



CITY OF ITHACA

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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, BUILDING, ZONING, & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Michael Thorne, Superintendent of Public Works
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Phyllis Radke, Director of Zoning Administration

From: Jennifer Kuszniir, Economic Development Planner

Date: October 26, 2015

RE: Proposal to Mandate Street-Level Active Uses on Primary Commons

The purpose of this memo is to provide information regarding a proposal to create a requirement for active street-level uses on the primary Commons.

Street-level active uses encourage high levels of pedestrian activity and enliven the streetscape. Therefore, staff is recommending that the City consider adopting requirements for ground-floor active uses on the Commons.

The City recently adopted similar regulations as a part of the Collegetown re-zoning process, which requires street-level active uses in the MU-2 district. Active uses are defined in the MU Zone as any of the following:

- Retail store or service commercial facility
- Restaurant, fast-food establishment, or tavern
- Theater, bowling alley, auditorium, or other similar public place of assembly
- Hotel
- Library, or fire station
- Public park, or playground
- Bank, or monetary institution

In addition, staff recommends adding the following language in response to a recent development proposal that contained a street-level use that was considered active, but was not on the approved list:

- Additional uses may be permitted, if the Planning and Development Board determines them to be an active use and grants special approval for the use

This concept is also supported by the City's Comprehensive Plan, adopted by the Common Council in September 2015. The plan outlines future uses for the downtown/core business area and states that ground-level active commercial activity will enliven the streetscape. This idea is also reinforced by the Downtown Ithaca Alliance's 2020 Strategic Plan, which states that the plan relies on a dense urban core with a pedestrian-friendly street-level environment, and calls for zoning changes to encourage street-level activity. It further states that one of the key downtown planning principles is to maintain street-level retail uses in key locations.

Staff believes this zoning change will help support the investment the City has recently made in the Commons and make it a more welcoming environment. A draft of the proposed ordinance is attached, along with a draft Full Environmental Assessment Form (FEAF). The Planning and Economic Development Committee will consider the ordinance at its meeting on November 19, 2015. Your comments are respectfully requested *prior* to this meeting. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at: jkusznir@cityofithaca.org or 274-6410. Thanks so much.