
Summary of Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Cornell University WEST CAMPUS RESIDENTIAL INITIATIVE City of Ithaca May 24, 2002

This Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) has been prepared pursuant to the adoption of a Positive Declaration by the City of Ithaca Planning Board and follows the scope adopted by the City of Ithaca Planning Board. The applicable citations are Chapter 176 of the city of Ithaca Code, City Environmental Quality Review Ordinance (CEQR), article 8 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law, State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), and Part 617 of Title 6 of the New York State Code of Rules and Regulations.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The pending action is the Site Development Plan Approval for the West Campus Residential Initiative (WCRI). The purpose of Cornell's WCRI is to transform the quality of student life in the west campus residence halls. The WCRI will replace existing conventional dormitories with the House system. Professional staff members in the Department of Campus Life presently provide leadership in the residence halls. The WCRI proposes that leadership in the Houses be provided by faculty members in the role of House professors/deans, and assistant deans, who are staff members, by graduate student tutors and by the undergraduate students themselves. The houses will offer a rich variety of intellectual programs for students. Cornell University views the WCRI as essential to remain competitive and attract the best students to the university.

The WCRI will create five Houses of 350 to 375 students each. The total number of students living on west campus will remain at 1800, essentially the same as pre-Residential Initiative levels. Each house will have a dedicated dining facility and a variety of program spaces such as seminar rooms, a library, and music/performance spaces. The WCRI facilities program anticipates that the existing six class halls and Noyes Center will be demolished. Building construction will include five new Houses and a new recreation center to serve west campus residents. The site will be completely rehabilitated and will include construction of new driveways and emergency access lanes, walkways, pedestrian amenities and landscaping. Some parking on-site will be reconfigured and some will be relocated off-site. Approximately 195 parking spaces will be relocated one block west near the intersection of University Avenue and Lake Street. A new surface parking lot will be constructed in this location to replace parking lost on west campus.

POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The scoping document for the DEIS was Adopted by the City of Ithaca Planning Board at its meeting held May 22, 2001. A copy of the approved document is enclosed herein. The areas of potentially significant adverse environmental impacts identified in the scoping document for inclusion in the DEIS, together with a summary of the evaluations of each, are:

- **Drainage:** Stormwater from portions of the west campus site currently drains to Fall Creek and Cascadilla Creek via existing storm sewer lines. In the developed condition, impervious surfaces on west campus will decrease slightly or remain the same. Stormwater run-off from west campus will be redirected and a greater proportion of the west campus site will drain to Cascadilla Creek in the future.

Relocation of the 195 parking spaces to the University Avenue site will result in the construction of a new surface lot and an increase in impervious area on this site. A drainage study conducted during design development of the project suggests the existing storm sewer piping under University Avenue is not capable of handling the existing 2-year storm event. Design of the project will need to include either on site storage or upgrade of the existing sewer system.

- **Natural Resources – Vegetation:** Construction of the WCRI will result in the removal of mature trees and ornamental landscaping surrounding the buildings to be removed on west campus. Approximately 1.56 acres of naturalized vegetation, consisting predominately of invasive species, will be removed on the University Avenue site as a result of construction of the replacement parking lot. This will result in the loss of habitat. Extensive new landscape plantings will be installed on both sites. Left to mature over time, the new plantings will replace much of the removed vegetation.

- **Visual Impacts:** Visual impacts will result from the change in appearance of the project site after development. The overall visual quality and character of the proposed project will be compatible with the existing views towards west campus and the University Avenue site. New buildings on west campus will be sited to complement existing buildings, and to create pleasing new outdoor spaces. The building design of the new residence halls is respectful of the architecture of the adjacent Gothic halls that remain. The high quality architectural design, the compatible materials and colors, the re-establishment of historic views, and extensive landscaping will all be positive visual impacts. The removal of Noyes Center, resulting in the opening of views through west campus is an additional positive impact.

The University Avenue surface parking lot will be visible from 660 Stewart Avenue, the Kahin Center and locations along University Avenue and can be considered a negative impact. However, the siting and terracing of the lot, the preservation of existing vegetation along the west and south edges and substantial new landscaping will minimize the visual impact.

