

# Southwest Area Land Use Plan

City of Ithaca, 1994

Includes 1998 Addendum

Report of the Southwest Area Land Use Committee

Formerly the "Southwest Area Land Use Study"

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## Preface

### Preface

#### Southwest Area Land Use Study

April 1998

In the four years since the publication of the *Southwest Area Land Use Study*, City of Ithaca, 1994, several significant real estate developments have occurred along the Route 13 corridor. Some of which are in the study area. However, large undeveloped tracts of land, including Southwest Park and the former city dump, remain undeveloped. The new construction is significant more as a bellwether of a strengthening commercial real estate market than for the actual square footage that has been created. The market seems to show a definite inclination toward development of commercial real estate along the Route 13 corridor.

In the 1994 plan, the summary of recommendations called for the following:

Alienation of Southwest Park

Proceeds from the sale of Southwest Park for acquisition of parkland and capital improvements in existing parks

Preservation of the right-of-way for two roadways to serve the area to be developed in southwest

The rezoning of the area currently zoned MH-1, with the exception of the developed portion

The rezoning of the city-owned land in the southwest, including Southwest Park

The report went on to recommend that the Southwest Park area be developed as a predominantly residential, mixed-use planned unit development. The report recognized that this might be difficult and suggested that the City periodically revisit this recommendation to see whether market forces and current city leadership still favored trying to create a mixed-use district in the southwest.

Finally, the report recommended that the City continue its investigation of the southwest area beginning with a preliminary environmental assessment of Southwest Park.

In the intervening four years, the City has begun to take steps to implement the recommendations of the *Southwest Area Land Use Study*. Shortly after completion of the study, Stearns & Wheeler, an engineering firm, was hired to conduct an environmental assessment of southwest. During the course of this investigation, the consultants identified certain indicator species which suggested that parts of southwest had become wetlands. This led to a further investigation of these wetlands and ultimately to their surveying by the City and to their formal delineation by the Army Corps of Engineers. These wetlands were formed as a consequence of filling activities by the City in Southwest Park. Southwest Park had been in agricultural use before its acquisition by the City. The City used the area as a deposition site for clean fill. In storing materials on the site, the City blocked the drainage ways which formerly took water from the agricultural fields to the Cayuga

Inlet. As a consequence, impoundments were created which allowed for the growth of wetland species and caused the soils in the wetlands to become hydric. Despite the fact that these wetlands are designated Class 3 and they are relatively of little significance for wildlife preservation, the City recognizes that regulations require their retention or the creation of alternative wetlands. As work progresses on the alienation and development of Southwest Park, attention will be given to these wetland areas and their ultimate replacement or improvement. The delineation of these wetlands is one of the significant changes that has occurred between the publication of the report and the writing of today's preface.

The second significant change is that the report's recommendation for construction of a mixed-use, predominantly residential planned use development seems, in retrospect, to have been overly idealistic. In addition, several factors have changed since the publication of the report, including a marked softening of the real estate market in the Ithaca area, particularly at the lower income end of the market. Whereas vacancy rates were extremely low at the time of the writing of the report, and there was still some apparent upward pressure on rents and sale prices, residential real estate over the past several years, particularly at the low end, has seen decreases in price and increase in vacancy rates, as well as increases in the length of time that unsold houses have remained on the market. On the other hand, the market for commercial space has every appearance of being robust and continuing to grow. There is marked developer interest in all property along the Route 13 corridor in the City of Ithaca, including the larger parcels of undeveloped land that were designated for development in the *Southwest Area Land Use Study*.

In re-examining the recommendations for residential development, the City felt it would be important to solicit the opinions of individuals who were involved with the development of housing in and around the City. Consequently, a focus group consisting of builders, developers, bankers, realtors and low-income housing providers was convened to re-evaluate the committee's 1994 recommendation for residential development of Southwest Park. This focus group, as had the focus group convened in 1973, felt it would be very difficult to develop Southwest Park for housing and that such development would require extensive government subsidy. Furthermore, there was unanimity that it would be difficult or impossible to develop mixed income housing in the southwest, since there are many more desirable locations for people with middle to higher incomes. Given these changes in the housing market and the continuing strength in the commercial real estate market, the recommendation of planning staff is that the former Southwest Park be rezoned for commercial use rather than mixed-use residential.

The third significant change from the 1994 report is that the report now recommends that entire area be rezoned for commercial use.

## Introduction and Recommendations

### SOUTHWEST AREA LAND USE

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of an intensive study by the Southwest Area Land Use Committee, described in this report, five key steps have been identified for City action to guide development of this important area on a course that will realize the greatest potential benefit for the City as a whole. These five recommended actions are:

1. That the process of the alienation of Southwest Park be completed.
2. That money from the disposition of the current Southwest Park be used partly for acquiring substitute parkland and partly for capital improvements to existing City parks.
3. a) That a right-of-way be reserved for a future south-west roadway to connect Elmira Road west to Floral Avenue, possibly continuing up West Hill. The right-of-way should make ample provision for separate bicycle and pedestrian paths, and landscaping.  
b) That a right-of-way be reserved for the future construction of a north-south roadway to improve access to the Southwest Park area and to alleviate future congestion on Meadow Street/Elmira Road. The right-of-way width reserved should be adequate for anticipated bicycle and pedestrian use, as well as automotive.
4. That, with the exception of the area now developed with mobile homes, the areas zoned MH-1 be rezoned to a heavy commercial designation. And that no further development of housing be permitted on the area formerly used as a garbage dump.
5. a) That 'Southwest Park' and the adjoining City-owned parcel to the north be rezoned for a predominantly residential mixed-use planned unit development (PUD). To do this, the City must amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow planned unit development.  
b) The City should solicit proposals from developers for a planned unit development in the alienated Southwest Park.

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#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 1992, Mayor Benjamin Nichols appointed the Southwest Land Use Committee to study the 62-acre City-owned parcel known as Southwest Park, and to recommend how the site should be used. The Committee, recognizing that the park is

only part of a much larger area needing such study, took the initiative to expand the scope of study to include two hundred fifty-seven acres in total (*see Map 1*). During 1992 the Committee, with staff support from the Department of Planning and Development, undertook this task, concentrating on the issues of land use and transportation. In addition to basic data gathering and research by the Planning Staff, the Committee has received information on various technical issues from the City's Engineering Staff and private consultants. While final recommendations on some of the matters raised by the Common Council must await further investigation, recommendations can be made on a number of issues including land use and circulation. The discussion of the factors leading to these recommendations have been organized in the report as follows:

The **Introduction** deals with the Committee's charge and its approach to the problem.

**Chapter One** presents an overview of the study and site analysis of the study area. It includes a discussion of the various opportunities and constraints to development in the area.

**Chapter Two** focuses on the central transportation issue in the Southwest Area, i.e., the location of a proposed southwest connector road as well as a north-south alternate route to Elmira Road/Meadow Street, both of which will traverse Southwest Park. The Committee's conclusion and recommendation is that there should be a connector between Elmira Road and Floral Avenue which should ultimately connect to upper West Hill in the Town of Ithaca. In addition, another connection between the Southwest Area and Elmira Road is proposed. Although the Committee has identified the preferred alternatives for these roadways, final decisions of their exact locations require further detailed engineering and environmental analyses.

**Chapter Three** discusses the underlying assumptions of various land use scenarios and their relative desirability. Concurring with previous studies' recommendations that Southwest Park be developed for non-parkland uses, the Committee faced the critical question of whether the area is suitable for residential development. While many constraints such as the surrounding industrial land uses, the railroad tracks, the County's solid waste handling facility, and NYSEG's power transmission lines militate against residential development, there is strong demand for additional affordable housing in the City.

**Chapter Four** discusses the recommendation that the money from the disposition of the current Southwest Park be used partly for acquiring substitute parkland and partly for capital improvements to existing City parks.

**Chapter Five** presents the Committee's conclusion and recommendation that the area now designated 'park' should be rezoned for a predominately residential planned unit development. In addition, it is recommended that with the exception of the area now developed with mobile homes, the rest of the area now zoned for mobile homes be rezoned for commercial activities. Specific actions are necessary for realization of the goals and objectives defined by the Committee. These include an environmental audit of

the sites in question, and engineering and environmental studies of the roadway alternatives.

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## INTRODUCTION

Land use alternatives in the City's southwest area had been examined in a number of previous studies, including the *1971 Southwest Development Feasibility Study* by the New York State Urban Development Corporation, the *1971 Ithaca General Plan*, and the *1977 Southwest Development Plan*. Southwest Park, being the City's largest single undeveloped parcel, was evaluated for its potential as a park versus its potential for other land uses. There were strong indications in all previous studies that all or part of Southwest Park should be alienated and used for non-park purposes, with the assumption that alternative parklands would be located and acquired which would be of equal recreational and monetary value.

Since the early 1980's, there has been discussion of how Southwest Park, once it is alienated, should be used. At its January 1992 meeting, the Common Council passed a resolution directing that...

*The Mayor shall appoint, with Common Council approval, a Southwest Parkland Use Study Committee consisting of: one owner of a business in the vicinity of Southwest Park, one planning or design professional, one housing professional, one resident of the City, one Council Member, one member of the Board of Public Works, and one member of the Parks Commission or the Conservation Advisory Council... [and that] the Committee shall recommend to Common Council a preliminary land use plan for Southwest Park. The Committee should recommend what portions of Southwest Park should be residential, what portions (if any) should be commercial, what portions (if any) should be devoted to City municipal uses, and what portions should be left in a natural state. Particular emphasis should be placed on exploring the area's potential for new housing. The Committee should consider whether a natural or architectural buffer zone is required to shield the area from the nearby County garbage baling station, to allow optimal development of the remaining land. The Committee should also recommend how the residential areas, any commercial areas, any municipal areas, and the protected areas should be zoned. Finally, the Committee should recommend a basic infrastructure arrangement of roads, sidewalks, possible bicycle paths, and utilities that would optimally support the recommended land uses. In its deliberations, the Committee should seek to optimize relationships between Southwest Park and adjacent land uses, transportation systems and natural areas...*

This Committee, formed in February 1992, decided shortly after it began to meet that the geographic boundary of the study area should extend beyond Southwest Park proper to include all the area (south of Clinton Street) between the Flood Control Channel, Meadow Street and Elmira Road. It was also decided that, in order to minimize any misconceptions regarding the character of the area or any preconceived notions about its future development, "Southwest Park" would not be used to designate the study area. The Committee correspondingly changed its name to Southwest Area Land Use Committee.

In order to make any such recommendations, the Committee felt the need to gather as much information as possible about the study area. Consequently, the main efforts of the study so far have been on data gathering and research and their documentation and presentation. Further, public education and participation in this planning process would also need to take place before any recommendations could be adopted by the City's Planning and Development Board and Common Council.

There were discussions on the scope and specificity of any land use recommendations to be made. While detailed site planning is important for the visualization and discussion of alternative land uses, the Committee recognized that there is no practical development-control mechanism which could ensure the implementation of any detailed site plan. Nor would this necessarily be desirable, even if it were possible. The goals of this study would therefore include only the delivery of recommendations for general land use and the reservation of rights-of-way for future road access to the area and possibly to connect traffic to West Hill.

## Overview

The City has been working on the Southwest Area Land Use Plan since February, 1992, when then Mayor Ben Nichols appointed a committee to study the area. The Committee finished its report in 1994. The end result was a plan consisting of land use and transportation recommendations for the southwest area of the City consisting of approximately 350 acres. The plan also recommended alienating and selling Southwest Park and purchasing and establishing a natural area further southwest, known as the Negundo Woods. On July 23, 1998 the governor signed the Southwest Alienation legislation into law. The City is now in the process of purchasing the substitute park lands. Once purchased, the park status of Southwest Park will be officially removed.

The 1994 Southwest Area Land Use Plan called for a five-year review of the housing recommendation for Southwest Park. The plan originally proposed that the City owned parcels be rezoned for predominately a residential mixed use Planned Unit Development. In May 1998, a focus group was assembled to re- address the question of housing as a viable use in Southwest Park. The focus group consisted of developers, bankers, and low income housing advocates. The focus group's unanimous recommendation of no housing in Southwest Park resulted in an addendum to the 1994 plan. The 1998 addendum reflected new information that had become available since 1994 and revised recommendations in response to public comment, consultation with experts in the housing development field and public goals.

### The Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS)

On May 6, 1998 the Common Council, acting as Lead Agency determined that the Southwest Area Land Use Plan may have a significant environmental impact and that a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) must be prepared. Due to the scope and scale of the project, Common Council resolved that a professional engineering and planning firm, assisted by City staff, would conduct the GEIS. The Planning and Development staff was authorized to release a Request for Proposals to qualified engineering and planning firms for this assignment. A selection committee consisting of representatives from the Planning and Development Board, Planning and Economic Development Committee, the MPO, and the Planning and Development Department reviewed the responses to the RFP and recommended Clark Patterson Associates of Rochester, NY for the assignment. A separate consultant experienced in urban design will be responsible for establishing the design guidelines for the study area. These guidelines will ultimately be incorporated into the GEIS and utilized by the Planning and Development Board during the Site Plan Review process.

The GEIS will investigate potential impacts based on six different build-out scenarios. The major components of the GEIS include the following: a drainage study, a landfill assessment, and a traffic study. Mitigation measures will be identified as appropriate. The completion of the GEIS will result in the adoption of the Southwest Area Land Use

Plan, re-zoning of approximately 112 acres to commercial, and creation of the Negundo Woods natural area.

On August 5, 1998 Common Council approved the GEIS consulting firm and contract amount. Council also deemed the scoping document complete. The GEIS is currently under way.

FINAL SCOPING DOCUMENT

**SOUTHWEST AREA LAND USE PLAN**

**CITY OF ITHACA, TOMPKINS COUNTY**

Approved by City of Ithaca Common Council 8/5/98

- I. Cover Sheet**
- II. Table of Contents and Summary**
- III. Project Description**

The Southwest Area Land Use Plan was completed in 1994 and modified by addendum in May of 1998. It examines the options for the use of over three hundred fifty acres south of Clinton Street, bounded on the west by the Flood Control Channel and the City line, and on the east and south by Meadow Street and Elmira Road. Prior to adoption of this proposed Plan by the City Council, the impacts of the Plan's recommendations must be examined within the framework of the State Environmental Quality Review Act. The proposed Plan makes the following recommendations:

- That the process of the alienation of Southwest Park be completed.
- That money from the disposition of the current Southwest Park be used partly for acquiring substitute parkland and partly for capital improvements to existing City parks.
- That right-of-ways be reserved for future transportation corridors including accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- That several areas be rezoned to heavy commercial (B-5).
- That buffering be provided between commercial and residential/recreation uses.
- That public access be provided to recreation areas.
- That the City expand the light industrial zone to the south.

A. Project Purpose, Need and Benefits

- 1. Background and history
- 2. Public need for the proposed plan
- 3. Objectives of the Project Sponsor

- 1. Benefits (direct and indirect) of the proposed plan.

A. Location

- 1. Geographic boundaries
  - 1. Existing zoning and land use of project site and surrounding area

A. Design and Layout

The GEIS will examine potential impacts based upon six alternative construction and build-out scenarios:

- One mixed use non-residential (i.e., commercial, office, warehouse, etc.)
- One mixed use with residential as suggested in the 1994 Southwest Area Land Use Plan (same as above with residential)
- Office/retail with build-outs of, 500,000 SF, 750,000 SF, 1,000,000 SF, and 1,250,000 SF.

The alternatives will be based upon the use of the substitute parkland as wildlife preserve, flood management, and passive recreation.

#### A. Approvals

City of Ithaca Common Council adoption of the Southwest Area Land Use Plan.

## IV. Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation

This Section will include a description of the existing environmental setting in and around the study area and will address the potentially significant adverse impacts identified below. Practicable mitigation measures that can be used to avoid or minimize some or all of these potential environmental impacts must also be discussed.

#### A. Impact on Land

The Plan makes the following land use and zoning recommendations that might result in potentially significant environmental impacts:

1. 60 +/- acres of parkland to be rezoned B-5, Commercial
2. 38 +/- acres currently zoned MH-1, Mobile Home to be rezoned B-5, Commercial
3. 7 +/- acres currently zoned I-1, Industrial to be rezoned B-5, Commercial
4. 7 +/- acres currently zoned P-1, Public to be rezoned B-5, Commercial
5. 60 +/- acres currently zoned FW-1, Flood Zone to be rezoned as substitute parkland

The GEIS will examine the impacts of these proposed changes on the land use and zoning in the southwest area of the City. It will examine the impacts on all of the impacted land uses and zoning classifications currently existing and proposed. Mitigation measures will be identified if necessary.

In addition, as a result of the recommended change in land uses, subsequent development in the Southwest Study Area may result in construction on land where the depth to water table is less than three feet, construction of parking facilities for 50 or more vehicles, removal of vegetation, and removal of top soil. Each of these conditions must be examined and mitigation measures identified.

#### A. Impact on Water

Wetlands:

The Army Corps of Engineers has delineated approximately 9 acres of Class III wetlands in the study area. The impact of proposed development in or near the designated wetlands will be investigated and mitigation measures proposed. All other wetlands in the area will be identified and evaluated. Possible mitigation measures might include improvement or replacement of wetlands.

#### Water Quality:

The anticipated addition of large areas of impervious surface will result in the potential for pollutants to negatively impact nearby water bodies. Proper mitigation techniques must be identified and incorporated into future development. These mitigation measures may include but are not limited to the following:

- Swales, detention/retention ponds, and constructed wetlands to remove pollutants prior to discharge into the water body
- scheduled sweeping of lots
- alternative materials to salt
- utilizing sumps and traps in all storm structures
- incorporation of mitigation measures in parking lot design

#### Aquifer:

A confined aquifer exists in the study area. The proposed development will be assessed for its impact on this (potential long-term) source of drinking water. Available published literature will be reviewed to identify the recharge and discharge areas for the aquifer and the horizontal and vertical extent of the aquifer. Possible mitigation measures to protect the aquifer will be proposed. Included in mitigation may be an assessment of aquifer water quality and an inventory of existing sources of drinking water.

#### Landfill: Phase I & II Environmental Investigation

A portion of the study area was once a City dump and the existence and/or extent of contamination in this area is unknown. The landfill was never properly closed and the amount of cover material on the landfill is minimal.

A phase I and phase II environmental investigation must be conducted and will include assessment of groundwater and surface water quality, a determination of the limit of waste, an explosive gas survey, a vector survey, a surface leachate investigation, and identification of sensitive environmental receptors and local groundwater users. The closure investigation must be based on a work plan approved by the NYSDEC.

