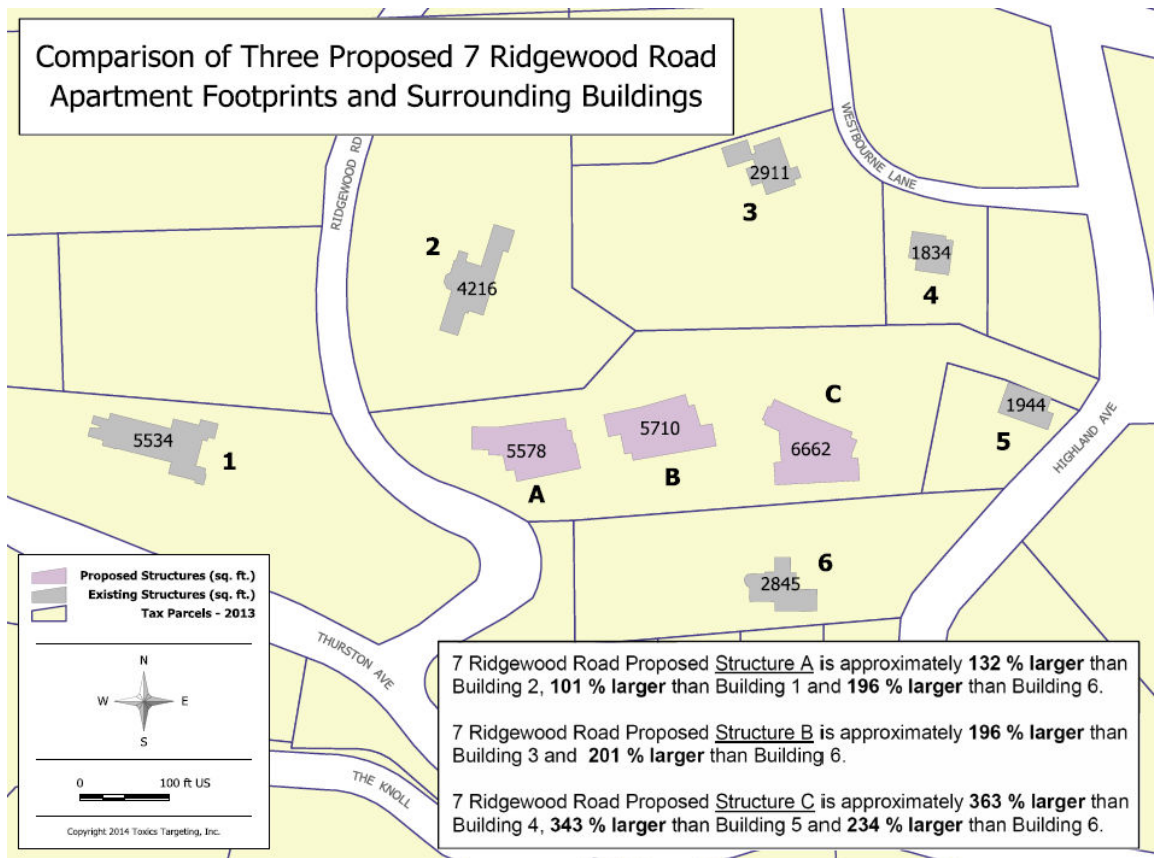


**Statement of Walter Hang  
Owner of 218 Wait Avenue  
Before the Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission  
May 20, 2014**

Greetings. My name is Walter Hang. I live in the home I own at 218 Wait Avenue in Cornell Heights. I have lived in that lovely “residential park” historic district for more than two decades.

I respectfully request that the Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission (ILPC) not grant a “certificate of appropriateness” for the 7 Ridgewood Road apartment complex proposed to be constructed in an unspoiled forested glen in Cornell Heights because it clearly violates City of Ithaca historic preservation requirements.

As I will explain, the proposed project impermissibly exceeds Ithaca’s “Historic District and Landmark Design Guidelines.” As illustrated below, each of the three proposed building footprints is larger than all of the adjoining, surrounding or immediately nearby building footprints. One proposed building footprint is nearly four times larger than an adjoining residential home footprint.



**Cornell Heights Historic District**

The Cornell Heights Historic District was established in 1989 in response to potential development that could have dramatically altered the neighborhood’s architectural and historical significance.

According to its significance statement:

“The Cornell Heights Historic District is architecturally and historically significant as an exceptional intact example of a turn-of-the-century planned residential suburban development placed in an outstanding natural setting along the northern rim of Fall Creek Gorge overlooking the City of Ithaca and the southern tip of Cayuga Lake. The district’s curvilinear street plan, lavish landscape features, dramatic geographical setting, strictly residential character (developed on large private lots) and its historical pattern of development place it within the romantic tradition of the ‘ideal’ residence park developed in the second half of the nineteenth century and popularized by Frederick Law Olmsted after the Civil War.”

Once the Cornell Heights Historic District was established, existing structures were grandfathered in, but requirements were established to preserve the character of the area as a whole.