- **Historic Resources:** The existing Gothic halls on west campus are eligible for the national register of historic places. The WCRI has been designed specifically to preserve and be integrated with the architecture of the Gothics. The project will result in a positive impact to the Gothic halls. Removal of the undistinguished class halls and Noyes Center and construction of the new residence halls will restore the historic axis centered on Baker Tower and the War Memorial arcade. The University Avenue parking facility will impact the landscape, setting and views of the historic Treman properties. Sensitive planting can mitigate the impact of the lot, but entirely screening the lot would be impractical. A positive impact of the University Avenue surface parking project is that historic views to west hill will be restored.

- **Archaeological Resources:** The University Avenue parking lot site has been found to contain an archaeological site considered to be eligible for the national register of historic places. Construction of the University Avenue surface lot would negatively impact the archaeology resources of the site if the resources were not first recovered. Cornell is moving forward with the full recovery and cataloging of artifacts, which is standard procedure for archaeological sites proposed

for development.

- **Transportation and Parking:** The project will result in improved access and facilities for pedestrians, the mobility impaired, and cyclists for the entire west campus area. The existing population on west campus will remain at pre-residential initiative levels following completion of the project. Therefore, no increase in traffic will result from the project. Approximately 195 vehicles currently parking on-site will be relocated one block west at the University Avenue site. These represent staff and student vehicles that currently park at the west campus site and will now park one block further west. No significant change in traffic patterns in the neighborhood is expected as a result of the relocated traffic. No changes to transit are expected.

- **Construction Impacts:** The project will require construction over a seven year period. Completion of the project is expected in 2010. Short term noise and air quality impacts typical for a construction site can be expected. Residents of west campus will be the most impacted, with diminishing impact as one moves away from the site. The project will employ best practice controls to minimize construction phase impacts. Construction workers will park at the University Avenue surface lot. Some residents and staff from west campus will be relocated to other parking locations for the duration of construction. All west campus resident students, staff, and construction workers will be provided parking by the university. Deliveries of construction materials to the site and removal of materials will result in slight increases in construction vehicle traffic in the vicinity for the duration of construction. The university will develop a communications plan for informing the city and the surrounding neighborhood of planned construction activities.

Final Scoping Document
for Draft Environmental Impact Statement
Cornell University
West Campus Residential Initiative
City of Ithaca
May 5, 2001

INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to Chapter 176 of the City of Ithaca Code, City Environmental Quality Review Ordinance (CEQR), New York State Environmental Conservation Law Article 8, State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR), and Part 617 of Chapter 6 of the New York Code of Rules and Regulations, and the adoption of a Positive Declaration by the City of Ithaca Planning and Development Board, Cornell University intends to prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the West Campus Residential Initiative. In accordance with CEQR and SEQR, the DEIS is required to address specific adverse environmental impacts which can be reasonably anticipated. This document defines the potentially significant environmental impacts to be addressed in the DEIS, as well as the extent and quality of information necessary to address these issues.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The pending action is the Site Development Plan Approval for the West Campus Residential Initiative (WCRI). The purpose of Cornell's WCRI is to transform the quality of student life in the west campus residence halls. The WCRI will replace existing conventional dormitories with Living-Learning Houses. Professional staff members in the Department of Campus Life presently provide leadership in the residence halls. The WCRI proposes that leadership in the Living-Learning Houses be provided by faculty members in the role of House Deans, by graduate student tutors and by the undergraduate students themselves. The houses will offer a rich variety of intellectual programs for students. Cornell University views the WCRI as essential to remain competitive and attract the best students to the university.

The WCRI will create five houses of 350 to 400 students each. The total number of students living on west campus will remain at 1800, essentially the same as pre-Residential Initiative levels. Each house will have a dedicated dining facility and a variety of program spaces such as seminar rooms, a library, and music/performance spaces. The WCRI facilities program anticipates that the existing six Class Halls and Noyes Center will be demolished. Building construction will include four new houses, rehabilitation of the existing gothic halls, and a recreation center to serve west campus residents. Some parking on-site will be reconfigured and some will be relocated off-site. The site will be completely rehabilitated and will include construction of new driveways and emergency access lanes, walkways, pedestrian plazas and landscaping. Integral to the project's design will be continued pedestrian access between the West Campus grounds and Stewart Avenue and destinations such as the Kahin Center, residential areas to the west and the longstanding Hot Truck concession.

POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE IMPACTS

The potentially significant adverse impacts to be addressed in the DEIS are associated with the following environmental issues:

- Drainage
- Natural Resources – Vegetation
- Visual Resources
- Historical Resources
- Transportation and Parking
- Construction Impacts

The issues are further described below, along with the extent and quality of information necessary to address each issue.

Drainage. Due to the fact that the site is currently predominately covered by either buildings, paving or lawn, the percentage of site impervious coverage is expected to increase only slightly. However, the stormwater run-off from the project may be discharged in a different manner than currently occurs. Drainage impacts will be evaluated through calculation of the change in off-site peak flow rates and storm event volumes for the 25, 50, and 100 year storm events using accepted engineering techniques. Impacts to water quality and construction phase impacts will be evaluated. Appropriate mitigation measures to address the identified impacts will be evaluated on the basis of methodologies and parameters as recommended in the 1992 NYS DEC publication Reducing the Impacts of Stormwater Runoff from New Development.

Natural Resources – Vegetation. Construction of the West Campus Residential Initiative will result in the removal of approximately thirty-six trees of significant size.

The DEIS will include an inventory of existing site vegetation including size, species and condition. Impacts resulting from the removal of existing mature trees and other vegetation, will be described and mitigating measures will be outlined.

Visual Resources. Proposed new buildings on West Campus will be about four or five stories in height. Visual impacts will be limited by the campus setting, surrounding buildings, and the height of the new buildings. The existing landscape, open space and architectural character will be described and alterations to the existing landscape and built environment will be analyzed. An analysis will be conducted of height, massing, scale, roof lines, materials, building configuration, and open space and vegetation. Any impacts to existing buildings on-site that are to remain will be evaluated. Specific consideration will be given to the following off-site viewpoints:

1. View From Library Slope Looking West
2. View From Intersection of Stewart Avenue and University Avenue

Historical Resources. The existing gothic halls and war memorial are potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Some of the existing fraternities on the project site, and some buildings nearby but off-site, may have historic importance. All existing structures on-site including the gothic halls, the Class Halls, Noyes Center and the four fraternity houses will be evaluated for architectural and historic qualities. Potential impacts to off-site historic resources will also be evaluated, including the five houses on the west side of Stewart Avenue across from the

project site.

Transportation and Parking. The construction of new buildings will result in the displacement of some existing parking on West Campus. The proposed redevelopment of West Campus provides an opportunity to reconsider employee commuter access and resident transportation options for West Campus and the surrounding area. These options will be integrated with the Transportation Demand Management Program.

The university is exploring a number of options to meet the remaining parking needs of the West Campus neighborhood. Construction of parking both on-site and off-site is anticipated. An analysis will be provided of both the on-site and off-site parking programs and any anticipated impacts. The DEIS will include an analysis of the following potential locations for off-site parking:

- a. Site west of Stewart Avenue and Von Cramm Hall.
- b. Stewart Avenue/Williams Street Parking Garage.
- c. South Avenue Parking Garage.

A preferred off-site location has not been identified. The intention is to evaluate the above alternatives through the SEQR process and identify a preferred location that meets the needs of West Campus, and the larger university community. Figure 1: Off-Site Parking Alternatives illustrates the off-site parking locations.

In addition to parking, the DEIS will include an analysis of any changes to existing vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic patterns, as well as transit ridership, and any expected change in volumes accessing the site. An analysis will be provided for any change in service and emergency access. An analysis will be provided of projected levels of service at the intersections and street segments which will be most impacted by the proposed project. A list of the intersections to be analyzed is included in the attached outline of the DEIS.

Construction Impacts. The project will require construction over a six or seven year period. The DEIS will describe construction phase impacts including noise, air quality, staging areas, traffic and construction routes, potential impacts to the Hot Truck and parking. General goals for recycling of demolition materials will be described. Finally, impacts to the 4th Ward 1st District polling place, located on West Campus, will be described. Mitigation measures for construction phase impacts will be identified and described as well.

ALTERNATIVES

A discussion of project alternatives will be included in the DEIS. A smaller project and the no action alternative will be discussed.