Depending upon the findings of the testing, the following mitigation measures could be proposed:

- Engineering design and formal closure and capping of the landfill in accordance with NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Department guidelines.
- A long-term monitoring network should be established during the closure investigation.
- Collection and treatment of leachate generated by the landfill (if necessary)
- Management of explosive gases
- Identification of the landfill as a non-residential development zone

Stormwater Management:

Portions of the study area are currently prone to lake-level and creek-level flooding. Potential flooding resulting from various levels and types of development needs to be investigated. In addition, existing drainage ways across the study area will be assessed for its ability to accept increased volumes of stormwater. In addition, the impact of increased runoff on substitute parkland will be assessed. The study will be conducted utilizing TR-55 software assuming a 25-, 50-, and 100-year storm. FEMA information will be considered.

Mitigation measures will be identified if required. Possible measures may include the construction of detention/retention ponds, vegetated swales, and constructed wetlands. These stormwater management structures will be located and sized based upon each of the six development scenarios. Consideration will be given to a regional approach to stormwater management. Incorporation of stormwater management strategies into overall buffering strategies will be considered.

A. Impact on Air

Traffic generated as a result of the anticipated development in the Southwest Area may have an impact on air quality. Mitigation measures will include transportation-infrastructure improvements and pedestrian, bicycle, and mass transit options.

B. Impact on Visual Resources

With the potential development, the appearance of the study area will be significantly altered. Much of the area is currently undeveloped and any change to this undeveloped area will have a visual impact

An assessment of key points of visibility will be conducted. This assessment will be based upon the eventual maximum build-out scenario. Visual simulations of the study area will be developed from these key points and the visual impact of the development alternatives assessed.

It is anticipated that these key points of visibility could include, but not be limited to the following:

- Key points along the Route 13 corridor
- Buttermilk Falls State Park (including the gorge trails)
- Proposed Black Diamond Trail
- Substitute Park Land
- Former railroad right-of-way and the levee
- Upland residences in the Town of Ithaca
- Nates Floral Estates
- Spencer Road

Mitigation measures will be identified where required and may include but are not limited to the following:

- Urban Design Guidelines/Study to be done as a separate document, to be included in GEIS
- use of landscaping, buffers, and the preservation of existing vegetation
- establishment of guidelines for the siting of new structures including buildings and parking lots

#### A. Impact on Transportation

As development occurs existing transportation systems will be affected. The need for, and the possible location of, new corridor alternatives must be further investigated. A comprehensive traffic study must be prepared to assess both on- and off-site impacts and mitigation measures. Particular attention will be paid to engineering constraints, and possible traffic calming measures, and emergency routes. Connectivity to alternative modes of transportation including pedestrian access, bicycle routes, and ADA accessible routes must be considered. The traffic impact study will be based upon the development of the two new roads, the six alternative development scenarios, and the no action alternative.

The Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council T-Model will be used to model traffic patterns, capacities, access management, and potential impacts of development on the study area and on nearby neighborhoods (pre-existing traffic counts will be used to correlate findings).

The study will examine:

##### Route 13 Corridor

The limits of the study will be based upon an analysis of the Level of Service (LOS) at all intersections along the corridor. The limits of the study for each development scenario will be determined by those intersections where the LOS drops. The

model will be used to determine impacts to intersections and highway capacity. At those areas impacted, a standard capacity analysis will be conducted to determine mitigation.

The mitigation plan will result in the payment of mitigation fees by future developers. The mitigation plan will detail the levels of fees based upon level of impact. Mitigation measures must be specifically identified and quantified. They will include the following as appropriate:

- Intersection improvements
- Signal timing improvements
- Capacity improvements
- Access management
- Traffic calming
- Multi-modal alternatives
- Other appropriate traffic demand management and traffic systems management alternatives

#### Spencer Road:

The study will examine the entire length of Spencer Road. Impacts on all intersections and on capacity will be examined for each development scenario. At those areas impacted, a standard capacity analysis will be conducted to determine mitigation.

The mitigation plan will result in the payment of mitigation fees by future developers. The mitigation plan will detail the levels of fees based upon level of impact. Mitigation measures must be specifically identified and quantified. They will include the following as appropriate:

- Intersection improvements
- Signal timing improvements
- Capacity improvements
- Traffic calming
- Multi-modal alternatives
- Other appropriate traffic demand management and traffic systems management alternatives

#### Floral Avenue (Route 13A):

The study area will include the length of Floral Avenue between Route 13 and State Street. The study will examine the potential impacts of each development scenario on the intersections at Route 13 and at State Street. It will also examine capacity issues. At those areas impacted, a standard capacity analysis will be conducted to determine mitigation.

The mitigation plan will result in the payment of mitigation fees by future developers. The mitigation plan will detail the levels of fees based upon level of impact. Mitigation measures must be specifically identified and quantified. They will include the following as appropriate:

- Intersection improvements
- Signal timing improvements

- Capacity improvements
- Traffic calming
- Multi-modal alternatives
- Other appropriate traffic demand management and traffic systems management alternatives

Old Elmira Road:

The study will examine the impacts of each development scenario on the intersection of Elmira, Spencer, Albany, and Park Street. The study will also examine the impacts of each development scenario on road capacity. At those areas impacted, a standard capacity analysis will be conducted to determine mitigation.

The mitigation plan will result in the payment of mitigation fees by future developers. The mitigation plan will detail the levels of fees based upon level of impact. Mitigation measures must be specifically identified and quantified. They will include the following as appropriate:

- Intersection improvements
- Signal timing improvements
- Capacity improvements
- Traffic calming
- Multi-modal alternatives
- Other appropriate traffic demand management and traffic systems management alternatives

Neighborhood Streets:

The traffic impact study will examine the neighborhood area bounded by Court Street on the North, Cayuga Street on the East, Route 13 on the West, and Spencer Street on the South. The model will assess the impacts of each development scenario on two types of streets:

Principal Through Streets:

These roads include Buffalo Street, Seneca Street, Green Street, Clinton Street, Albany Street, and Cayuga Street. The development scenarios will be assessed to determine if any result in a minimum of two percent (2%) traffic volume increase on any segment of these through streets. Any increase of 2% or greater will be deemed an impact that must be mitigated.

The mitigation plan will result in the payment of mitigation fees by future developers. The mitigation plan will detail the levels of fees based upon level of impact. Mitigation measures must be specifically identified, described and quantified. They will include the following:

- Specific traffic calming measures

### Local/Neighborhood Streets:

This includes all other streets in the defined study area. The development scenarios will be assessed to determine if any result in any level of traffic volume increase on any segment of these streets. Any level of increase will be deemed an impact that must be mitigated.

The mitigation plan will result in the payment of mitigation fees by future developers. The mitigation plan will detail the levels of fees based upon level of impact. Mitigation measures must be specifically identified and quantified. They will include the following:

- Specific traffic calming measures

#### A. Impact on Daily Life

Objectionable odors, noise, glare, and vibration may be produced as a result of development activities. Noise and vibration can be expected during periods of construction. Mitigation measures must be identified for these construction-related impacts.

Steps will also be taken to mitigate off-site impacts from post-construction noise, glare, objectionable odors and light spillage to the extent practicable through the use of mitigation measures including the following:

- Acoustical controls
- Earth berms
- Building placement
- Landscape buffers
- Limits on light pole heights
- Cut-off light fixtures
- Existing vegetative buffers

Adjacent neighborhoods will be the focus of this investigation.

#### A. Impacts on the Character of the Community

Development of the study area has the potential to impact existing residential neighborhoods. Potential mitigation measures will be identified where appropriate.

The economic impact of the development scenarios will be assessed. (Consistent with current SEQR case law, the economic impact study will not examine retail competition but will

examine the impacts on existing built environment such as neighborhood character and vacancy rates.) The areas of economic impact that will be examined shall include the following:

- Examine past economic activity and existing economic conditions
- Cumulative impact of the potential retail development on the character of the City
- Delivery of community services (fire and police protection)
- Cost of infrastructure (construction & maintenance)
- Tax Revenues
- Employment
- Vacancy rates

Potential mitigation measures will be identified where appropriate.

#### A. Utilities

Maximum build-out will be assessed for its impact on public utilities. Impacts assessed will include available capacity and, in the case of water service, maintenance of adequate pressure to meet fire flows. Mitigation measures, if required, will be identified.

The mitigation plan will result in the payment of mitigation fees by future developers. The mitigation plan will detail the levels of fees based upon level of impact. Mitigation measures must be specifically identified and quantified. They could include the following:

- Construction of new water and/or sewer mains
- Capacity improvements at the sewage treatment facility
- Improvements in water delivery systems

#### A. Solid Waste

The generation of solid waste will be assessed for each development scenario. Waste generated will be quantified. The capacity of existing disposal alternative will be assessed for its ability to absorb the increased volume of waste. Mitigation measures will be identified if necessary.

#### B. Plants and Animals

The study area will be examined for the presence of plants and animals including any rare or endangered species. In addition, the limits of the Unique Natural Area (Negundo Woods) will be established. Impacts on possible rare or endangered species and on Negundo Woods will be assessed. Mitigation measures will be identified if necessary.

(NOTE: Other issues preliminarily determined not to be relevant or not environmentally significant include -- impact on agricultural land resources; impact on aesthetic resources; impact on historical and archaeological resources; impacts on critical environmental areas; impacts on energy; and impacts on public health.)

## **V. Adverse Environmental Effects that Cannot be Avoided if the Project is Implemented**

Identify those adverse environmental effects in Section IV that can be expected to occur regardless of the mitigation measures considered.

## **VI. Alternatives**

### **A. Alternatives**

Identify and examine the six development scenarios described in III.C, above.

### **B. No Action**

1. Effect on public need for parkland and commercial land.
2. Impact on the future land use of neighboring sites

## **VII. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources**

Identify those natural and human resources listed in Section IV that will be consumed, converted, or made unavailable for future use.

## **VIII. Growth-Inducing Aspects**

Identify and discuss the potential growth inducing impacts associated with the proposed project.

## **IX. Appendices**

## **Southwest Area Land Use Plan**

The City has been working on the Southwest Area Land Use Plan since February, 1992, when then Mayor Ben Nichols appointed a committee to study the area. The Committee finished its report in 1994. The end result was a plan consisting of land use and transportation recommendations for the southwest area of the City consisting of approximately 350 acres. The plan also recommended alienating and selling Southwest Park and purchasing and establishing a natural area further southwest, known as the Negundo Woods. On July 23, 1998 the governor signed the Southwest Alienation legislation into law. The City is now in the process of purchasing the substitute park lands. Once purchased, the park status of Southwest Park will be officially removed.

The 1994 Southwest Area Land Use Plan called for a five-year review of the housing recommendation for Southwest Park. The plan originally proposed that the City owned parcels be rezoned for predominately a residential mixed use Planned Unit Development. In May 1998, a focus group was assembled to re- address the question of housing as a viable use in Southwest Park. The focus group consisted of developers, bankers, and low income housing advocates. The focus group's unanimous recommendation of no housing in Southwest Park resulted in an addendum to the 1994 plan. The 1998 addendum reflected new information that had become available since 1994 and revised recommendations in response to public comment, consultation with experts in the housing development field and public goals.

### **The Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS)**

On May 6, 1998 the Common Council, acting as Lead Agency determined that the Southwest Area Land Use Plan may have a significant environmental impact and that a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) must be prepared. Due to the scope and scale of the project, Common Council resolved that a professional engineering and planning firm, assisted by City staff, would conduct the GEIS. The Planning and Development staff was authorized to release a Request for Proposals to qualified engineering and planning firms for this assignment. A selection committee consisting of representatives from the Planning and Development Board, Planning and Economic Development Committee, the MPO, and the Planning and Development Department reviewed the responses to the RFP and recommended Clark Patterson Associates of Rochester, NY for the assignment. A separate consultant experienced in urban design will be responsible for establishing the design guidelines for the study area. These guidelines will ultimately be incorporated into the GEIS and utilized by the Planning and Development Board during the Site Plan Review process.

The GEIS will investigate potential impacts based on six different build-out scenarios. The major components of the GEIS include the following: a drainage study, a landfill assessment, and a traffic study. Mitigation measures will be identified as appropriate. The completion of the GEIS will result in the adoption of the Southwest Area Land Use

Plan, re-zoning of approximately 112 acres to commercial, and creation of the Negundo Woods natural area.

On August 5, 1998 Common Council approved the GEIS consulting firm and contract amount. Council also deemed the scoping document complete. The GEIS is currently under way.

Available information:

Proposed Land Use Plan

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*The Southwest Area Land Use Committee:*  
Denise Rusoff, Chair  
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## Chapter 1 - Description of Study Area and Vicinity

### *Definition of study area -*

The Common Council resolution establishing the Southwest Parkland Use Study Committee directed that the Southwest Park be studied. However, the resolution also stipulated that the committee should seek to optimize relationships among the Southwest Park and adjacent areas as well as with transportation systems and natural resources. Therefore, the study committee expanded its charge to include all that part of the City lying south of Clinton Street, bounded on the west by the Flood Control Channel and the City line, and on the east and south by Meadow Street and Elmira Road.

While the land use investigation and recommendations for the most part stayed within these boundaries, transportation issues required that the committee look beyond the study area boundaries. The committee studied roadways which would connect the study area to the rest of the City, the Town of Ithaca and the County. Therefore, the committee has examined land between the railroad tracks and the flood control channel, as well as land further west connecting to West Hill.

### *Study area history -*

The entire study area lies within the historical flood plain, as do all of Ithaca's flat areas. Historically, all of Ithaca, except the hills, was subject to periodic flooding. Before development the study area was covered by flood plain forest or grassy marshlands.

Ithaca lies at the head of Cayuga Lake which was gouged by the glaciers and, as is typical of glacial lakes, is deep and 'v'-formed. The area on which the City is built was formed by gradual deposition of alluvial tills washed down from the hills on their way to the lake. The deltas on which Ithaca is built have soils typical of such geological formations. As will be discussed later, these soils are soft and difficult to build on. The depth to bedrock may be as much as 300 or 400 feet in some areas. No deep soil borings have been done in the study area but it is assumed that the depth of bedrock is in the 100 foot range, or deeper. Ground water levels are very high, within four to ten feet of the surface in some areas, and subject to fluctuation with lake level.

The entire Southwest area was subject to severe periodic flooding, usually the result of inadequate stream capacity rather than an overflow from Cayuga Lake. In 1935, a major flood destroyed a great deal of property in the City. As a consequence, serious work began on flood prevention measures. This culminated with the construction in 1968-70 by the Army Corps of Engineers, of the Flood Control Channel and with it the construction of a levee running from Elmira Road to the railroad tracks where they cross Cayuga Inlet. The combination of these measures has reduced the potential for flooding from the Cayuga Inlet north and east of the flood channel and levee. As snow melt and Spring rains in 1993 and 1994 demonstrate, there is still a risk of flooding from small

creeks and a general risk of lake level flooding in low lying areas. Since the construction of the flood prevention measures, the study area is no longer in the 100-year Flood Hazard Area (as defined by USDHUD/FIA) and has not been severely flooded except for brief episodes, due to lack of capacity of existing channels to carry floodwaters into the lake. Even in the flooding during the Spring of 1993, the undeveloped part of the study area remained unaffected.

The southwestern part of the City, which includes the study area, was not annexed into the City until 1958 and was relatively undeveloped until the 1960s. The Elmira Road itself was not constructed until after the flood of 1935. Before that time Spencer Road and Floral Avenue were the City's only connections from downtown to Spencer, Elmira and points southwest. There was some residential development along Spencer Road, but the flat part of the area had various non-urban land uses such as farming, the City dump, and the County fair grounds.

Use of much of the land west of the flood control levee and south of Cayuga Inlet has been restricted to activities such as agriculture and recreation, in line with an agreement with the Army Corps of Engineers pursuant to their construction of the levee and the flood control channel.

The former City dump, on land which was privately owned, was closed around 1968, and most farming in the study area was discontinued by the late 60s. The former City dump has remained undeveloped with the exception of the northerly-most portion on which a mobile home park has been constructed. (Map #4 shows the area that was used as the City dump and the staff's best estimate at the boundaries of this dump area over the period of time during which it was actively used.) The property which includes the former City dump, owned by Dr. Reuben Weiner, is now mostly either undeveloped or used as a mobile home park. This large tract includes frontage along Elmira Road, which is partially developed with leasehold businesses and interim uses.

Elmira Road is the City's automobile-oriented, heavy commercial strip. Most of the land uses along Elmira road are commercial. Typical uses include automobile-related commercial activities, fast food establishments, construction material supply, etc.

One of the last remaining large parcels in the study area lies just south of Southwest Park and east of the flood control levee and is roughly triangular in form. It was owned by the Marion family until it was recently sold to Tompkins County for development as a County-wide solid waste processing facility. The office for the County's Solid Waste Division is already in operation at the time of the writing of this report. Permitting and design of the main building continues.

Southwest Park itself was farmland until it was acquired by the City in 1963. In accordance with the official purpose of acquisition, the City's approach was to use the land as a clean fill site in order to raise its elevation so that it could be used for active recreation. This filling activity, which would also benefit alternative development, continued until the late 1980s. Southwest Park and the other City-owned land which

abuts it is not developed and is now covered by relatively small second-growth trees or grassy early succession vegetation. Much of the northeast portion has been filled with clean fill materials. The City has also used it for storage of bulk materials such as paving bricks removed from various City streets.

### *Southwest Park alienation process -*

In 1971 the City of Ithaca, in cooperation with the New York State Urban Development Corporation, prepared a Southwest Development Study which suggested that it might be in the City's interest to remove the park designation of Southwest Park (i.e., to "alienate" the park) and designate other parkland in its place.

Discussion of the future of Southwest Park by the Common Council began in 1981. These early deliberations suggested that the City combine the alienation of Southwest Park with that of land on Inlet Island that had been acquired in conjunction with the purchase of land for Cass Park. In 1983, a further study performed a cost-benefit analysis of various uses in Southwest Park. This study, again, suggested that alienation of Southwest Park and substitution of other more desirable and attractive parklands would be in the City's best interest. In 1984, the Common Council passed a resolution authorizing staff to begin the alienation process. In 1985 it authorized staff to identify and appraise substitute lands and begin negotiations for their acquisition. The acquisition and development of Cass Park as a major regional active recreation complex lessened the need for the development of Southwest Park. A Home Rule Message was sent by Common Council to the New York State Legislature supporting Senate Bill S-6362 and Assembly Bill A-6672 which would enable alienation.