### **ILPC New Construction and Additions Guideline**

The proposed 7 Ridgewood Road apartment complex must fulfill an historic preservation guideline for “New Construction and Additions:”

“The footprint of a building is the area of ground that is covered by the structure. As mentioned earlier, zoning may allow a larger footprint than would be visually appropriate in the context of the historic environment. Not only the width of the new building along the street front, but its depth and total lot coverage, must be considered in evaluating compatibility with existing historic resources. The range of existing footprint sizes in the immediate vicinity should inform the new design: a new construction project that has either a significantly larger or a significantly smaller footprint than is common in the area would be considered inappropriate.” **See attachment.**

The Oxford English (US) definition of “vicinity” is “the area near or surrounding a particular place.” Its definition of “near” is “at or to a short distance away; nearby.”

The key requirement is: “The range of existing footprint sizes in the immediate vicinity should inform the new design: a new construction project that has either a significantly larger or a significantly smaller footprint than is common in the area would be considered inappropriate (emphasis added).”

### **New Construction Footprints Essentially Must be the Same Size as Surrounding and Nearby Building Footprints**

Given that mandate, Ithaca’s historic preservation guidelines essentially require new construction in the Cornell Heights Historic District to have the same “footprint sizes” as the surrounding and nearby buildings as well as buildings “common in the area.” New construction is “**inappropriate**” if it is significantly larger or smaller than those existing footprints.

That is why ILPC must not grant a “certificate of appropriateness” for the proposed 7 Ridgewood Road project. I emphasize that each of its three building footprints would be larger than all of the

adjoining, surrounding or immediately nearby building footprints. One proposed apartment structure footprint is nearly four times larger than the footprint of an adjoining residential home.

In short, the proposed 7 Ridgewood Road apartment buildings are completely out of scale with the nearby buildings in the Cornell Heights Historic District.

### **ILPC Failure to Preserve Cornell Heights Historic District from Improper Development at 312 Thurston Avenue**

Another large apartment complex is currently under construction at 312 Thurston Avenue, virtually across the street from the proposed 7 Ridgewood Road site. With all respect, that project never should have received a “certificate of appropriateness” because its three buildings are much larger than the surrounding buildings with the exception of non-contributing structures, notably the huge Highland Apartments that prompted local historic preservation efforts 25 years ago.

They are not as large, however, as the proposed 7 Ridgewood Road buildings.

### **Community Action to Improve Historic Preservation of Cornell Heights**

Approval of the 312 Thurston Avenue project generated intense historic preservation concerns among community residents, elected officials and City planning staff. As a result, efforts were initiated to improve zoning safeguards in Cornell Heights, but that initiative was withdrawn after it was deemed inadequate. A Working Group has been established to address historic preservation concerns, but it has not yet met to begin deliberations. I urge ILPC to work closely with that Group.

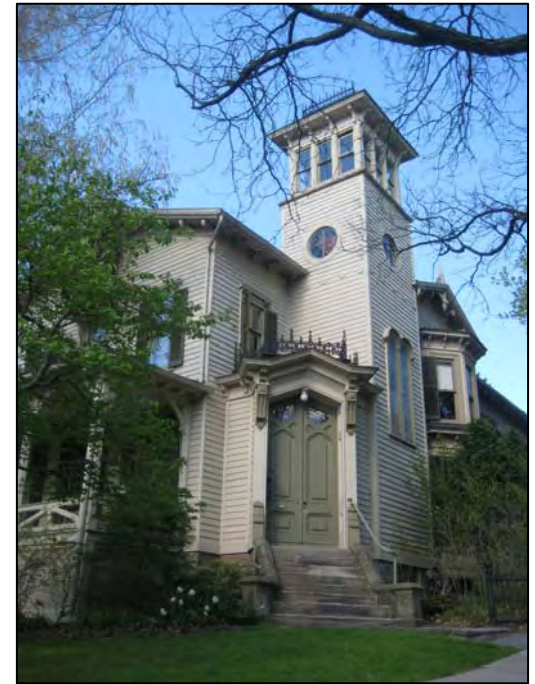
Perhaps most importantly, a coalition letter with a total of 988 signatories requests that a new housing development moratorium be adopted until a Cornell Heights comprehensive land use plan has been adopted along with an updated City-wide land use plan, improved zoning and improved historic preservation protections. If the City continues to authorize inappropriate housing developments within the historic district, the damage that has already been done would be exacerbated. See: <http://toxictargeting.com/letters/2014/3/14/cornell-hqts-moratorium-letter>

The signatories to this coalition letter include owners of more than 40% of the residential properties in the Ithaca portion of Cornell Heights: <http://toxictargeting.com/letters/2014/4/9/cornell-hqts-walter-hang-statement>

