

Comments to Planning and Development Board concerning Vecino proposal at 130 Cherry Street.

From: George McGonigal

Sent: Thursday, April 18, 2019 2:19 PM

To: Lisa Nicholas

Cc: JoAnn Cornish; Jennifer Kuszniir; Megan Wilson; Common Council

Subject: Comments to Planning and Development Board concerning Vecino proposal at 130 Cherry Street.

Hello, Lisa,

Would you kindly include this letter in with comments to the Planning Board? Thanks a lot.

George McG

Greetings, members of the Planning and Development Board,

I would like to share with you some concerns I have about the Vecino Group's proposed project at 130 Cherry Street. As you may know, I am one of two alderpersons who represent the First Ward on Common Council. I am also a member of the Waterfront/West End study group that is working on the Phase Two Waterfront Area Plan.

As I am sure you are aware, the "Cherry Street District" consists of the City of Ithaca's last remaining (light) industrial zone. The portion south of Cecil Malone Drive remains reserved for commercial and industrial uses. Zoning for the Cherry St. District north of Cecil Malone Drive has been changed so that it allows for mixed-use development and housing options.

The type of mixed-use development that is desired for Cherry St. has been clearly spelled out in the draft Waterfront Plan, which is to "encourage and support mixed-use development that is compatible with the existing industrial uses and that allows for live/work opportunities."

Further, one of the primary goals in the City's plan for the Cherry Street District is to "Retain Industrial Character....This industrial character should be retained and encouraged." And of course, a key part of retaining this character is to protect and promote the ability of these light industrial companies to thrive, and hopefully grow. There is more at stake here than retaining an "industrial aesthetic." There are lots of skilled, good-paying jobs in the Cherry Street District. There are several long-standing businesses that contribute significantly to our tax base and to our economy.

Which brings me to the Vecino proposal for 130 Cherry Street. New housing is clearly one of our goals for this block of Cherry Street. And housing that is affordable is an even greater goal.

I commend the purpose behind the Vecino Group's plan. They appear to be an honorable outfit.

My concern, in a nut shell, is that this apartment building is so large in size that it threatens both the character and utility of the surrounding industrial enterprises. While there is a nod toward space for artists to display and rehearse their work in the building, which is good, it is a stretch to call it a work/live building.

As proposed, the building will cover the entire property, and rise to the zone's maximum 5 stories. It will house approximately 200 people. There is no room for any on-sight outdoor space, either for adults or for children who may live there. Currently there are no sidewalks connecting the sight to anywhere. Heavy construction trucks and tractor trailers serve various businesses throughout the Industrial District, from

early in the morning into the evening. How will this activity mix with a very significant addition of personal cars and pedestrians? With school buses and children playing?

A smaller housing development, one that did not fill the property like a hippo in a bathtub, would fit this neighborhood much better. It would not change the nature of its surroundings because of its overwhelming size and scope.

The problem here is not with what Vecino wants to do so much as with the structure of how these projects get necessary funding. Apparently it is an easier road to get the funding suitable for a very large project than it is to get funding for a smaller project. There is more competition for the smaller projects, I guess, because these projects actually fit the communities that hope to get them.

What I am respectfully asking is that we hold out for a project that will fit the Cherry Street District. Vecino has been successful in applying for funding that works for smaller projects as well as for the big ones. Yes, it would mean going back to the drawing board for them. But let us keep in mind that the Waterfront Plan is not finished yet. A draft plan has not been presented to the public yet. Other developers besides Vecino are getting "their ducks in a row," so to speak. That they will want to build similarly sized buildings seems likely. Now is the time to insist on affordable and live/work mixed-use housing projects that will enhance and improve Cherry Street, rather than change and impair (destroy?) its core purpose.

Thank you for reading and considering.

yours,
George McG

George McGonigal

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