4.2.3 Smaller University Avenue Project

The University Avenue parking lot is sized to provide replacement parking for the spaces lost on the west campus site due to construction of buildings on the current parking lot site. The lot will provide for the maximum contractor parking need. The proposed lot meets the required space needed during and after construction, with no surplus spaces. Consequently, the effect of a smaller project is similar to the no-action option (Section 4.2.4), except that fewer parkers are affected.

4.2.4 No Action -- University Avenue

From the perspective of university employees and students who park on west campus, a University Avenue surface parking no-action decision would require those people either to park elsewhere or to seek alternative forms of transportation. Cornell tries to acknowledge preferences for transportation and parking by providing a variety of alternatives. For example, the university, as a partner of the Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit system, pays its employees' public transportation fares and subsidizes student fares as an alternative to driving to and parking in campus areas, including west campus. However, a percentage of faculty, staff and students choose to park near their place of work or residence for a variety of reasons. A no-action decision on the University Avenue

project would cause some of these people to compete for scarce parking resources, exacerbating an already difficult parking situation in the west campus area. Cornell views the plan to replace west campus parking in-kind as a reasonable balance between the desire to encourage use of public transportation and the desire to avoid causing staff and students to compete with others for off campus parking facilities. If parking were not provided near west campus, additional demand would be placed on surrounding neighborhood streets as some staff and residents might compete to find parking close to their place of work and home.