### **Conclusion**

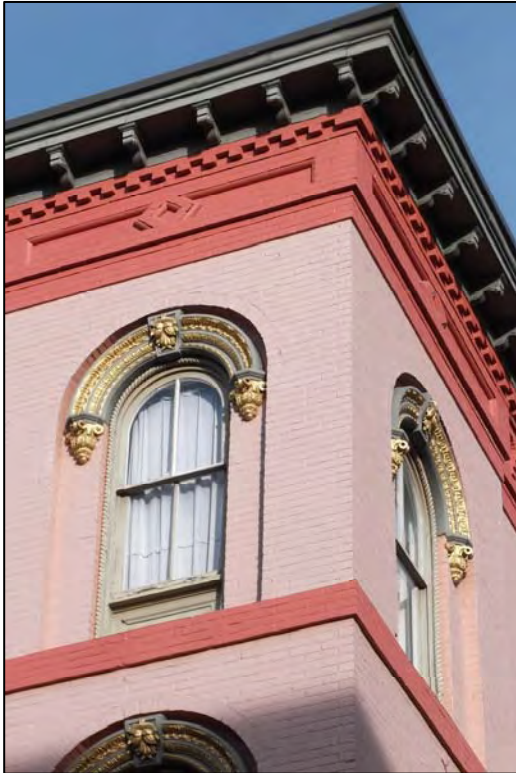
In conclusion, I respectfully request that ILPC not grant 7 Ridgewood Road a “certificate of appropriateness” for the reasons outlined herein. I also request that ILPC require all new construction in Cornell Heights and other Ithaca Historic Districts to be neither larger nor smaller than the existing footprints of buildings on any adjoining property lot, including across any street, or any buildings within 250 feet of the block where development is proposed in an Historic District, not including “non-contributing structures. In addition, the width of any new buildings along the street front, their depth and total lot coverage must be essentially the same as those existing structures. Until these requirements are fully codified, ILPC should adopt a new housing approval moratorium.

# The City of Ithaca Historic District and Landmark Design Guidelines



Adopted May 14, 2013

## What are Design Guidelines?



Protection of the historic, aesthetic, and cultural heritage of the city of Ithaca is considered essential to the promotion of the educational, cultural, economic, and general welfare of our citizens. Toward that end, Ithaca, like hundreds of other cities across the country, has adopted a historic preservation ordinance which allows individual properties and groups of properties possessing special historic character to be designated as local landmarks and historic districts. Exterior and site alterations to locally designated historic properties are regulated by the Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission (ILPC). The goal of such regulation is to preserve and protect the historic character of our community for the benefit of current and future generations, while allowing our historic properties to evolve and retain their usefulness.

The City of Ithaca's Design Guidelines for Historic Districts and Individual Landmarks provide general guidance to property owners, architects, developers, and trades people in planning appropriate repairs, renovations, and alterations to Ithaca's historic built environment. These Guidelines also serve as the basis for the ILPC's decisions regarding regulated changes to locally designated historic properties. They are based on The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (Appendix II), a broad national standard used to guide preservation efforts across the country, and on the principles enumerated in the City of Ithaca's Landmarks Ordinance (Appendix I), which is itself based on the New York State Model Landmarks Ordinance. Although many typical issues are discussed in these Guidelines, every building presents unique and sometimes unpredictable challenges. Owners of locally designated historic properties are reminded that before embarking on any work that will affect the exterior or site of their property, they must consult with the City's Historic Preservation Planner, who is staff to the ILPC. The ILPC and its staff are eager to work with applicants to achieve a project that both preserves the character of our historic resources and meets the functional and aesthetic goals of the property owner.

## Scale and Massing

*Scale* is the visual size of a structure when compared to adjacent structures and the site. *Massing* refers to the basic geometrical forms or blocks of a structure. Both of these criteria have a profound impact on the ability of a new construction project to fit in with its historic environment. The specific components of a design that combine to create its overall scale and massing include composition, roof forms, foundation, footprint, and height.

*Composition* is the way in which the geometrical forms of a structure that make up its massing are assembled. Composition can be symmetrical or asymmetrical, simple or complex, and can have a directional expression that is vertical, horizontal, or neutral. Compositional complexity is increased with each massing block that is added to the main core of a structure. Such added masses would include porches, wings, or other projections off the main block of the building.

*Roof forms* can have a major impact on the perceived scale and massing of a structure. The overall roof form is created by its shape, pitch, and degree of complexity, all of which were discussed in detail in an earlier section of these Guidelines. The roof shape, pitch, and complexity proposed for a new construction project should relate to the shapes, pitch, and level of complexity found on neighboring structures. A flat roof, for example, would not be appropriate in an area where complex gable roofs with dormers and intersecting gables are the norm.

The height of a structure's *foundation* has a significant impact on its perceived scale and massing. Most historic structures feature a raised foundation, but except in areas affected by Ithaca's very steep topography, the foundation is not generally more than a few feet tall. For this reason, slab foundations, or unusually tall raised foundations, are generally not appropriate on new construction projects. Again, the new project should look to the historic structures in its immediate environment for an appropriate range of foundation heights.

The *footprint* of a building is the area of ground that is covered by the structure. As mentioned earlier, zoning may allow a larger footprint than would be visually appropriate in the context of the historic environment. Not only the width of the new building along the street front, but its depth and total lot coverage, must be considered in evaluating compatibility with existing historic resources. The range of existing footprint sizes in the immediate vicinity should inform the new design: a new construction project that has either a significantly larger or a significantly smaller footprint than is common in the area would be considered inappropriate.

Finally, the overall *height* of a structure and the proportional heights of each story are key elements of a structure's scale and massing.