The Finger Lakes State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation office supported the alienation, and in August 1985 Governor Mario Cuomo signed into law Chapter 757 of the Laws of 1985, allowing the City to alienate Southwest Park and Inlet Island and substituting for them other parklands of equal recreation and monetary value. As authorized by this law, the City began steps to purchase the identified substitute parcels and, in fact, purchased two of them in 1986. Work continued through the next several years with a Public Hearing being held on possible condemnation of the substitute lands where owners were unwilling to sell.

Parcels identified as substitute parkland for Southwest Park, (identified as A1 and A2 in Chapter 757), straddle the south City line and are located southwest of the Flood Control Levee, partially in the Town of Ithaca and partially in the City of Ithaca. (See Map # 4 and 4A) Substitute Parcel A1 is in the Town of Ithaca and is bordered by the railroad on the northwest and Cayuga Inlet on the south and east. In 1985, the Town Board of the Town of Ithaca passed a resolution in support of using this land as substitute land for Southwest Park. Substitute Parcel A2 is in the City, south of the Cayuga Inlet; its western boundary is the City line. It is currently zoned FW-1. Since roughly half of the substitute lands were to be in the City and the other half in the Town, it was informally agreed that

an arrangement would be worked out under which development, improvement, and maintenance of these areas would be shared between the Town and the City.

With changes in membership on the Common Council in 1988, the City began to alter its intentions with respect to Southwest Park and the Inlet Island. The first step in that direction was an attempt to obtain State legislative permission to use different land in exchange for the Inlet Island property than the City-owned "Festival" parcel, adjoining Treman marina, which Chapter 757 had designated as the substitute. The Common Council also directed that the environmental reviews of the Inlet Island and the Southwest Park alienations be separated. As these various steps were taken, the approved package began to come apart. It became increasingly clear that the City would have to take further action and request additional authorization from the State if the alienations of Southwest Park and of Inlet Island were to continue to be politically and legally acceptable.

In 1989, Common Council directed the Planning and Development Department to prepare separate bills authorizing the alienation of all or portions of both Inlet Island and Southwest Park. Finally, and most recently, as noted in Common Council Minutes of January 1, 1992, Common Council established the Southwest Parkland Use Study Committee to make recommendations regarding the future of Southwest Park. A separate committee was established to study Inlet Island, and completed its work with publication of its report in 1992.

### ***Zoning and major land ownership -***

The study area is zoned for a variety of uses, including heavy commercial, industrial, mobile home, public uses, and floodway. The largest portion, including the entire frontage of Meadow Street and Elmira Road, is zoned B-5, which is the City's heavy, automobile-oriented commercial zoning designation. Following in descending order of size in the study area are I-1 industrial, MH-1 mobile home, P-1 public and FW-1 floodway. In contrast to the B-5 district, which is almost fully developed, much of the area in other zoning classifications is undeveloped. (*See Maps 2A, 2B, and 3*)

Generally speaking, the land not fronting on Elmira Road/Meadow Street is zoned for industry. The exceptions are: the Southwest Park itself, which is zoned P-1 or public; the mobile home park zoned for that use; and the FW-1 zone west of the Flood Control levee. The southerly boundary of the Flood Way-1 zone was originally intended to denote the edge of the area which would be inundated in a flood situation. The FW-1 zone is supposed to set aside an area in which flood waters from the upstream Cayuga Inlet drainage area can pool before transiting the flood channel. Only a small portion of this area would actually be in the floodway, which is technically the "channel" that is required to be kept free of fill or development in order to let the "design flood" water drain away as fast as possible. The remainder of the FW-1 zone would be subject to flooding but would not actually be in the path of moving water. Studies by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) suggest that a far smaller area than that now covered by

the FW-1 designation would be a part of the floodway and that the majority of the site would be designated in the 100-year flood hazard zone rather than the floodway. A redefinition of the floodway boundaries is now under study.

In November 1992, a developer was given a variance by the Board of Zoning Appeals which will allow development of a portion of the FW-1 zoned area which was part of the substitute parkland identified in 1985, for commercial real estate. The proposed development would be similar to others in the Meadow St.-Elmira Rd. B-5 corridor, which includes the majority of the development site. In recognition of the potential for problems of compatibility between a major retail facility, with large site areas devoted to parking and service, and a major community park, conditions were attached to the variance requiring a buffer area, site plan review, and compliance with flood hazard regulations.

The FW-1 zoned area has long been identified by the City as land suitable for substitution and designation as parkland if the City proceeds with alienation of Southwest Park. Changes in the boundaries of the FW-1 area may have a significant impact on these plans by the City.

The largest single land ownership in the study area is held by Dr. Reuben Weiner. His properties include the mobile home park, the former site of the City dump, and several other major parcels. The next largest land holder is the City of Ithaca with ownership of Southwest Park and its adjacent parcel totaling approximately 66 acres. After that is Tompkins County, with its Recycling Center and Solid Waste Center. Other major holdings are the Tops and Wegmans supermarkets (the former County Fairgrounds), as well as the K-Mart plaza. These properties front on Meadow Street and are anchored by discount stores, car dealers, or large supermarkets.

### *Transportation analysis -*

Spencer Road historically was the main road connecting Ithaca to Spencer and points south and west. The construction of Elmira Road and its connection to Meadow Street was a major improvement in the area's road system. By the early 70s, however, traffic volume on Elmira Road, which was constructed as two lanes with dirt shoulders, was well above the road's effective carrying capacity. In 1975 the City approved and funded a major reconstruction of Elmira Road which expanded it to five lanes (two moving lanes in each direction with one center turning lane). Granite curbs were installed as were light fixtures and new signage. This facility has served the area very well and appears to have enough capacity to meet the volume needs at least for the immediate future.

Before the construction of this five-lane facility, New York State Department of Transportation was considering construction of a major new road on a new right of way which would connect the four-lane limited access portion of Route 13 north of the study area to the intersection with Routes 96 and 34 at the base of Newfield hill. This facility was to be a major limited-access highway. The construction of the five-lane portion of

Elmira Road, and changes in how NYS DOT and the City viewed the automobile and the roads which serve it, made DOT drop these new road-building plans. However, current traffic volumes and levels of service on Elmira Road in the City and Town are evidence of the need for some improvements to increase capacity, and the State is now preparing plans for upgrading the section entering the City, as well as for rebuilding the 13/96/34 intersection. There will in all likelihood come a time when additional roadway capacity in the Southwest will be warranted. The study committee has examined several alternatives for construction of a collector which would facilitate movement of cars between the State Street area and the south City line.

The other major traffic issue is that the connections between West Hill and South Hill are extremely circuitous and limited. The City has had for some time in its master plan a conceptual "southwest parkway" which would connect Meadow Street to West Hill. The Planning Department staff and the Study Area Committee have given careful consideration to several alternative roadway alignments which would accommodate trips between West Hill and the southern portion of the City. It is their consensus that this facility cannot be constructed without the full cooperation of the County and the Town of Ithaca. The County, in its negotiated agreement with the City of Ithaca on the Recycling and Solid Waste Center, has agreed to pay half the cost of any such roadway. For more discussion of the proposed Southwest Connector, see Chapter 2.

A second transportation question which was addressed by the committee was whether it would be possible to extend Cherry Street to connect it at its southern end to the City street system. There are approximately eleven acres of undeveloped land which lie to the south of the Cherry Street Industrial Park. Road access must be provided to this land if it is to be developed.

It appears to be physically and economically impractical to build any connection over the railroad tracks which would tie this expanse to the area to be developed to the east of the railroad tracks. Furthermore, there does not appear to be any practical way of connecting a Cherry Street extension to any of the proposed east-west connectors through Southwest Park. Any such connection would require that a large structure be built which would connect Cherry Street to the east-west connector about 25 feet above the existing ground elevation. This structure would be required since any crossing of the railroad tracks must be elevated, due to the problems associated with grade crossings, and there is insufficient room in which to bring a roadway back down to grade so that it would connect with Cherry Street. (In a meeting with representatives from Conrail, committee and staff representatives were informed that, because of regulations regarding construction of new at-grade crossings - particularly where there are multiple rails - any rail-crossing would have to be practically planned as an elevated structure.)

Crossing the railroad tracks at grade and connecting to the street system on the east, or crossing the Flood Control Channel on the west, were deemed not to be economically feasible. This access problem is complicated by the fact that Cherry Street is already 1200 feet long extending south from its intersection with Clinton Street. It is generally accepted practice not to encourage development of a cul-de-sac which exceeds 500 feet.

In exploring this question, Planning staff solicited comments from the Engineering Division and Fire Department. The consensus was that as long as safety access was assured, and adequate water pressure could be maintained, there were no compelling reasons why the Cherry Street cul-de-sac should not be extended, given that there appeared to be no practical alternative to serve that property.

The conclusion of this investigation is that the only economical method for developing the land south of Cherry Street between the railroad tracks and the Flood Control Channel is by extending Cherry Street as a cul-de-sac.

Since the mid-1970s, the City of Ithaca has been working with the Finger Lakes State Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation Region and the Town of Ithaca toward construction of a recreation way (previously called the Cayuga Inlet Trail but now renamed the Black Diamond Trail) for bicycling, walking, and similar activities that would ultimately connect Taughannock Falls State Park with Robert H. Treman State Park. The central section of the trail is proposed to connect the City's Cass Park with Buttermilk Falls State Park.

Over the years, numerous right-of-way alternatives for this recreation way have been investigated and ultimately rejected, and with the passage of time the cost of the facility has greatly increased. Nonetheless, the City, Town and Finger Lakes remain committed to its ultimate construction. The alignment which is now under consideration is as follows (see Map #4): starting at the State Street bridge over the Flood Control Channel, the right-of-way follows the western edge of the Flood Control to a point approximately opposite West Clinton Street. Here it crosses the Flood Control Channel on a bridge to be constructed as a part of the project. From there, it proceeds southerly along the eastern side of the Flood Control Channel to the point where the tracks cross the channel, by the fish ladder. There it recrosses the channel, continuing Southwest along the abandoned DL&WRR right-of-way, and crossing the Inlet again as the r.o.w. curves south toward Buttermilk Falls and back up South Hill. Now back on the east side of the Inlet, the route follows the Inlet upstream, passing under the east end of the Rt. 13 bridge over the Conrail tracks, and finally doubles back along the south side of Rt. 13 to get to the Falls.

As noted above, this facility is proposed ultimately to connect to Robert H. Treman State Park and, as such, is an important recreational and transportation resource. The committee feels that the work on this bikeway should be given a very high priority by both the City and Finger Lakes.

It is recognized that the resources for construction of either of the proposed Southwest Connector or the proposed bikeway may not be immediately available. Nonetheless, staff and the committee recommend that after a road right-of-way has been selected, the involved governments should act quickly to acquire any necessary rights-of-way. Once rights-of-way have been acquired, funding necessary for construction can be sought over an extended period of time.

### ***Topography, and built and natural land cover -***

Since the area is a flood plain, it is extremely flat. The area must accommodate surface drainage flowing from South Hill on its way toward the Inlet. The extreme lack of gradient presents problems since waters traversing the area move very slowly and, therefore, need large structures to accommodate the peak flows of major storms.

In 1988, the process of environmental review for alienation produced findings of interest. First, an environmental analyst from New York State Department of Environmental Conservation inspected Southwest Park and found no freshwater wetlands as defined by Article 24 of the Environmental Conservation Law. In addition, Robert Wesley, a well-known local botanist specializing in wetlands, surveyed Southwest Park. He found that there were only five small areas that had characteristics of wetlands, the largest of which was about 1/4 acre. He found no significant flora except for the remnants of the flood plain forest which separates the eastern edge of Southwest Park from the former City dump.

Further description of the physical characteristics of the area is in the "Development Opportunities and Constraints" section below.

### ***Development Opportunities and Constraints***

There are a number of physical and legal constraints to development of the area. Some of these act as constraints only for residential development; others are problematic no matter what land use is proposed. Some of these constraints can be seen as opportunities, as will be noted below. The committee spent considerable time talking about these opportunities and constraints and finding out as much about them as they could during the course of their investigations. (*See Map #4*)

### ***Railroad tracks:***

The freight railroad line which traverses the western side of the area on the west is the sole remaining active railroad serving the Ithaca area. At this time it only serves two customers, bringing coal to Milliken Station and taking salt from the Cargill Salt Mines to their markets. These trains run relatively infrequently, roughly once a day, but while they pass through the City of Ithaca, they completely block east-west traffic. In addition, there is a railroad yard in which trains are de-coupled, stored and reassembled for the final leg of their journey to Milliken station. Engines are sometime stored in this yard and, due to operating procedures, are allowed to run all night during the winter, causing problems of noise and fumes to the nearby residents. It is staff's understanding that there have been numerous complaints from residents of Nate's Floral Estates (the mobile home park) regarding the noise and fumes from idling engines.

Stored trains sometimes are left on the tracks to the south of the City for several hours at a time as new trains are assembled. This storage of trains, as well as the sheer size of the yard, complicates any effort to site an east-west connector. The committee's conclusion is that, in all likelihood, any southwest connector would have to be elevated over the tracks. An at-grade connector would be of relatively little usefulness since it would often be blocked for long periods of time. Furthermore, as discussed earlier [i.e., pp.14, 15] the regulations regarding construction of new at-grade crossings add considerable expense to what is already an extremely difficult siting problem. Committee members and staff met with Conrail officials to discuss the possibility of relocating the yard to an area further south of the City. This is physically possible, but it would be extremely expensive.

In summary, the railroad tracks both act as a significant impediment to siting of an east-west connector, and generate negative environmental impacts on any abutting uses, particularly housing.

### ***The levee:***

As previously mentioned, the Army Corps of Engineers constructed a flood control levee from Elmira Road, just a few hundred yards north of the south City line, which runs roughly north until it meets the railroad at about the end of the Flood Control Channel. This structure was built to prevent flood waters from moving northward into the City. Regulations and common sense prohibit any penetrations of this barrier. It is our understanding that it would be permissible to construct a road over the levee as long as it does not interfere with its ability to contain flood waters. The levee is a very strong physical barrier separating the land uses on its north and south. This can be seen either as an opportunity or a constraint.

In addition, the levee may be considered a recreational resource since it makes a good location for a walking or bicycle trail. The levee provides an opportunity for pedestrians and bicyclists to view the land to the east and west of the structure and to gain access to the DEC fish ladder at the Inlet, where fish may be viewed swimming up the Inlet during spawning season. The creek just to the west of the levee is the last non-gorge free-flowing creek in the City.

### ***Flood Control Channel:***

The Flood Control Channel constructed in 1968-70 is a major barrier to east-west movement. It is a wider body of water than any of the other creeks in the City, and there are regulations which require that any structures be kept at a certain distance from its edge. On the other hand, the Flood Control Channel is a major recreational and aesthetic resource. It is not as attractive as either the gorges or the free-flowing creeks which meander through the valley floor, but almost any body of water is an attraction. In addition, the Flood Control Channel is the site for Cornell, Ithaca College and Cascadilla

Rowing Club crew races, and provides fishing opportunities. There are problems with erosion of the channel edges which should be addressed by the appropriate state agencies. Any east-west road would have to cross the channel on a bridge which would be quite expensive.

### ***Relief Channel:***

The only way for water from the western side of South Hill to reach the Flood Control Channel, and ultimately the lake, is to pass through the southwest area. The second most important structure for movement of storm water runoff is the Relief Channel. It is located behind the first layer of commercial development along Meadow Street at a distance varying from about 300 feet behind Elmira Road to approximately 800 feet to the west of Meadow Street. It joins the old Cayuga Inlet near State Street. This waterway can be bridged or located in a culvert at relatively little expense compared to the larger bodies of water, such as the creeks or the Flood Control Channel. The Relief Channel could be relocated if it were necessary for development. Nonetheless, provisions must be made for the movement of flood waters off South Hill to the lake.

### ***Storm drainage and ground water:***

As mentioned above, storm water runoff must pass through the southwest area and since the topography of the area is very flat, large structures (such as channels, ditches or pipes) are required for movement of peak storm flows. This can be seen as both an opportunity and a constraint. Some provision must be made for these flood waters but, in the committee's opinion, these structures could be utilized to form water attractions which would be a benefit to future developments. Nonetheless, a significant amount of land will need to be set aside for the movement of storm water runoff.

In addition, ground water levels throughout Southwest Park are near the surface. Ground water may be from 0 to 15 feet below the surface. These levels vary with surface elevation, lake level, and with the seasons of the year, rising in winter and spring, and dropping in summer and fall. The Committee was informed by hydrologist James Zollweg that ground water elevations are primarily determined by a balance of precipitation and evapotranspiration. When precipitation exceeds losses through evapotranspiration, levels rise. When the reverse is true, levels fall.

Any development will have an impact on both storm water management and ground water level. Reductions in vegetative cover will result in diminished evapotranspiration, resulting in marginally higher ground water levels during the months that plants are active. Thus, both the loss of vegetation and the increase in impermeable cover have impacts on ground water and surface runoff.

### *Soil type:*

The soils in the area are poorly suited for heavy development. Lightweight development such as one-story commercial and industrial facilities or two-story wood frame residential buildings can be accomplished through spread footings or waffle slabs. Larger buildings must be constructed on piles. Pre-loading of soils can significantly reduce the problems of differential or uniform subsidence. However, pre-loading is relatively expensive and time-consuming, i.e., several years are required to get a suitable amount of compaction. Pre-loading can be accelerated but only at considerable cost. In addition, there is a fairly high groundwater level which fluctuates with lake elevation. These factors act as constraints to development.

### *Old dump site:*

A major part of the study area was used as a City dump until as recently as the 1960s. Before development could proceed on any portion of the area which was used as a dump, environmental audits would need to be performed. Investigations have been made to determine the toxicity of the materials which were deposited in the dump. Most, if not all, materials disposed of were municipal household waste, and there is no record of toxic materials being dumped in this area. Nonetheless, an investigation will be necessary to see if industrial materials or other possible noxious or toxic wastes were disposed of in the area.

According to engineers consulted by the committee, the best way of determining whether there is a contamination problem would be to construct test wells at the periphery of the dump which could be monitored for groundwater contamination. It is assumed that groundwater runs in approximately the same direction as surface water, i.e., groundwater generally moves northward toward the lake. Furthermore, the soils in the area are relatively impermeable for the most part and, therefore, the movement of buried contaminant leachates would be relatively slow.