**Adopted Scope for Draft Environmental Impact Statement
West Campus Residential Initiative
Cornell University
May 5, 2001**

Executive Summary

Chapter One: Description of The Proposed Action

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Project Purpose, Need and Benefit
- 1.3 Location and Setting
- 1.4 Program.
- 1.5 Design and Layout
- 1.5.1 Site Layout and Landscape Design
- 1.5.2 Architectural Design
- 1.6 Facility Operations

Chapter Two: Potential Significant Impacts

(Environmental Setting, Impacts of Proposed Project Including Any Off-Site Parking and Mitigating Measures)

- 2.1 Drainage
- 2.2 Natural Resources
 - 2.2.1 Vegetation
- 2.3 Visual Resources
 - a. View From Library Slope Looking West
 - b. View From Intersection of Stewart Avenue and University Avenue
- 2.4 Historical Resources
- 2.5 Transportation and Parking
 - 2.5.1. Relationship to Other Long Range Traffic Planning Efforts on the Cornell University Campus
 - 2.5.2. Transportation Demand Management Program (TDMP).
 - 2.5.3. Pedestrian Circulation
 - a. Description of existing and proposed pedestrian routes around and within the project site
 - 2.5.4. Bicycle Circulation
 - a. Description of existing and proposed bicycle routes and parking around and within the project site.
 - 2.5.5. Transit Service
 - a. Description of existing and proposed transit ridership and routes/frequency
- 2.6. Vehicular Circulation. Description of the following intersections (for both the existing condition and post-development) to include Traffic Volume Data, Turning Movements, Intersection Geometry, Level of Service, and Safety Analysis for the following Intersections:
 - a. West Avenue/University Avenue/McGraw Place
 - b. Campus Road/West Avenue
 - c. Stewart Avenue/Campus Road
 - d. Stewart Avenue/University Avenue
 - e. Proposed Access Drive(s)/University Avenue

f. Proposed Access Drive/Campus Road

2.7. Parking

2.7.1. On-Site Parking. Description of existing and proposed on-site parking program for the project including staff/employee/student/visitor/service and short term and long term parking.

2.7.2. Off-Site Parking Alternatives to be Analyzed.

a. Site west of Stewart Avenue and Von Cramm Hall.

Description of the following intersections (for both the existing condition and post-development) to include Traffic Volume Data, Turning Movements, Intersection Geometry, Level of Service, and Safety Analysis for the following Intersections:

1. University Avenue/Lake Street/Willard Way
2. University Avenue/Stewart Avenue
3. Proposed Access Drive

b. Stewart Avenue/Williams Street Parking Garage.

Description of the following intersections (for both the existing condition and post-development) to include Traffic Volume Data, Turning Movements, Intersection Geometry, Level of Service, and Safety Analysis for the following Intersections:

1. Stewart Avenue/Williams Street
2. Williams Street/Eddy Street
3. Stewart Avenue/Buffalo Street
4. Stewart Avenue/Campus Road
5. Stewart Avenue/Osmun Place
6. Proposed Access Drive to Garage

c. South Avenue Parking Garage.

Description of the following intersections (for both the existing condition and post-development) to include Traffic Volume Data, Turning Movements, Intersection Geometry, Level of Service, and Safety Analysis for the following Intersections:

1. South Avenue/Stewart Avenue
2. South Avenue/West Avenue/Edgemoor Lane
3. Edgemoor Lane/Stewart Avenue
4. Stewart Avenue/Campus Road
5. Proposed Access/Egress Drives to Garage

2.8. Service and Emergency Vehicles

a. Description of existing and proposed service and emergency vehicle routes and frequency.

2.9. Student Move-In/Move-Out

a. Description of existing and proposed routing of cars and buses for student move-in.

Chapter Three: Construction Impacts

- 3.1 Description of Construction Phasing /Staging and Construction Activities Per Phase
- 3.2 Demolition and Recycling of Materials
- 3.3 Impacts to the Hot Truck
- 3.4 Impacts to 4th Ward 1rst District Polling Place
- 3.5 Drainage
- 3.6 Air Quality
- 3.7 Noise
- 3.8 Traffic
 - 3.8.1. Construction Phase Traffic - Description of the proposed construction route(s) under the existing condition and during construction to include Traffic Volume Data, Turning Movements, Intersection Geometry, Level of Service, and Safety Analysis for the Following Intersections:
 - a. Lake Street/Falls Street
 - b. Lake Street/Lincoln Street
 - c. Lake Street/University Avenue/Willard Way
 - 3.8.2. Construction Phase Parking

Chapter Four: Alternatives to the Proposed Action

- 4.1 Construction of Smaller Project
- 4.2 No Action

Chapter Five: Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

Chapter Six: Growth Inducing Aspects