In the absence of investigation, it is assumed that the Southwest Park area itself is probably not contaminated since it was used for farm land and not as a site for dumping any known toxic materials. Nonetheless, before construction or completion of development plans, environmental audits must be performed on both Southwest Park itself and the surrounding areas including the old City dump.

In summary, it is likely that there will be some problems either in the form of contaminated materials or simply the generation of methane in the old City dump which could place a constraint on the development of that area. However, the Southwest Park itself is probably free of contamination. The degree to which the City investigates the possibility of contamination in the Southwest Park parcel should be a function of its willingness to accept risk with regard to these issues. The further one investigates, the more assured we can be that the area is clean. However, each level of investigation is more expensive. No level of investigation can prove absolutely that no contamination

exists on the site. After testing, the best that could be said is that none was found and that it is unlikely that any exists. Thus, at a certain level, testing reaches a point of diminishing returns, and development proceeds based on the City's willingness or unwillingness to accept any degree of risk.

***Tompkins County Recycling and Solid Waste Center:***

Despite strong official City and public opposition to this site, the County selected Commercial Avenue, just south of Southwest Park, as the location for its solid waste handling facility and the office of the County Solid Waste Division. When originally proposed, this facility was to house machinery which would bale all waste materials originating in the County to be taken to a landfill in Tompkins County. Since that time, it has been decided that the County's waste will be exported to another landfill outside of the County, and that in all probability the garbage will not be baled before transport. Nonetheless, the facility will handle all County solid waste. It will be a trans-shipment point at which garbage and other waste will be off-loaded from packer trucks to larger vehicles for shipment to a landfill and other points of disposition. According to the most recent site plan, processing, recycling, and transferring activities, and all storage of processed materials will take place indoor within a 28,130 square foot pre-engineered metal structure. In addition, a canopied public convenience area will be established to receive small quantities of waste and recyclable from County residents. The County's intention at this time is to "pick" the garbage delivered to the building for removal of approximately 10% more of the waste stream. All garbage delivered to the site should have been separated at its source so that paper, glass, plastics, yard waste, and most metals are removed from the stream before it arrives at the building. These recyclable will be delivered separately, sorted, compacted, and then sold to regional handlers of such materials.

In the opinion of the majority of the committee and staff, this facility represents a considerable constraint on certain types of development in the remainder of the area. Certainly housing would be affected if the facility smells, makes a great deal of noise, generates a lot of traffic, or is particularly unattractive. In all likelihood, it would be advisable to design screening between the solid waste center and any development which might occur to the north. The levee effectively screens the site at least from visual impacts on the neighbors to the west of the facility. Odor, however, will be a problem throughout the area if the facility stinks.

***Route 96 Project substitute parkland:***

Certain parcels on the eastern border of the Flood Control Channel have been suggested by the City and approved by New York State Department of Transportation, the Finger Lakes Parks Region, and the National Park Service as substitute land for lands on Inlet Island to be taken out of park use for the proposed Route 96 improvements. The details

are as follows: the Route 96 improvements located north of Buffalo Street and west of old Taughannock Boulevard will require that lands now designated 'park' be utilized for highway purposes. In order to remove park designation, the property has gone through legal processes known as alienation and conversion. These processes require that lands of equal monetary and recreational value be acquired and designated as parks.

A strip of land running along the eastern border of the Flood Control Channel will be substituted for some of the parklands to be taken for Route 96. In addition, a larger parcel located between the Flood Control Channel and the railroad tracks running to near the City line forms a larger park resource. This area would be accessible by bicycle and by foot on the Black Diamond Trail proposed by the Finger Lakes State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Since these will be parklands, and they act as substitution for parkland funded by the federal government, they will have all the protection that federal parklands enjoy. Therefore, any attempt to use these lands for anything other than park would be subject to severe constraints. The strip of parkland running along the Flood Control Channel acts as a serious obstacle to the location of any east-west roadway connector. The City has, however, reserved a wide right-of-way between the parcels mentioned above at the Town/City line for the specific purpose of constructing a southwest connector road. Thus, the substitute parkland is an important factor in choosing a location for a southwest parkway connector.

Substitute parkland for the Route 96 Project should not be confused with the proposed substitute parkland for Southwest Park. The latter is a much more expansive area south of the Rt.96 Project substitute land, and is separated from it by the fish ladder structure and Cayuga Inlet. While each piece of both substitute parklands has its own intrinsic value, together they will become a significant part of an open space system connecting Cass Park and Buttermilk Falls State Park. As such, the combined green space will be a major recreational asset to any uses which are developed in the southwest area. When the Black Diamond Trail recreation way (as proposed by Finger Lakes Parks Commission) is constructed it will provide access to these proposed parklands, which will add to their importance to the area. (See pages 8 and 9 for a more detailed discussion of the alienation process of Southwest Park and the identified substitute land for this purpose.)

### ***DPW bulk storage area:***

The Department of Public Works and the Board of Public Works have requested that approximately ten acres of City-owned land be reserved in or near the Southwest Park for storage of bulk materials. Over the years, DPW areas devoted to the storage of bulk materials such as gravel, salt, sand, top soil, etc. have been displaced or encroached upon by other uses. The BPW is also considering consolidation of its Water and Sewer Division in an expanded facility where the Construction and Maintenance Division and the Joint Transit Facility are now located. If this consolidation proceeds and the DPW facilities on the east side of Route 13 at First and Franklin Streets are sold, the need for a bulk storage area will be all the more pressing. The request for storage of bulk materials, if accommodated, is a further constraint on the development of the Southwest area.

While the storage of bulk materials itself does not have serious negative environmental impacts (except for an aesthetic impact), the truck traffic to and from the site may be somewhat undesirable if housing is to be located nearby. There are, however, several other activities near the site which may be ideally matched with bulk storage. These are the recycling and solid waste facility to the south of the site and the New York State Electric and Gas Corporation power line to the north. Therefore, if the DPW bulk storage site is to be accommodated, it should probably be located either 1) near the railroad tracks, 2) next to the recycling facility, or 3) along the NYSEG right-of-way. An apparently appropriate site is the City-owned parcel north of Southwest Park.

### ***NYSEG right-of-way:***

Power transmission lines run along the northern boundary of Southwest Park. According to Greg Mulvaney of NYSEG these lines carry electricity at 34,500 volts. There is an increasing body of evidence which suggests that the electromagnetic radiation generated by power transmission lines may have negative environmental impacts on living organisms. They are specifically suspected as a cause of certain cancers in human beings. The evidence at this time is still epidemiological and the exact physiological causes, if any, are not fully understood. Nonetheless, the principle of prudent avoidance suggests that the area near the power transmission lines be reserved as an area in which people do not remain for long periods of time. In the absence of any established guidelines or standards, a 100 to 200-foot wide strip is assumed to be adequate to provide a reasonable separation between power lines and uses requiring human occupancy. This area should be reserved for recreation, parking, bulk storage, or some other similar activity. No housing or employment should be located within this zone.

### ***Old flood plain forest and wetlands:***

Along the eastern border of Southwest Park, there are some remnants of the ancient flood plain forest which covered most of the alluvial plain on which the City is located. Similar vegetation can be found in the Fiertes Bird Sanctuary adjacent to Stewart Park. Investigation by a botanist, Robert Wesley, suggests that this is the only area within Southwest Park of any botanical interest. It is the recommendation of staff and the committee that this area be preserved, protected, and restored. This is both a constraint and an opportunity. An old growth natural area is an important resource regardless of its location, but in such close proximity to development, it is of particular value. Further study is needed regarding measures for protection of this area.

In addition, there are certain parts of Southwest Park which may conform to the current definition of protected wetlands. Further study will be required to determine whether these areas are, in fact, wetlands and should be protected.

## Chapter 2 - New Roadways

### *Southwest Connector*

Since the 1950s, all planning studies which dealt with the southwest portion of the City, or the City as a whole, have shown a 'southwest connector'. These include the 1959 Ithaca Urban Area General Plan, 1967 Open Space Plan, the 1971 General Plan, the 1977 Southwest Development Plan, and the 1991 West Hill Master Plan. In addition, capital improvement programs throughout the 70s listed the 'Southwest Parkway' as a needed infrastructure improvement.

The roadway was proposed for the following reasons: First, the most obvious reason for construction of a southwest connector is to provide access to the southwest area for recreation or development. Second, as further development takes place on South Hill and in the southern part of West Hill, the need for a connection between West Hill and the Southern portion of the City will increase with time. Third, there is a need for a supplementary crossing over the Flood Control Channel in addition to the three bridges that will cross the Flood Control Channel near the former Octopus, when the Rt. 96 project is completed: the southwest connector as presently proposed would provide a means of crossing the Flood Control Channel and the railroad tracks in the case of a prolonged blockage of the crossings near State Street, and would provide relief for some of the traffic that presently uses the Octopus corridor.

While the funding for construction of this improvement may not be available in the immediate future, failure to designate and acquire a suitable right-of-way in the near term may result in development on or near a preferred right-of-way alignment which will make it politically evermore difficult to construct such a roadway.

To pursue the possibility of mapping and acquiring a right-of-way for this future roadway, several alternatives have been identified for further engineering and environmental evaluation. The development assumptions and design criteria are the following.

### *Location parameters*

- This road should have the potential of being connected to a collector or arterial from West Hill.
- According to the existing land ownership and traffic patterns, the most readily available and functional intersections with Route 13 would be a) at the existing access road to Southwest Park and b) in the vicinity of the K-Mart plaza entrance.
- Because of the potential negative impacts of the NYSEG right-of-way and the County Recycling and Solid Waste Center, the land use alternatives adjacent to those uses are limited. Therefore, these two general areas (near the north and south boundaries of the current Southwest Park) seem most suitable for any necessary roadway development.
- Because of the difficulty in crossing the railroad tracks, a Cherry Street extension would not be connected to the Southwest connector.
- Any crossing of the railroad tracks would be elevated.
- Elevated portions of the roadway should be kept to a minimum length by avoiding the section of the railroad yard which contains multiple tracks, and by being located close to the point where the tracks cross the Inlet.
- The proposed road cannot cross existing or proposed parkland at grade. It may be possible that an elevated crossing would be approved over a narrow portion of the proposed park which runs along the Flood Control Channel. However, this would require the approval of New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and, in all likelihood, the National Park Service. Therefore, locating the proposed road right-of-way at the reserved section at the City line, or south of any proposed parkland would simplify the necessary approvals.
- The road should be located so as to cause minimal negative environmental, economic and social impacts.
- The right-of-way for the connector road should be wide enough to include landscaping, sidewalks, and bike

paths.

- Cooperation with the Town of Ithaca and Tompkins County is required if any connection to South Hill or West Hill is to be implemented. Clearly, no roadway location should be chosen without the involvement of both the Town and the County. The Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council, established to coordinate local transportation plans under the 1991 federal 'ISTEA' legislation, will assist in this process.

Based on the above parameters, three basic roadway alternatives for the Southwest Connector have been identified.

### *Alternative A (See Map 5A) -*

Alternative A begins on Elmira Road at the access road to Southwest Park. From there it proceeds roughly in a northwesterly direction toward the Cayuga Inlet which is crossed near the northern end of the Flood Control levee. It is on an elevated structure over the railroad tracks and Flood Channel, after which it returns to grade and intersects Floral Avenue (Rt. 13A) between the City line and Glenside Road. From there it could be extended up West Hill toward West Haven Road.

Advantages -

- Alternative A is the shortest of the three alternatives and will require the least right of way acquisition. Therefore, in all likelihood, the cost will be lower.
- This roadway, particularly if it were developed as a parkway, would act as another buffer between the County Recycling and Solid Waste Center and any proposed land uses in the most developable portion of the current Southwest Park. This would be especially desirable if light industrial development were to occur in the area adjacent to the Recycling and Solid Waste Center and residential development in the central and northern portion of the parcel.
- It provides more direct access to the County Recycling and Solid Waste Center from West Hill than the other

two alternatives.

- The crossings of Cayuga Inlet and the railroad tracks are fairly close together, and there is only a single set of tracks to traverse, reducing the length and, therefore, the cost of the elevated portion of the road.
- The intersection with Elmira Road is far enough south so that it will probably not increase congestion significantly at the present intersection of Meadow Street and Elmira Road.

Disadvantages -

- The connection to Elmira Road is the most southerly of the three alternatives. Therefore, any trips heading to the north and east will need to traverse a longer section of Elmira Road.
- There was some concern on the part of committee members that the road would take up land in Southwest Park which could be better used for other purposes, and it isolates the southern part of the redeveloped area from the northern portion.
- The area crossed by the road west of the Inlet may be environmentally sensitive. Further investigation is needed to see if the roadway can be located in this area..
- This alternative would require that a separate east-west collector road be built in or near the NYSEG r.o.w. between the K-Mart plaza and the Tops plaza, to connect Meadow St. with the proposed new north-south road corridor, and to provide access to Southwest Park.

***Alternative B (See Map 5B) -***

Alternative B intersects with Meadow Street north of the K-Mart shopping plaza entry. It could be extended to connect with the old Elmira Road east of the Ithaca Shopping Plaza. Heading west from the intersection with Meadow Street, the corridor continues along the New York State Electric and Gas Corporation power transmission right-of-way to about the eastern border of Southwest Park where it heads southwesterly

toward the fish ladder. There it crosses the railroad tracks and the Cayuga Inlet, and continues to an intersection with Floral Ave.

Advantages -

- If the North-South Corridor recommended later in this report is used, this Alternative would not require construction of a separate east-west collector road, as would Alternative A.
- For trips from West Hill, the intersection at Meadow Street is closer to all major destinations (downtown, Cornell, Tops and Wegmans) than the intersection in Alternative A.
- It utilizes land under or near the power lines which is not suitable for most other uses.
- It crosses the railroad tracks and the Cayuga Inlet on a single structure, shortening the length of the elevated portion of the roadway.

Disadvantages -

- It is the longest of the three alternatives, and thus is likely to be the most expensive.
- The intersection with Meadow Street is near the intersection of the old Elmira Road and Meadow Street which is already experiencing capacity problems.
- The connection between Meadow Street and the old Elmira Road may cause negative land use impacts especially on the Ithaca Shopping Plaza.
- The road will require crossing of the Relief Channel. Depending on the final decision on the exact location of this road, a relocation or channelization of a portion of the Relief Channel may be necessary.
- There may be environmental problems with the portion of the roadway just south of the Cayuga Inlet.
- Any connection to Coy Glen Road may be unacceptable

to the Town of Ithaca.

- It does not provide direct access to the Recycling and Solid Waste Center from West Hill.

### *Alternative C (See Map 5C) -*

Similar to Alternative B, Alternative C intersects with Meadow Street, north of the K-Mart shopping plaza entry, and it could be extended to connect with the old Elmira Road east of the Ithaca Shopping Plaza. Heading west from the intersection with Meadow Street, the corridor continues along the New York State Electric and Gas Corporation power transmission right-of-way to cross the railroad tracks and Flood Control Channel near the old City line. This crossing can utilize a right-of-way that is proposed to be reserved by the City for this purpose between the Flood Control Channel and the railroad tracks. From there the road joins Floral Avenue immediately south of the City line. The advantages and disadvantages of Alternative C are quite similar to those of Alternative B. They are as follows:

#### Advantages -

- If the North-South Corridor recommended later in this report is used, this Alternative would not require construction of a separate east-west collector road, as would Alternative A.
- The roadway intersects Meadow Street such that the trips between West Hill and downtown will be shorter than in Alternative A.
- This Alternative uses land under or near the power lines which is not suitable for many other uses.
- While the length of new road required is longer than for Alternative A, this Alternative is shorter than B and, therefore, probably less costly.
- This alternative utilizes the proposed reserved road right-of-way at the Flood Channel just north of the City line and, therefore, is not subject to restrictions on land

designated as park.

- If this alternative were constructed on a straight line running east-west, it would reflect the traditional city grid and define forever the south City line.

Disadvantages -

- The road intersects Meadow Street near the existing intersection of Meadow Street and the old Elmira Road. As that intersection is presently configured, it is already experiencing some capacity problems which could be further affected by traffic using this Alternative.
- There will be some land use impacts from this roadway both on the Ithaca Shopping Plaza and the K-Mart Plaza.
- The road will require crossing of the Relief Channel. Depending on the final decision on the exact location of this road, a relocation or channelization of a portion of the Relief Channel may be necessary.
- The road will require a relatively long and expensive elevated portion since it crosses the railroad yard in an area where there are multiple tracks, and where the railroad yard is farther from the Flood Channel than the point of crossing for Alternatives A and B.
- It is substantially longer than Alternative A and, therefore, in all probability will be more expensive.
- It does not provide direct access to the Recycling and Solid Waste Center from West Hill

*Preferred Alternative -*

Based on information available to date, Alternative A was the preference among Planning and Engineering Staff members from the County, Town and City, because it is technically the simplest solution and it will probably not add significantly to the traffic at the already overburdened Meadow Street/Elmira Road intersection. Nevertheless, the Land Use Committee judged that Alternative A would be too disruptive to future

residential development, severing it from the open and recreational space to the west. Alternative C, therefore, was the preferred choice. It should be noted again, however, that no final recommendation should be made without the Town's official endorsement and without thorough environmental investigation.

### ***North-south Elmira Road/Meadow Street Bypass***

The committee concluded that, to provide access into the SW Park area and to alleviate future traffic congestion on Meadow Street / Elmira Road, it would be advisable to investigate a corridor location for a north-south collector road. Several alternatives are identified, and some of their respective advantages and disadvantages are listed below. (*See Map 6*)

#### ***Alternative I -***

North-south corridor Alternative I would run from the intersection of West State Street and Taughannock Boulevard to the present Southwest Park entry from Elmira Road. From the intersection of West State Street and Taughannock Boulevard, the corridor would cross the old Inlet heading roughly south to the area near the intersection of the active Conrail tracks and Clinton Street, continuing south-southwesterly between Nates Floral Estates and the Conrail switchyards, through the east side of Southwest Park and then to the end point at the Southwest Park entry road.

Advantages -

- Both ends would be located on or near existing roads, making this alternative more economical and less disruptive of existing development.
- Brindley Street may be eliminated if this road is aligned to intersect with Taber Street, simplifying the current dangerous intersection of State, Seneca and Brindley Streets.
- The section that is parallel to the east boundary of Southwest Park may create a protective barrier for the existing vegetation in this area. (This vegetation may be

part of what has been identified as the remnants of flood plain forests.)

- This roadway would have the least impact on the potential residential development in the area that is currently Southwest Park.

#### Disadvantages -

- Both ends would have narrow rights-of-way, hence sidewalks, bike lanes, and tree plantings might not be possible in some section of the roadway.
- Limited access to one or both sides of road reduces its potential in serving economic development.
- Might require overpass over the railroad tracks.
- The Inlet Island land use Report identifies the natural forested area south of the State Street bridge over the old Cayuga Inlet as a quiet, passive recreation area. The road would have an impact on this area.
- More northerly terminus on Elmira Road would add to congestion on that artery.

#### *Alternative II -*

North-south corridor Alternative II also begins at West State Street and Taughannock Boulevard, but joins Elmira Road near the south end of the Flood Control Levee. From its beginning at West State Street, Alternative II is the same as Alternative I to a point near the southern end of the developed part of Nate's Floral Estates, from which point it continues more or less parallel to the Conrail lines, turning south along the western edge of Southwest Park and following along the Flood Control Levee to Elmira Road.

#### Advantages -

- The northern portion would be in roughly the same location as the existing private road which runs between the rail tracks and Nate's Floral Estates.

- Brindley Street may be eliminated if this road is aligned to intersect with Taber Street, simplifying the current dangerous intersection of State, Seneca, and Brindley Streets.
- The intersection with Elmira Rd is the farthest of these alternatives from the busiest traffic on Meadow St., which would tend to reduce the potential for congestion.
- The more southerly terminus would have positive effects on traffic flow and congestion on Elmira Road.
- A four-way intersection with Spencer Road may be possible, which would have better flow and capacity characteristics than the 'T' intersection of Alternatives I or III.

#### Disadvantages -

- A considerable length of this road will serve development only on one side of the road, reducing its potential in serving economic development.
- The section through Southwest Park could have a negative impact on any residential development in that area. If it is located near the western boundary of Southwest Park, it would separate the potential residential development from the natural and recreational areas associated with the proposed substitute parkland, including the Black Diamond Trail, along the Inlet and Flood Control Channel. If it is located further east, it would in all likelihood be close enough to residential uses to cause some negative impact which would be especially severe if it intersects with the proposed Southwest Connector.
- There may be engineering problems in intersecting the proposed Southwest Connector, which would be elevated in this vicinity. Even if the two roads are not intended to intersect, there would still be extra cost to elevate the Southwest Connector over Alternative II.
- Both ends would have narrow rights-of-way, hence sidewalks, bike lanes, and tree plantings may not be

possible in some sections of the roadway.

- At-grade crossing of the rail tracks (on West Clinton Street) may be against regulations. There would be additional expense and environmental impact if an overpass is required.
- The natural wooded area south of the State Street bridge over the old Cayuga Inlet has been identified in the *Inlet Island Land Use Report* as a quiet, passive recreation area. The road would have an impact on this area.

### ***Alternative III -***

North-south corridor Alternative III would run from the intersection of West Green Street and Fulton Street, joining Elmira Road roughly at the mid-point between the Meadow Street/Elmira Road intersection and the Southwest Park access road. From its beginning at West Green Street, it runs roughly south-southwest to Clinton Street, then passing behind the Wegman's property on the east side of the Relief Channel. At some point behind the Tops and Wegman's property, the corridor would cross the Relief Channel holding an alignment along the west side of the Channel and proceeding in a southerly direction to its intersection with Elmira Road.

Advantages -

- This roadway would have the least impact on the potential residential development in the area that is currently Southwest Park.
- This alternative could offer much-needed relief to congestion now experienced on South Meadow Street due to the combined effects of commuter and business traffic, if it could connect directly to the proposed Fulton-Meadow pair.
- The additional expense of an overpass at the crossing of the rail tracks (on West Clinton Street) might be avoided.
- The natural wooded area south of the State Street bridge over the old Cayuga Inlet (identified in the *Inlet Island*

*Land Use Report* for passive recreational use) would not be disturbed.

Disadvantages -

- The northern half is in a relatively built-up area, thus this alternative, while being the most disruptive to existing development, offers the least possibilities of amenities or room for future expansion.
- Limited access to one or both sides of road reduces its potential in serving economic development.
- Right of way behind Wegmans and Tops would be narrow, perhaps requiring expensive engineering solutions.
- More northerly terminus on Elmira Road would add to congestion on that artery.

*Preferred Alternative -*

Based on information available to date, Alternative I is the preferred alternative. While there are the disadvantages of limited access and little possibility for amenities such as sidewalks and bike lanes, these drawbacks are common to all three discussed alternatives. On the other hand, this alternative seems to best serve the purpose of development in the southwest area and it makes the most economic sense (in terms of engineering solution and property acquisition). As with the decision on the location of a south-west connector, the right-of-way for an alternative north-south corridor should not be mapped until a thorough environmental assessment and preliminary engineering investigations have been completed.

*Summary of proposed new road network (See Map 7)*

Southwest Connector Alternative C and the North-South Corridor Alternative I are recommended as the basis of a new road network which is to serve the southwest area of the City. Both of these new roads should make ample provision for bicycle and pedestrian use, as well as tree plantings. In addition, provisions for cyclist and pedestrian traffic currently

proposed in other City studies and plans should be incorporated into the transportation plan for the Southwest area.

These include

- The Cayuga Inlet Trail, now renamed ‘Black Diamond Trail’;
- A bikeway and pedestrian way along the levee connecting with the Black Diamond Trail;
- A bikeway and pedestrian way along the curved embankment at the south City limit (with a bridge over Route 13) to connect with the old South Hill railroad spur. This would provide a connection between the Town of Ithaca’s South Hill Recreationway on the east and the Black Diamond Trail on the west;
- Sidewalks on both sides of Elmira Rd.

### ***Recommendations for Action: Transportation***

- Continue discussions and cooperation with Town Planning, County Planning, and Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) regarding the location and development of the Southwest Connector.
- Take appropriate action to reserve rights-of-way for proposed roadways including sidewalks and bikeways.
- Conduct environmental assessment of the proposed new road network, and in particular the preferred alternatives.
- Investigate the possibility that the connector or other major roads discussed above can be partially funded in cooperation with the Ithaca Tompkins County Transportation Council.

### Chapter 3 - Land Use Alternatives

The Committee was charged with recommending land uses for the Southwest Park parcel after its park designation has been removed. Recognizing that it may be desirable to use some of the parcel as open space after alienation, this study was begun with an evaluation of the park's landscape character, its potential for recreational uses, and its value as a green space.

After reviewing some general information on Southwest Park and its history and conducting field trips to the site, committee members reached an early consensus that there are other areas, including those already identified as substitute park land, more suitable than Southwest Park either to be preserved as open space or to be developed for recreational uses.

The physical characteristics of Southwest Park are described in Chapter One. The most visible presence defining Southwest Park's character is DPW's filling and stockpiling activity in the area. While these operations were meant to prepare the site as a community park for active recreational uses, the need for such facilities was largely eliminated when Cass Park was built. Meanwhile, green areas in Southwest Park have been steadily diminishing. Extensive revegetation and site construction would be necessary in order to make a park out of Southwest Park. However, given that four excellent State parks, two major City parks, and extensive athletic fields and open spaces at Cornell and Ithaca College exist to serve community needs for active and passive recreation, developing Southwest Park for park use does not seem a logical priority. This is particularly true since the proposed substitute parkland appears to be a superior choice for recreation and in need of timely protection from the continual demand for commercial land because of its proximity to the growing business district along Elmira Road. The proposal for a Wal-Mart development in the adjoining parcels south of the proposed substitute parkland is a recent example of the market trend.

In contrast to a large part of the proposed substitute park, almost all of the area in Southwest Park has been significantly modified by human intervention, ranging from farming to filling. Preliminary studies indicate that, with the exception of the small remnant flood plain forest which should be preserved, there is little of botanical interest in the study area. Depending on the outcome of further investigation, it would appear that if flood water management and ground water issues can be resolved, no major environmental impediment exists to some level of development of the area.

The study area is fairly distant from any existing residential areas and therefore unencumbered by some of the restraints to development in a built-up area. In an undeveloped area, where there are no previously established patterns of development, innovative and environmentally sensitive models of development may be explored. Being the largest single undeveloped parcel in the City, Southwest Park, together with the adjacent City parcel to the north, offers a rare opportunity for the City to initiate development strategies which best answer the City's needs. These factors were significant in the Committee's recommendations for alienation and development in the study area.

To predict market demand for the various land uses considered for the southwest area is beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, previous attempts to design land plans according to such market studies did not prove to be very useful because of the time lag between analysis work and the beginning of development activity. It is generally accepted, however, that the viability of the City hinges on a sufficient supply of affordable housing as well as employment opportunities generated by industrial/commercial development.

The viability of the City of Ithaca, or for that matter, of cities in general, is an important planning issue. It is indisputable that some of the consequences of suburbanization (such as the loss of farmlands and natural areas, greater energy consumption for transportation, higher infrastructure costs) are a serious cause of environmental degradation. It is therefore not only in the local economic interest that human settlement and activities should be encouraged in the City; it is also sound environmental planning.

With the conclusion that Southwest Park should at least be partly developed for non-park purposes, various future land use scenarios were considered by the Committee. The parameters of these scenarios were:

- All land use schemes should locate and reserve a right-of-way for a southwest roadway connector and a north-south corridor (as discussed in the previous chapter).
- Residential development of the entire study area should only be considered if the environmental site assessment of the former City dump site does not present any significant implications of environmental risk to those who would live in the area. (The Committee ultimately decided that residential development should not be proposed for the undeveloped parcel south of Nate's Floral Estates and east of the City parcel currently known as Southwest Park, which area had been used as a garbage dump. Although there have been no studies which indicate that there would be health risks associated with residential development in the area, the possibility of serious environmental problems would cast a pall over any residential proposals for the area. The level of environmental investigation necessary to conclude absolutely that no environmental hazards existed would, in all likelihood, be economically infeasible. If such studies were conducted and no environmental problems were found, it is likely that the public would still question their validity given the level of concern about environmental hazards.)
- Any residential development in the area currently known as Southwest Park must be sufficiently separated from the surrounding incompatible uses such as the railroad, the Tompkins County Recycling and Solid Waste Center, and the NYSEG right-of-way.
- Residential development should be planned only where the area is large enough to sustain a viable and attractive residential neighborhood.

- The remnant flood plain forest should be disturbed as little as possible. In addition, some land on both sides of the forest should be left undeveloped in order to protect and restore this area.
- Site amenities should be created. It is most likely that these amenities would be focused on water-related structures which also function as storm water management facilities. Such amenities might both serve the uses planned for the area and attract people who do not work or live in the area.
- The Department of Public Works has requested that about ten acres be reserved for bulk storage of such materials as sand, gravel, bricks, composted yard waste, and possibly a pipe storage yard. If no other location can be found for these uses, they could be accommodated within the study area in those areas least desirable for other uses, i.e., near the NYSEG right-of-way, or the County Recycling and Solid Waste Center.
- Because of soil characteristics, the most economical construction type is light one-to-two-story buildings with relatively uniform loads. Heavier construction would require piles.
- Automobile-oriented commercial uses, as permitted under the current B-5 regulations, are appropriate for the frontage of all properties on Meadow St./Elmira Rd. in the study area. Generally speaking, land use in the study area interior, including along the southwest connector corridor, should be less dependent on exposure to high traffic volume.
- The controlled, low-impact industrial development along Cherry Street should continue in the remaining area between the railroad and the flood channel, served by an extended Cherry Street cul-de-sac. This development should be designed so as to work with the existing and proposed amenity features of its surroundings.

### *Land use alternatives -*

The land use alternatives investigated by the Committee fall into two basic categories - those which include residential uses and those which do not. There is a general assumption, which is supported by staff and committee members, that some combination of non-residential uses would sooner or later be successful in Southwest Park and most probably in all the undeveloped portions of the study area. The more difficult question is whether residential development can be made to succeed in this area.

### *Non-residential development -*

This alternative is based on the presumption that residential development is not viable because of environmental problems, economics, and a lack of overall amenity. There is

also the question as to whether an isolated residential area as small as Southwest Park, which is subject to the constraints described earlier, can be made to stand alone. Non-residential uses to be developed under this alternative include industrial, commercial and office, as well as supporting community facilities such as parks, stormwater runoff management structures, roadways, etc.

### *Residential development alternatives -*

There are many factors which militate against residential development. The preponderance of existing non-residential uses and the environmental problems and constraints described above all cast doubt on the viability of the area as a potential residential neighborhood. The Committee, therefore, invited a group of builders, developers, and realtors to participate in a Focus Group to discuss this question (see Appendix E). The focus group was presented the following development scenario:

- Of the undeveloped land within the study area, only that which is currently in Southwest Park is to be developed for housing, with a combination of detached single-family units and multi-family dwelling structures.
- The area adjacent to the Tompkins County Recycling and Solid Waste Center is to be developed for offices, research, or light manufacturing facilities.
- The currently undeveloped area east of the City parcels will be developed for non-residential purposes.
- Two new roads, one intersecting Route 13 (Meadow Street) in the vicinity of K-Mart and Tops plazas, and the other intersecting Route 13 (Elmira Road) at the present entrance to Southwest Park, will serve the new development area. These will be connected by at least one new major north-south road.
- Some kind of water feature is to be created both as a solution to the drainage problem and as a major public site amenity.

There was an apparent Focus Group consensus that it would be possible to develop Southwest Park and its surroundings for residential uses. However, residential development would be forced because of the many constraints previously described. In addition, Focus Group members agreed that it would not be possible to market homes higher in value than the \$100,000 per unit range. This would preclude any development of a truly mixed-income nature.

Furthermore, the Focus Group concluded that substantial subsidy would be required in addition to other governmental assistance. Needed government aid would include subsidy to write down land cost, and further assistance in terms of marketing, development of infrastructure, or other mechanisms. Finally, there was a strong consensus that the regulatory risk would have to be essentially removed if the area was to be developed for housing. This would require the City to complete all necessary environmental

investigations and in some way guarantee that developers would be given building permits with a minimum of delay or risk.

While the possible problems related to residential development in Southwest Park and in the surrounding area may not be able to be completely resolved, other positive factors might help make residential use a viable option. These factors include, for example, the proximity to existing grocery stores and nearness to the Cayuga Inlet Trail and other green open space. Other amenities might be created in the development process: well-designed housing, community facilities, water features (as part of the stormwater management system), sidewalks and bike lanes, and conveniences offered by commercial establishments in the neighborhood.

Taking the Focus Group's conclusions into account, the Committee then considered two scenarios for residential development, both of which include a combination of residential and compatible non-residential uses, e.g., light commercial office, research facilities, light assembly, community facilities, etc.

#### *Scenario #1*

In one scenario the entire area, i.e., both the City land and Weiner's property to its east would be developed predominately for residential use. This alternative assumes that any environmental problems associated with the old City dump (on Weiner's property) are manageable and that no over-whelmingly negative conclusions would be reached about the viability of residential development in the area.

#### *Scenario #2*

A second scenario would be residential development in the alienated Southwest Park only, while other land uses occur in the other undeveloped portions of the study area. Another question is whether the Southwest could be developed as a mixed-income residential area. There is certainly a large body of evidence which suggests that development only for low-income housing brings with it certain problems that can be avoided through income diversity. Most advocates of residential development in the Southwest area feel that mixed income development is most desirable, despite the Focus Group's estimate that this would be against the housing market's dictates.

Having thus subjected this issue to such close examination and intensive discussion, the Committee selected the residential scenario #2 as the most desirable in terms of potential benefits to the community as a whole. Perhaps the most important determinant in this decision was the City's longstanding emphasis on the provision of housing that is adequate in quantity, has wide variety of type, and is affordable to all income levels.

### ***Recommended Land Use and Planning Goals***

Given that the creation of more affordable housing is a long-established general goal of the City, efforts should be made in pursuing the possibilities of housing development in the Southwest area. Despite the aforementioned factors which may cast doubt on the viability of a residential neighborhood in the Southwest area, the committee was not convinced that all these would be insurmountable obstacles, provided that certain development guidelines are adhered to.

*Planning objectives and site planning principles -*

- While preserving and creating amenities, development in the southwest area should have an urban appearance, to the greatest extent possible given the limitations of the area. This would require that the developed portions be relatively dense while preserving the unbuilt areas for green space and other amenities. Also, density should be encouraged to the extent allowed by the physical limitations of the site.
- Reduced dependency on the automobile should be encouraged and facilitated. In the residential schemes, mixed land uses are called for so that people could live and work within walking distance of their homes. Bicycle and pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the physical planning of the site.
- Socio-economic diversity should be one of the development goal. This applies particularly if the land use plan for the area includes residential development. Development for low-income housing only should be discouraged. Community facilities and other site amenities to be developed should appeal to and serve a diverse population.

Built projects in the area will likely concentrate in the north-east quadrant of the alienated Southwest Park because the compacted and raised ground here (as a result of DPW's landfilling activities) would be more suitable for construction than the low areas to the south. Cluster development of a variety of housing types (e.g. detached single-family, duplexes, town houses, etc.) built at a density higher than average for the City, together with retail and some service industries, could be the beginning of a vibrant neighborhood. Allowing for different housing types in one neighborhood will to some extent encourage a diverse population among its residents. (The residential development Focus Group's initial assessment is that a truly mixed-income housing is not likely to be possible in the southwest area, but the low to moderate income population still is comprised of different age-groups with different life styles and housing needs.)

Planning a relatively dense mixed-use development in selected areas is desirable from both the ecological and economical points-of-view. Higher density development in one area would make possible the conservation of open space in other more environmentally sensitive areas. In the southwest study area, the areas most sensitive to development are the low areas (whose natural state may be essential in the overall stormwater management scheme) and the old flood plain woods along the eastern boundary of the City parcel. These areas may be left undeveloped, or developed for recreational purposes,

as part of the open space system that has begun to be formed by the various parks and recreational trails in the area. The presence of this open-space system is why a network of bicycle and pedestrian ways throughout the entire area is both feasible and desirable. Such alternative transportation modes in turn support concentrated, mixed-use development because they will be more readily used if destination points are close to one another.

A planned unit development (PUD) would most efficiently provide for a mix of land uses complementing and supporting one another. Because site developments of an entire PUD area can be planned as a whole, conflicts of development goals may be resolved at the early planning stage (See Appendix B for further discussion of PUD.) Typical PUD regulations could also ensure that the development pattern and site amenities envisioned in a masterplan will likely become part of the evolving landscape.

## Chapter 4 - Recommendation for Use of Income from Disposition of the Current Southwest Park

This Chapter describes the Southwest Area Land Use Committee's recommendations for use of the income to be realized from disposition of the current Southwest Park. In addition the following topics are briefly covered: a description of the parcels recommended for acquisition; a discussion of the Parks Commission recommendations; an outline of legal procedures for alienation of parklands as set forth in relevant State documents; and a summary of the Southwest Land Use Committee's recommendations regarding substitute parkland and use of other income from Southwest Park's proposed sale.

Parcels identified in 1985 as substitute land for Southwest Park lie south of the fish ladder. Some of these parcels are located in the City, and the others are located in the Town of Ithaca, across a section of the Cayuga Inlet which delineates the City-Town line. Map #4A entitled "Substitute Lands As Identified in Chapter 757 of New York State Laws of 1985" shows the parcels recommended for acquisition. These lie to the southwest of existing Southwest Park. The parcels identified as SW4 and SW5 were purchased by the City in 1986 pursuant to approval in Chapter 757. It should be noted that the Board of Zoning Appeals variance granted in 1993 for the proposed Wal Mart store lies in part on parcel SW3.

The section of the Cayuga Inlet which runs through the proposed substitute park land is in a relatively natural condition, that is, its bed and banks have not been extensively altered by human intervention. Most of the other creeks in the City, except the gorges, have been modified extensively over time. Flood control measures and land filling have caused these creeks to be channelized and straightened. Although no environmental analysis has been conducted on this proposed substitute parkland, it can be assumed that the mature vegetation along the water's edge may be similar to what has been identified as remnants of the flood plain forests on the eastern border of Southwest Park. (*See Map 4 in Chapter One*) A 1933 aerial photo shows that north of the flood plain forest was open field where agricultural activities had apparently already ceased. Today, almost the entire area, except the northernmost corner near the fish ladder, is wooded. The same aerial photograph shows that cultivated fields existed south of the Inlet, and in contrast to the abandoned field north of the Inlet, a good portion of this area remains in agricultural use today.

The scenic quality and diversity of open-space types within the substitute land identified in 1985 suggest that there are opportunities for both preservation of natural habitats and development for recreational purposes. This area within which the Black Diamond Trail is proposed to be developed would become an important link between Buttermilk Falls State Park, Cayuga Inlet and Cass Park.

The City of Ithaca Parks Commission visited both Southwest Park and the proposed substitute park lands in 1993 and in a memo dated August 5, 1994 stated that:

"After a careful review, discussion and site visit, a final recommendation concerning the purchase of substitute park lands with the money acquired from the alienation and subsequent sale of the current Southwest Park, it was agreed, by a majority vote, that the following recommendation be made:

1. That the City-owned land known as SW4 and SW5 be designated as park.
2. That the City acquire, as substitute park land, the privately owned parcels known as: SW1 (in City), SW6 (in Town), SW7 (in Town), and SW8 (in Town), and perhaps additional substitute park land, provided the purchase price for these parcels does not exceed 50% of the total amount received, by the city, for the sale of the current Southwest Park.
3. That the remainder of the money from the sale of the current Southwest Park be put into a fund to be used for much needed capital projects in existing city parks. The fund should be administered by the Department of Public Works, in conjunction with the Parks Commission.
4. That the portion of the privately owned parcels known as SW2 and SW3 (to be purchased by Wal-Mart should the proposed Wal-Mart project be approved) that is not built upon, be planted as a buffer zone between the proposed Wal-Mart development and the proposed City park and be donated by Wal-Mart to the City of Ithaca.

The Parks Commission made its recommendations, in part, based on their strong belief that the City's existing parks system is in serious need of major capital improvements. New York State's Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation allows proceeds from the sale of former park lands to be used for capital improvements instead of for the purchase of new park lands. It is our understanding that the Finger Lakes Parks Commission has expressed a preference for substitute land rather than capital improvements. However, such improvements are permitted under the regulations. The following is an excerpt from the *Guide to the Alienation or Conversion of Municipal Parklands* dated 1991, page 8:

#### What should be in the legislation

1. In general the policy of the Agency on parkland alienation legislation is consistent with the federal policy and the provision of substitute lands for those being alienated is preferred. Both the lands being discontinued and the replacement lands should be identified in the proposed legislation. This requirement cannot be waived by the Agency for any alienation of parklands for which the municipality received funds under the EQBA or LWCF Programs.
2. The Agency recognizes, however, that there may be valid reasons at times to alienate particular parklands when the substitution of other lands is not always possible or appropriate. In a case like this, if substitution is not mandatory, an alternate requirement

to the substitution rule is that the bill contain a statement calling for the net proceeds of any sale to be used for capital improvements to other municipal parks.

3. Where the parklands are being discontinued so that the municipality can use them for some other purpose, the legislation should require the municipality to set aside, for the purchase of additional parklands or the improvement of capital facilities at other parks, an amount equal to the appraised fair market value of the lands being discontinued."

The Southwest Area Land Use Committee adopted most of the Parks Commission's recommendations with the following exception: The Southwest Area Land Use Committee has recommended purchase of all of parcels SW1, SW2, SW3, SW6, SW7, and SW8 , in addition to retention of parcel SW4 and SW5 which have already been purchased by the City. It is the Committee's belief that purchase of SW2 and SW3 -- with the exception of the parts of those parcels which may be a part of the Wal Mart site if it is approved by the Board of Planning and Development -- would be the best protection for a new City/Town park in that area. In addition, it is the belief of the Committee that the 15% limit proposed by the Parks Commission might not allow sufficient funds for acquisition of these substitute park lands. However, the Committee feels strongly that there is considerable merit to the Parks Commission recommendations and, therefore, recommends that any proceeds in excess of the amount necessary for the purchase of the proposed substitute park lands be used for capital improvements throughout the City's park system.

## Chapter 5 - Recommendations for Action and Further Study

In summary, the Committee recommends that there be mixed-use development, with an emphasis on housing, in the alienated Southwest Park. (*See Map 8.*) Specifically, the necessary steps in this direction are:

1. That the process of the alienation of Southwest Park be completed.
2. That money from the disposition of the current Southwest Park be used partly for acquiring substitute park land, and partly for capital improvements of existing City parks.
3. a) That a right-of-way be reserved for a future southwest roadway to connect Elmira Road to Floral Avenue, possibly continuing up West Hill. The right-of-way should make ample provision for separate bicycle and pedestrian paths, and landscaping.  
b) That a right-of-way be reserved for the future construction of a north-south roadway, to improve access to the Southwest Park area and to alleviate future congestion on Meadow Street/Elmira Road. The right-of-way width reserved should be adequate for anticipated bicycle and pedestrian, as well as automotive use.
4. That, with the exception of the area now developed with mobile homes, the areas zoned MH-1 be rezoned to a heavy commercial designation and that no further development of housing be permitted on the area formerly used as a garbage dump.
5. a) That 'Southwest Park' and the adjoining City-owned parcel to the north be rezoned for a predominantly residential mixed-use planned unit development (PUD). In order to do this, the City must amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow planned unit development.  
b) The City should solicit proposals from developers for a planned unit development in the alienated Southwest Park.

These last two recommendations are made with the understanding that the decision to recommend housing be re-examined from time-to-time; say, on a 5-year basis. There is still some doubt that residential development can be made economically feasible in the Southwest area; therefore, we recommend that the City reconsider this decision periodically.

Further studies, some of which require the services of specialized consultants, will be necessary to resolve a number of unresolved issues and to guide the development of a more detailed planning policy. These are as follows:

### *Natural Resources Investigation -*

In 1988, the City hired Robert Wesley, a local botanist specializing in wetlands, to survey Southwest Park for the purpose of identifying plant species which might indicate the presence of wetland. His conclusion was that parts of the site had some wetland

characteristics but that the only area of any botanical interest was the remnant flood plain forest. This area is important and should be preserved.

The definition of wetland developed and promulgated by the Corps of Army Engineers and the Department of Environmental Conservation has changed several times over the past ten years. A consulting firm with expertise in wetland delineations has been hired to determine whether parts of the Southwest Park are wetland as currently defined. Any areas which are wetlands should be evaluated to determine whether they should be set aside and preserved. Additional land should be set aside to protect any wetlands so identified.

### ***Environmental audit -***

If Southwest Park is to be developed, an environmental site assessment must be performed. Staff investigation to date indicates no reason to believe that hazardous substances are buried on the site or that leachate from surrounding uses has contaminated the site. Nonetheless, an assessment will be required before the property could be developed.

Similar environmental investigation must be conducted before other land in the Southwest area can be developed. Such environmental assessment of both the Southwest Park and the remainder of the study area will begin with a Phase I assessment. The results of the Phase I assessment will provide direction for any additional investigation.

### ***Roadway and infrastructure alternatives -***

If the broad outlines of the Southwest Area Land Use Committee's recommendations are accepted, further studies will be needed to decide on corridor alternatives for the southwest connector, the north-south corridor, and other new roads and public infrastructure. Such corridor studies should include investigation of the engineering constraints and environmental, social and economic impacts of the various roadway alternatives. A full environmental review should be conducted on all alternatives under serious consideration.

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix A: List of Illustrations

Appendix B: Planned Unit Development

Appendix C: Borrowed Images of Development Types

Appendix D: Consultants and Meeting Participants

Appendix E: Focus Group Meeting

# Southwest Area Land Use Plan — Addendum

May 22, 1998

In the four years since the publication of the *Southwest Area Land Use Plan*, City of Ithaca, 1994, the findings and recommendations have undergone significant public comment and discussion as part of the public review process. This addendum is intended to update the report to reflect new information that has become available since 1994 and revise recommendations in response to public comment, consultation with experts in the housing development field and public goals.

The major changes contained in this addendum are:

- Identification of wetlands within Southwest Park
- Revision of future land use and zoning recommendation for Southwest Park
- Requiring buffers between conflicting land uses
- Expansion of the Cherry Street Industrial Park
- Provision of public access to substitute parklands
- Termination of the reserved east-west travel corridor at the Conrail railroad tracks prior to the Flood Control Channel
- Mitigation of off-site impacts of development
- Establishment of design guidelines to ensure quality site and project development

Several significant real estate developments have occurred along the Route 13 corridor in recent years. However, large undeveloped tracts of land, including Southwest Park and the former city dump, remain undeveloped. The new construction is a significant indicator of a strengthening commercial real estate market along the Route 13 corridor and a continuing absorption of vacant land within the city.

In the 1994 Plan, the summary of recommendations called for the following:

- Alienation of Southwest Park & purchase of substitute parkland along the Cayuga Inlet
- Proceeds from the sale of Southwest Park to be utilized for acquisition of parkland and capital improvements in existing parks
- Preservation of the rights-of-way for two roadways to serve the area to be developed in the southwest
- The rezoning of the area currently zoned MH-1 (Mobile Home) for commercial use, with the exception of the existing mobile home park
- The rezoning of the city-owned land in the southwest, including Southwest Park, for a Planned Unit Development, with predominantly residential use

The report recognized that development of residential uses might be difficult and suggested that the City periodically revisit this recommendation to see whether it is economically feasible. Finally, the report recommended that the City continue its investigation of the southwest area beginning with a preliminary environmental assessment of Southwest Park.

## **Wetland Delineation**

In the intervening four years, the City has begun to take steps to implement the recommendations of the *Southwest Area Land Use Plan*. Shortly after completion of the Plan, Stearns & Wheler, an environmental engineering firm, was hired to conduct a preliminary environmental assessment of Southwest Park. During the course of this investigation, the consultants identified certain indicator species, which suggested that parts of Southwest Park had become wetlands. This led to a further investigation of these wetlands and ultimately to their being surveyed by the City and to their formal delineation by the Army Corps of Engineers. The delineation of these wetlands is one of the changes that have occurred between the publication of the report and the writing of today's addendum (see Map 9).

These wetlands were formed as a consequence of filling activities by the City in Southwest Park. The Park had been in agricultural use before its acquisition by the City. A series of aerial photographs dated between 1933 and 1962 reveal consistent agricultural use of the land continued through the early 1960s. A 1933 aerial photograph of the City clearly shows agricultural fields and channelized streams or drainage ditches on what is now Southwest Park. The City used the area as a deposition site for clean fill. In storing materials on the site, the City blocked the drainage ways that formerly conveyed stormwater from the adjacent fields and South Hill to the Cayuga Inlet. As a consequence, impoundments were created which allowed the growth of wetland indicator species. These wetland plants were documented during a survey conducted by Robert Wesley, a local biologist. The report indicated the plant species in the park were "characteristic or indicative of wetlands in upstate New York" but that no rare or scarce species were observed on the site. "Of the nine wetland functions and benefits outlined in Section 664.3 of the Freshwater Wetlands Act, only one; flood and stormwater control, is relevant to this site."

The scattered wetlands are concentrated in the southern half of the park and total approximately 8-9 acres, with the single largest one measuring about 3 acres. None of these wetlands collectively or individually are protected under Article 24 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law (Freshwater Wetlands Act). Despite the fact that these wetlands are designated Class III and are relatively of little significance for botanical preservation, the City recognizes that federal regulations require the application for a permit prior to any disturbance activities and will mandate compliance with such federal regulations. As work progresses on the alienation and development of Southwest Park, special attention should be provided to these wetland areas and the ultimate replacement or enhancement of other wetlands to ensure that the development of the area occurs in an environmentally responsible manner.

## **Land Use Recommendation for Southwest Park**

The second significant change is that the report's recommendation for construction of a mixed-use, predominantly residential planned use development seems, in retrospect, to have been overly idealistic given the severe site constraints and public subsidies necessary for housing in the southwest area.

Site constraints place the Southwest Park location at both a cost and market disadvantage to other housing sites available in the region. Poor soils and the need for extensive public services and infrastructure to be brought to the vacant site impose the major cost constraints. The soil conditions are poorly suited for development and require specialized foundations that drive up housing construction costs. In addition, housing uses will require road, sewer, water, drainage, electric, gas and communication services to be extended to the site. The cost of installing this infrastructure is estimated at \$500-\$600 per linear foot and represents an enormous up-front capital cost. Unless deep public subsidies are provided, this initial investment must be supported by significant income-generating development in the near-term for development of Southwest Park to be economically feasible. A mixed-use, predominantly residential development that is

phased in over many years will have severe difficulty carrying the debt load resulting from extending infrastructure to the site.

Market disadvantages are those obstacles to homebuyers that would tend to discourage selection of Southwest Park compared to other available housing locations. The perception of the area as commercial and industrial in nature would tend to discourage potential residents from choosing Southwest Park as an area to reside. This perception is reinforced by the need to access the site through the existing Route commercial corridor. Several neighboring uses, such as the Tompkins County Recycling & Solid Waste Facility, the NYSEG high-voltage electric transmission lines and Conrail railroad tracks, would be negative factors in successfully marketing a residential development in the area. This is particularly true when competing against other locations in the region that lack these disadvantages while providing amenities such as scenic views, proximity to schools and connections with existing residential neighborhoods.

In re-examining the recommendations for residential development, the City felt it would be important to solicit the opinions of individuals who were involved with the development of housing in and around the City. Consequently, a focus group consisting of builders, developers, bankers, realtors and low-income housing providers was convened to re-evaluate the committee's 1994 recommendation for residential development of Southwest Park. Citing the above constraints, this 1998 focus group, as had the previous focus group convened in 1992, concluded it would not be financially feasible to develop Southwest Park for low-income housing and that any such development would require extensive government subsidies. Furthermore, there was unanimity that it would be difficult or impossible to develop mixed income housing in the southwest, since there are many more desirable locations for people with middle to higher incomes. The focus group reasoned that the highest and best use for the area was for large-scale retail commercial development in accordance with the predominant commercial pattern of the Route 13 corridor (see Appendix E: 1998 Focus Group Meeting).

The focus group also pointed out that the residential real estate market in the City has changed dramatically in the past six years. Whereas vacancy rates were extremely low in 1992 -- there was still some apparent upward pressure on rents and sale prices -- residential real estate over the past several years, particularly at the low end, has seen decreases in price and increase in vacancy rates, as well as increases in the length of time that unsold houses have remained on the market. The focus group agreed there is no demand for large-scale, dense residential development in the southwest area to support the cost of extending infrastructure to the site. In addition, it was the unanimous opinion of the focus group that, with the exception of student housing in Collegetown, the current weak demand for housing within the City would continue for the foreseeable future, echoing the slow population growth projections for the City and Tompkins County.

The City lacks appropriately zoned large parcels to accommodate large-scale (10+ acres) commercial development that can strengthen the declining tax base of the City. The soon to be alienated Southwest Park area offers one of the few remaining large vacant parcels in the City that could support large-scale retail/commercial development, and can do so without significant adverse impact on existing residential neighborhoods. The site's major constraints for future housing use -- commercial/industrial setting, lack of scenic amenities, poor soils, conflicting neighboring uses -- all recede in importance for commercial uses that primarily seek large assembled land and suitable Route 13 commercial access.

Given the marketing and cost disadvantages relative to other housing locations, future residential land use in Southwest Park has too many obstacles to overcome to be successful, unless deep public subsidies are provided. With the budgetary constraints of the City, subsidies to support new residential development in the southwest area will not be available in the foreseeable future. While not a determining factor, the present and projected future weakness of the housing market in the downtown and southwest area of the City further argues against designating the area for

primarily residential use. In contrast, the Route 13 commercial real estate market shows signs of continued strength while very limited land is available within the City for large-scale retail/commercial development to meet this demand. It is therefore recommended that the former Southwest Park be rezoned for commercial use rather than predominantly residential, mixed-use development as previously proposed (see appendix for revised "Map 8 Revised – Proposed Land Use"). It is important to note that under the current zoning framework for the City a commercial B-5 zoning designation allows housing as well as office uses, so a mixed-use residential use will still be possible. In an effort to further diversify the uses on the site it is recommended that research and light industrial uses also be allowed in the southwest areas earmarked for commercial use.

Some public speakers have still continued to lobby for zoning that mandates residential uses as part of a mixed-use development citing the "traditional neighborhood development" concept to create "urban village" neighborhoods as an alternative to single-use commercial areas. In prioritizing the City's resources, staff time and funds should be directed at improving and strengthening the existing urban neighborhoods before creating a new "urban village" away from the center of the City. These new urban village developments attempt to recreate traditional mixed-use neighborhoods in contrast to the prevailing contemporary pattern of automobile-dependent suburban development. The City of Ithaca, on the other hand, has traditional mixed-use neighborhoods throughout its downtown area which require continual effort and investment to prevent their decline. The City supports the notion of dense urban village forms and has taken steps toward this effort. Both the draft *Inlet Island Urban Design Guidelines* and the *West End Urban Design Plan 1998* encourage multi-story mixed-use development in areas with existing urban amenities in place.

### **Zoning Recommendations**

Zoning for the proposed land uses in the southwest area form the basis upon which future development will occur. This Addendum recommends the following areas be rezoned to allow commercial/office/light industrial and residential uses (see Map #10 – Proposed Areas to be Rezoned):

- Southwest Park (60± acres),
- the City-owned parcel north of Southwest Park (7± acres),
- the undeveloped property presently zoned MH-1 beginning 100 feet south of the most southerly mobile home (38± acres), and
- the industrially zoned land located adjacent to the substitute parkland at the extreme southern boundary of the City (7 acres).

However, it has not been conclusively determined that the B-5 zoning designation that presently governs development along the S. Meadow/Elmira Rd. commercial corridor is the most appropriate zoning to be adopted for these areas to be rezoned.

The B-5 district allows for a wide variety of commercial, service, office, residential and automobile-oriented uses, yet it does not allow research or light industrial uses. As mentioned earlier, one option is to rezone the southwest areas targeted for rezoning to a B-5 commercial designation and expand the list of permitted uses in the B-5 district citywide to include light industrial and research uses. Alternatively, a new zoning classification could be created for the southwest area, including both the Southwest Park and the adjacent MH-1 land to be rezoned. So, for example, certain automobile-oriented uses, such as "motor vehicle sales and service," "gasoline station," and "theaters and other places of public assembly" permitted in the B-5 district might be excluded and "light industry" and "research" uses included in a zoning district tailored specifically for the southwest area. No matter which approach is used, the rezoning should allow for both commercial and residential uses in Southwest Park after its alienation.

## **Buffering**

One of the most frequently raised issues heard at public meetings has been the request for effective buffering of adjacent residential and parklands from future commercial development. As the plan's recommended land uses involve areas where parkland, the Black Diamond recreation trail and existing residential areas abut commercial uses, screening and buffering are endorsed to mitigate negative impacts of commercial development.

In particular, effective buffering is recommended in the following areas:

- Between the mobile home park (Nate's Floral Estates) and commercial uses to the south
- Along the east side of the levee between the substitute parkland and retail/commercial development in the alienated Southwest Park
- Between the substitute parkland and commercial uses fronting Elmira Rd., for example, the former proposed Wal-mart site
- Between new buildings and parking lots in an expanded Cherry Street Industrial Park and the Black Diamond Trail

## **Public Access to Substitute Parkland**

It has become evident during public comments, that future utility of the substitute parkland located west of the levee requires enhanced public access. As the substitute parkland does not have street frontage along Elmira Rd., access for vehicles and pedestrians will be required.

All methods for improved public access to the substitute parkland should be explored. Any proposed commercial development along the Elmira Street frontage should make allowance for public access to the substitute parkland behind the site. Joint parking for commercial uses and the public parkland should be strongly encouraged.

## **Cherry Street Industrial Park**

Another notable update since the initial publication of the report involves the continued success of the Cherry Street Industrial Park. Employers located in the Park are currently employing 155 persons and generate approximately \$50,000 annually in revenues for the City. All building lots have now been leased out.

While the 1994 report recommended light industrial use for the vacant land located immediately to the south of the Cherry Street Industrial Park, between the Conrail railroad tracks and the Flood Control Channel, the issue has increased in importance since leasing out the last lot two years ago. It is recommended that the City build on the success of the Cherry Street Industrial Park and work to expand the park to the south, in the Industrial District adjacent to the railroad tracks. Such expansion should be conducted in a cost-effective manner that provides appropriate buffering and public access to the Black Diamond trail extending along the Flood Control Channel.

## **Reserved Traffic Corridor Rights-of-Way**

The 1994 Plan recommended designating and acquiring rights-of-way corridors within the study area to ensure that a coordinated travel network could be established to serve the future development of the entire southwest area. This circulation system is intended to not only serve access needs by motorists, but also by pedestrians and bicyclists. Moreover, reserving these rights-of-way will prevent incompatible development that could hinder construction of a preferred future circulation network.

The 1994 Plan did not advocate for the City to construct roads in these reserved rights-of-way corridors. Such construction is likewise not recommended in this Addendum. Rather, developers seeking to build in the southwest area will be required to undertake, at their own expense, detailed design and construction of roadways, including sidewalks and bicycle paths, to satisfy City concerns within the reserved travel ways.

This Addendum reinforces the previous general recommendation for designating and reserving rights-of-way for both east-west and north-south traffic corridors, however, it deviates from the 1994 Plan by revising the scope of the rights-of-way to be mapped and reserved for east-west travel. It is now recommended that the east-west right-of-way traffic corridor terminate at the Conrail railroad tracks and not extend over to West Hill (see Revised Map 8, April 27, 1998).

The proposed extension of the designated travel corridor over the Flood Control Channel was always viewed as a prudent measure to preserve the best option to address a projected long-range need to address growing traffic between West Hill and the southern portion of the City. It was argued at the time of the 1994 Plan that failure to designate and acquire a suitable right-of-way for a future crossing of the Flood Control Channel in the near-term could allow the most beneficial routes to be obstructed by private development. This still holds true, but reservation of the rights-of-way should be delayed until a feasible route for the connector is established.

At this point in time, and most likely for the next 20 years, construction of a roadway over the Flood Control Channel will not be warranted. However, given a continuation of current development trends, there is a strong possibility that 50 years from now there will be a pressing need to improve travel between West Hill and the southern portion of the City. Therefore, the 1994 Plan suggested extending the reserved east-west corridor to West Hill.

Based on public comments received, it is clear that city residents, residents of the town, and transportation officials have not reached agreement on the need for reserving a right-of-way for a crossing, much less a preferred location for any such crossing at this time. Additionally, none of the possible alignments for a preferred traffic corridor west of the Flood Control Channel have undergone preliminary engineering analysis or environmental assessment, so it is not possible to identify a practicable route to map and reserve at this time.

This Addendum recommends that the reserved east-west travel way be revised to extend only so far as the Conrail railroad tracks. No traffic corridor location extending west of the Flood Control Channel should be mapped as part of the *Southwest Area Land Use Plan*. Nonetheless, efforts should continue to solidify a working agreement for a future extension of the east-west travel corridor to West Hill and further analysis conducted to identify a suitable route for such extension.

### **Mitigate Off-Site Impacts**

It is recognized that development of large tracts of land in the southwest area will result in off-site impacts, both positive and negative. At this point in time, we can anticipate the strong likelihood of adverse off-site traffic impacts from development in the southwest area. Increased stormwater pollutant loads can also be expected to impact the water quality of the Cayuga Inlet without significant mitigation measures. As specific development proposals come forward additional impacts will undoubtedly be identified. Negative off-site impacts of new development need to be managed in the development review process to ensure that such impacts are avoided or mitigated to an acceptable level.

Maintaining the quality of life in the nearby residential neighborhood situated east of Meadow Street and south of Six Mile Creek is of particular concern. This neighborhood is most susceptible to off-site traffic impacts stemming from new development in the southwest area by virtue of its nearby location and the City's road network that funnels traffic bound for the southwest area from

South Hill, East Hill and points north through the neighborhood road network located between S. Meadow St. and Spencer Rd.

Recent traffic counts suggest that the neighborhood road network is increasingly being used as a "shortcut" by traffic with origins or destinations at commercial uses on S. Meadow St. and the Elmira Rd. Such through traffic alters the character of the neighborhood, raises traffic safety issues, depresses the local real estate market, and increases dirt and noise pollution. In short, it degrades the general quality of life in the neighborhood.

It is recommended that off-site impacts resulting from new development should be managed and mitigated through the site development review process and mitigation measures funded by the developer. In cases where the development is responsible for only a portion of the negative off-site impact, fair and proportional payments required to carry out mitigation projects should be required from the developer. To address the existing traffic problems in the southwest quadrant of the City and the S. Albany/Wood St. neighborhood, the City should adopt appropriate policies and commit to fund capital projects in the near-term that can reasonably be expected to improve traffic conditions.

Capital projects and changes in traffic regulations to combat traffic problems should be developed with wide neighborhood participation. Specific policies and projects to undertake include, but are not limited to, the following:

- take measures to prohibit heavy-truck through traffic in the neighborhood
- design and implement a system of "traffic calming" measures to slow traffic and enhance traffic safety within the neighborhood
- significantly reduce traffic volumes in the Southside residential neighborhood, including, but not limited to, S. Albany and S. Titus Streets

As a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) is prepared for the Plan, existing problems and projected off-site impacts will be further identified and mitigation measures developed to satisfactorily address significant negative impacts. Upon completion of the GEIS, the city will have information to begin planning work necessary to implement long-term solutions to address both existing and projected quality-of-life issues in the Southside residential neighborhood.

### **Design Guidelines and Criteria**

A committee appointed by the Mayor will be assembled to establish design guidelines and criteria for the Southwest Area. These guidelines and criteria, in addition to site plan review, will steer development towards high quality and creative site plan and building design. Although the details and actual criteria will need to be outlined by the committee, the issues to be discussed include, but are not limited to, the following:

Landscaping:	Each development shall provide adequate landscaping to enhance the site; including parking lots and buffers where necessary.
Circulation:	Each development shall provide adequate and safe pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular traffic access.
Parking:	Each development shall provide parking areas for vehicles and bicycles in conjunction with landscaping and retention of natural areas.

Retention of Natural Areas:	Each development shall retain and incorporate natural areas and features into the development, wherever desirable.
Innovative Mitigation:	Each development shall mitigate impacts through innovative solutions including, but not limited to, drainage issues, flood and stormwater management, and traffic impacts.
Building Façade Design:	Each development's buildings and façades shall consist of quality materials and incorporate appropriate architectural elements and detail to enhance the overall character of the development at both a motorist and pedestrian scale.
Lighting:	Each development's outdoor lighting shall be designed for compatibility with existing and allowed adjacent uses, to prevent excessive light levels, glare and light spillage, and to be incorporated into the overall character and architectural design of the development.

### **Preventing Piece-Meal Development**

Several members of the public have raised concerns regarding individual piece-meal development in the southwest area that could lead to uncoordinated, dysfunctional development patterns. In considering this concern, it should be recognized that the City-owned 60-acre Southwest Park parcel accounts for a majority of the developable area in the southwest. R. & M. Weiner own a second large parcel of 36 acres. Any division of these large parcels requires subdivision approval where the Planning & Development Board has authority to require a lot layout showing that subdivided parcels conform to current zoning regulations, and can be serviced by streets and utilities in a reasonable manner. During the CEQR and SEQR process as well as the site plan development review process, the Board can require more specific modifications to individual parcels as they are developed to ensure compatibility with surrounding areas. For example, developers can be required to relocate buildings and parking areas on the lot that could obstruct reasonable extensions of road systems and utility routes to serve future development. In addition, the establishment of reserved traffic corridors on an Official Map will ensure that suitable circulation for the entire area remains available.

While existing land use regulations allow for the possibility of limited piece-meal development where parcels abut public streets, most of the vacant parcels in the southwest lack street frontage entirely or have very limited amount of street frontage. In most cases, small-scale development will require subdivision review since nearly all of the undeveloped land is comprised of either large parcels or on property requiring property boundary modifications to create practicable building lots. Large-scale development will require site development plan review in all cases and subdivision review where assembly of several parcels is necessary. By and large, concerns about piece-meal development will be adequately managed through a combination of existing land use regulations and the reservation of traffic corridors.

### **Old City Dump**

Finally, there have been a number of concerns raised about the environmental impact of the former City dump on the future development of Weiner's vacant property located south of Nate's

Floral Estate mobile home park and east of the City parcel currently known as Southwest Park. This addendum confirms the original plan's recommendation that Weiner's vacant property - the old City dump - should be cleaned up to allow retail/commercial/office/light industrial uses on the 38 acre parcel.

The old City dump constitutes a substandard condition that exerts a blighting influence on the surrounding area and thereby impedes investment in the area. Although never publicly owned, the site was used for the disposal of primarily municipal household waste through the 1950s and 1960s. It is not known whether an actual contamination problem exists because an environmental investigation of the site has not been conducted to date. Unfortunately, the possibility of contamination is enough to discourage investment in the area. In order to assure overall protection of human health and the environment and promote sound growth and development of the community, appropriate and necessary remedial action should be taken to clean up the property and mitigate any off-site impacts from the former City dump.

If the City is going to realize the full benefits of economic development in the southwest area of the City, productive reuse of the old City dump site is essential. Prior to any development on areas previously used for dumping, an environmental investigation of the dump must be performed to identify the extent and severity of the contamination. Effective measures to appropriately remediate any serious hazards and mitigate the negative impacts from the previous City dump use should be implemented by the developer(s) to comply with applicable environmental and health laws to allow recommended commercial and light industrial uses.

## **Summary**

*The Southwest Area Land Use Plan* seeks to guide City policy and development of the southwest area to realize the greatest benefit for the City. While endorsing the vast majority of the Plan's 1994 recommendations, this addendum reflects information learned since the initial publication date. Ensuing wetlands investigation, a focus group meeting of housing development professionals, public meetings, and a renewed public policy emphasis on fiscal implications for future land use of the southwest area laid the framework for the recommendations contained in this Addendum.

The major change in the recommendations involves the future land use of Southwest Park after its alienation. The addendum recommends that the former Southwest Park area be rezoned for commercial use rather than the predominantly residential mixed-use development previously proposed.

A second important revision involves the traffic corridors to be reserved to serve the circulation needs of motorist, bicyclist and pedestrians as the southwest area develops. The proposed east-west traffic corridor to be mapped and reserved is now recommended to end at the Conrail railroad tracks rather than extend across the Flood Control Channel to West Hill at this time.

In addition, explicit recommendations calling for effective buffers between conflicting land uses, mitigation of off-site impacts of development, and establishment of design guidelines will allow the City to reap the benefits of development while minimizing its negative characteristics. Furthermore, this Addendum advocates for the expansion of the Cherry Street Industrial Park, appropriate clean up for future development on the old City dump site and public access to the substitute parklands. Finally, the wetlands in Southwest Park site have been delineated. These wetlands fall under jurisdiction of federal, but not state, regulations and will require impacts to be minimized unless alternative wetlands are enhanced or created.

LEGEND



Existing wooded area to be preserved



Approximate location of SWV Connector alternative C — partially overlapping the NYSDG r.o.w. — to include bike lanes, sidewalks, and tree planting area.



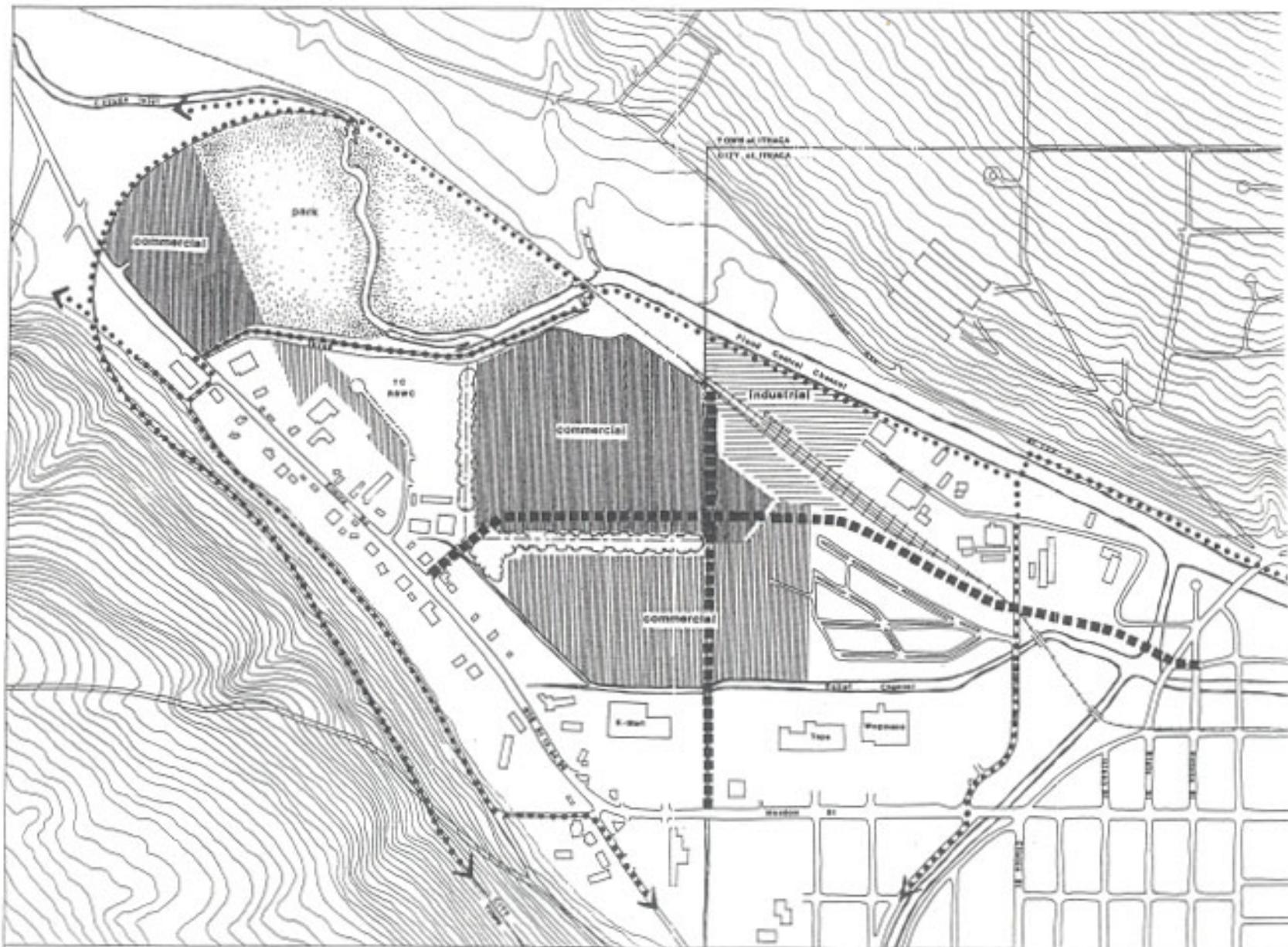
A north-south traffic corridor as an alternative to Meadow Street / Elmira Road: As shown, this road would intersect Taber Street, allowing Grindley Street to be eliminated.



Proposed bicycle and pedestrian route

NOTE A:

Those parts of parcels "SW2" and "SW3" included in the developed portion of any final Wet-Air site plan approved by the Board of Planning and Development would be excluded from the substitute park land shown here.



Southwest Area Land Use Study

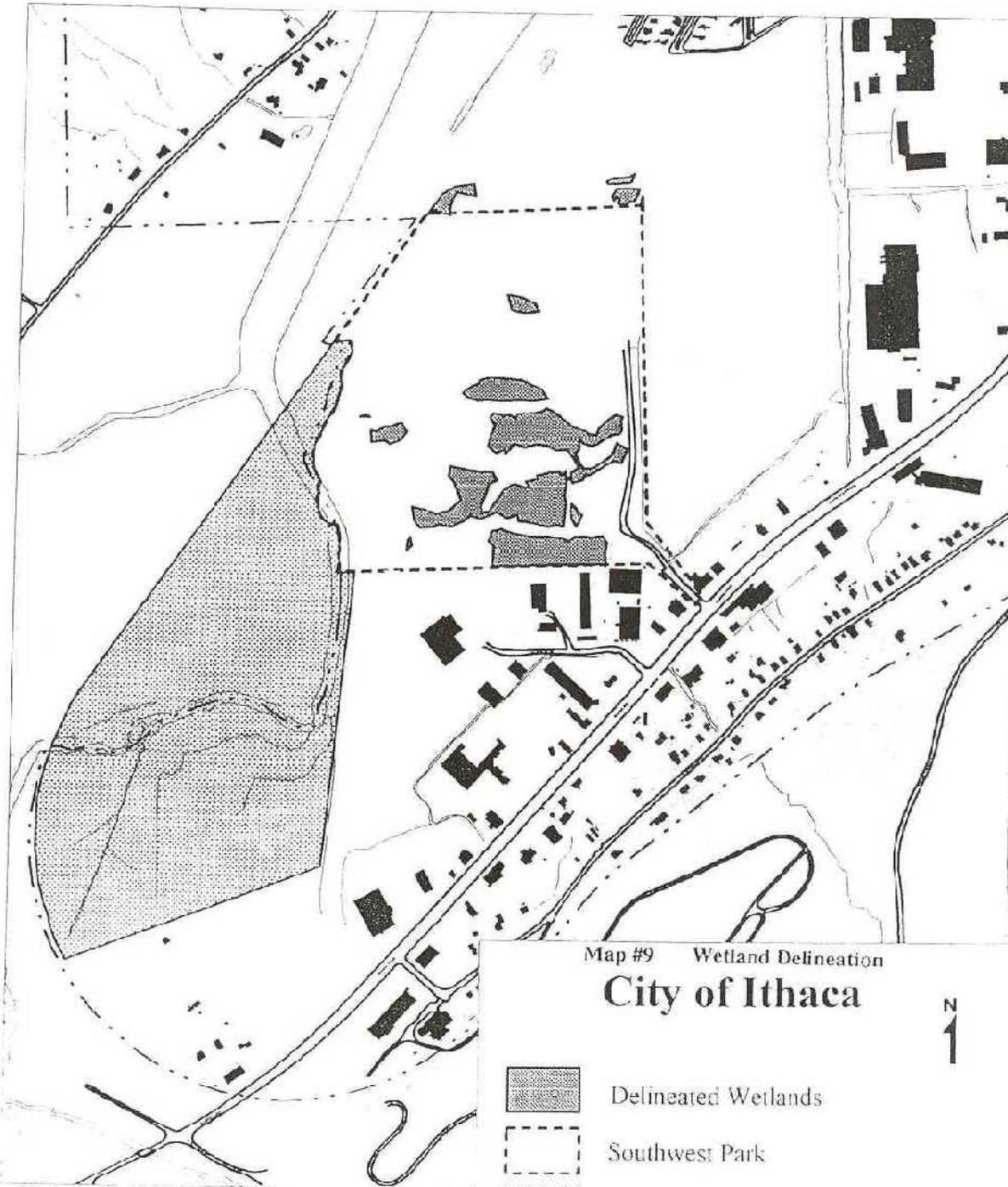
Southwest Area Land Use Committee  
Department of Planning and Development

City of Ithaca, 1993



Map #8 - REVISED 4/30/93

Proposed Land Use & Traffic Corridors



Map #9 Wetland Delineation

# City of Ithaca

-  Delineated Wetlands
-  Southwest Park
-  Proposed Substitute Parkland



# LEGEND

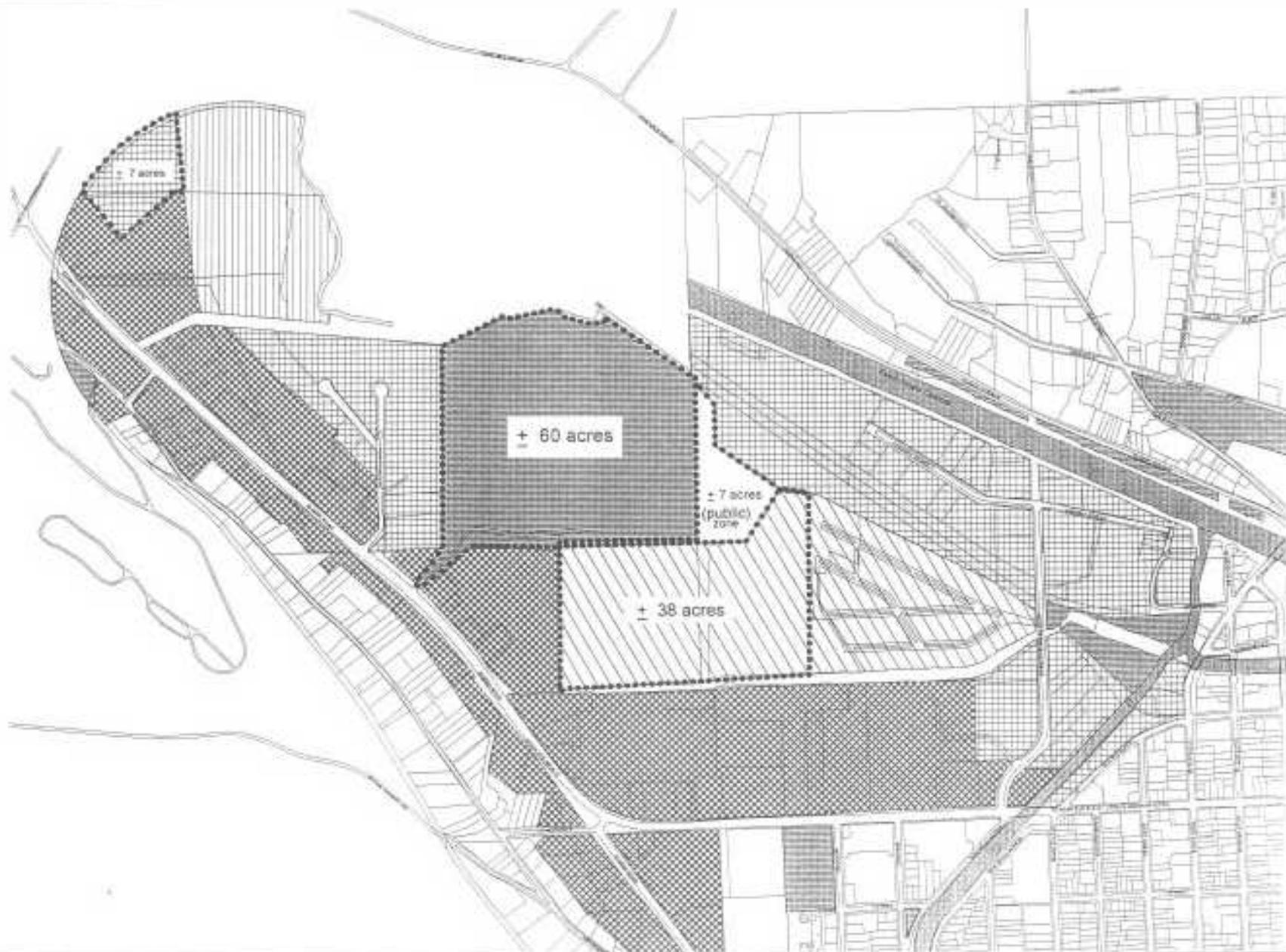
Existing  
City of Ithaca Zoning

- B-5
- FW-1
- I-1
- MH-1
- P-1

Proposed Areas to be  
Re-Zoned Commercial



Totals = + 112 acres



## Southwest Area Land Use Study



## 1998 Addendum Housing Recommendations

TO: Planning and Economic Development Committee Members

FROM: Jeannie Lee

Economic Development Planner

SUBJECT: Southwest Area Land Use Study Focus Group Meeting

March 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting Notes

Re: Housing Recommendation

DATE: March 18, 1998

In attendance were: Carl Carpenter (Cayuga Lumber), Margaret Hobbie (realtor), Mick LoPinto (LoPinto Builders), Paul Mazarella (INHS), John Novarr (Novarr-Mackesey Development and Construction), Martha Preston (Banker/IURA), Bruno Schickel (Schickel Construction), and Mack Travis (Ithaca Downtown Partnership/Developer). City Representatives: Mayor Alan Cohen and Alderwoman Susan Blumenthal.

Staff: H. M. Van Cort (Planning Director) and Jeannie Lee (Economic Development Planner).

The Southwest Area Land Use Study called for a five-year review of the housing recommendation for Southwest Park. The study proposed that the City owned parcels be rezoned for predominately a residential mixed use Planned Unit Development. It has now been four years and a new focus group was assembled for that purpose. This memorandum summarizes the focus group meeting and their updated recommendation regarding the role of housing in Southwest Park.

Mayor Alan Cohen addressed the focus group and gave a brief introduction explaining that each member was asked to participate to bring his or her unique experience and perspective of the market to the table. Following the Mayor's introduction, Van Cort summarized the site analysis outlining the development constraints and opportunities. The analysis is also discussed in Chapter One of the Southwest Area Land Use Study.

Van Cort opened the discussion by asking a series of questions. "Can housing be done at Southwest Park? If so, what kind of housing? What would one need to do housing? What is the highest and best use for the site?" A focus group member noted the surrounding area was predominately commercial and industrial and did not seem like an ideal place for housing. He also commented on the soil conditions in the area and thought if housing were to be built, the most economical type would be manufactured mobile homes with rents no higher than \$500 a month. Manufactured homes would be light and would not require substantial foundations to support the structure. He suggested the possible expansion of the existing Nates Floral Estates. Another focus group member suggested low-income elderly housing.

A question was raised as to the value of the land "unparked". Van Cort reported that the commercial value would range from \$1.50 to \$3.00 a square foot. A focus group member remarked that the land was too expensive to build housing on the site. Mobile homes, though inexpensive to construct, would not be a wise investment considering the land cost. Another

focus group member agreed manufactured homes would not be the best use of the site. Although he did not think housing should be built on the site, if it were to be done, he suggested the possibility of a dense urban village. A number of focus group members responded saying the housing market was too soft and would not support such density away from Collegetown. A comment was made that it was difficult to obtain local financing for multiple dwelling unit development outside Collegetown.

A focus group member stated that low-income, first time homebuyers look for the same characteristics as higher income first time homebuyers, meaning they want a detached house with land. Another focus group member commented that any housing project on the site would have to be at a large scale and volume to support the extensive infrastructure cost. Ithaca and the greater surrounding area could not support this scale of "subdivision" type development. There is no market for it. It was also noted the rental market in Ithaca is very weak at the moment. It was proposed that as Cornell and Collegetown absorb the student rental market the downtown rental units would eventually be converted back to single family homes.

All focus group members agreed there was no market for housing in Southwest Park. But if housing were to be developed, it would have to be low-income rental units given the lack of amenities and the market demand. This type of development, however, would make the project financially infeasible due to the land and construction cost, unless largely subsidized.

The group was then asked to address the question of highest and best use for Southwest Park. A number of focus group members stated the City lacked large parcels for large-scale retail/commercial development. Southwest Park, the old City dump, and the former Wal-Mart site are the few remaining large vacant parcels in the City, which could support such large-scale development. It was also noted that Route 13 was a commercial corridor and more retail development in the Southwest area would be ideal.

There was some concern expressed about the site's lack of frontage on Route 13. It was suggested the City consolidate small key parcels along Route 13 to create more frontage. Some thought a national developer would assemble the necessary parcels to reconfigure the site to meet their development needs. On the other hand, if the City assembled the parcels it would show our commitment to economic development and make the site more attractive.

All focus group members agreed the highest and best use for Southwest Park would be commercial development. It would increase the City's tax base, create jobs, and stimulate further economic development in the City.

In summary, there was a consensus among all the focus group participants that:

1. There is no market demand for housing in Southwest Park.
2. The highest and best use for the area is commercial development.

# 1998 Addendum Public Comments

Public Information Session - April 6, 1998

## Public Comments

1. Would trees on the flood control levee be a possibility? (to serve as a sonic and visual buffer)
2. Are the proposed roadways "access" roads or "through" roads? Access roads would make it difficult for vehicles to use for through traffic. The roads should be narrow with preference given to bicyclists and pedestrians. A five-lane road with high-speed traffic is not desired.
3. Who will pay for the construction of the roads? Will the city pass the costs for the roads onto the developers?
4. There needs to be proper buffers between the development parking lots and Cayuga Inlet and the park.
5. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) needs to be conducted before the adoption of the plan. How can Common Council adopt a plan without knowing if it is environmentally sound?
6. The drainage issue in the southwest area is very important and should be studied before the plan is adopted.
7. The old Wal-Mart site should be made into a park and preserved.
8. You start out with good intentions but things get lost in the process.
9. The same issues from the Wal-Mart proposal still apply and are equally valid to this plan.
10. Without a DEIS I cannot say that commercial development on the old City dump would be the best use. We do not know what the dump consists of and heavy truck traffic over the site may have some negative impacts.
11. The City did not create the wetlands in Southwest Park. When the park was utilized as farmland the drainage ditches served to drain the site. This indicates that the park was wet to begin with.
12. Let the wetlands in Southwest Park mature. They serve an important flood plain purpose.
13. The idea that we must fill every vacant space is ridiculous.
14. Having aerial photos of the area present at these meeting would be very helpful.
15. The old Wal-Mart site should be turned into a park or another comparable use, such as a visitor center. It could serve as a gateway to Ithaca.
16. The City should proceed with caution on the proposed Cherry Street Extension. The industries allowed to locate on the expansion should not emit any pollution such as noise.
17. If the area is allowed to be developed, the amount of run-off into the Flood Control Channel will increase further pollution to Cayuga Inlet.
18. Are there any interested developers? Who are they?
19. The proposed adoption of the plan on May 6<sup>th</sup> is too soon.
20. The original recommendation for housing in Southwest Park should be retained.
21. Another focus group should be convened, this time to invite people who have an interest in and care about providing low-income housing. People who are interested in more than the market aspect of housing need to be heard. The housing market may be soft right now, but then so is the retail market with so many vacancies.
22. Why did the City take good land and dump on it (as is the case with Southwest Park)?
23. Can the public use Southwest Park? If this is parkland, why is there a "No Trespassing Sign" posted?
24. Why did the focus group determine that low-income housing is not a good idea?
25. What does B-5 mean?
26. Is it possible to get a map that includes the existing buildings and the location of the wetlands before the public hearing?
27. The City/Town line goes through the substitute parkland. How will this be handled?

28. According to the Board of Realtors, 783 homes were sold last year. Of the 783 sold, how many were new homes?
29. Was a traditional neighborhood development considered for this area?
30. Was there any coordination between the City and the Town concerning Mecklenburg Heights. This development is low-income.
31. Have commercial/retail developers expressed an interest in this area?
32. Has the impact on the Commons from development in this area been considered?  
Commercial development of such large scale would adversely affect downtown and the commercial strip of Elmira Road.
33. With the type of development being considered, large parking lots will result. Has the effect on drainage been considered?
34. What are the names of the developers interested in this area?
35. For any expansion of the Cherry Street Industrial Park, consider placing industrial buildings as far away from the trail as possible and provide a significant wooded buffer between the Black Diamond Trail and any industrial buildings or parking lots.
36. Protect the woods in the southern portion of Southwest Park. Extend the flood plain forest to create a green corridor.
37. A planned-unit development is still desirable for this area. Big box retailers will create increased traffic without a significant increase in jobs. The benefits will not outweigh the risks.
38. The City should consider vertical zoning with commercial/retail on the ground floors and offices and residences on the upper floors.
39. If big box retailers are allowed to develop, the opportunity for housing will be lost.
40. Does the City have the right to reject a project after an Environmental Impact Statement is completed?
41. Eliminate commercial development west of the levee. Make the entire area a park.
42. Suggest doing a study of flora and fauna in the substitute parklands.
43. The land south of Cherry Street should be zoned residential in the area between the railroad and the water.
44. The unwooded portion of Southwest Park should be zoned residential.
45. The wooded portion of Southwest Park should remain parkland.
46. The area zoned for mobile homes should remain zoned for mobile homes.
47. Have all Common Council members walked the area being discussed?
48. Use the Seneca Street Bridge on the Black Diamond Trail.
49. Hope the City does not close out the opportunity for housing in Southwest Park. Great southern exposure, right on the water, and near the Black Diamond Trail. Mixed income should be encouraged, not just low income.
50. Will dogs be allowed on the trail or at the park?
51. Where will the winos and drug addicts go?
52. Who was on the focus group and why will there not be any low-income housing?
53. What is C-5? (which is B-5)?
54. The original report suggested preserving rows, not building roads. It also said bike lanes would be on the roads.
55. Was the new focus group the same?

No, it was completely different, except for Bruno Schickel.

56. Will there be a covenant that industries will uphold to community values, such as hiring African Americans?
57. Where is the city/town boundary? It looks like it goes through the proposed park?
58. How many homes sold are new?
59. Have we tried traditional housing?
60. Is the City going to make aware how many new units will be coming on line? Isn't this the last piece of development?
61. Will they be paying full taxes?

62. Is there interest from commercial retailers?
63. Have you considered what the impact will be on downtown?
64. What are the types of commercial development.
65. The area has a very high water table and rezoning for large-scale commercial development will require major paving. This is foolish because it will increase run-off, and the natural flood plain area cannot perform its natural function.
66. Rezoning for heavy commercial will not allow housing in the future.
67. There is no evidence that there is a lack of commercially zoned areas in the City.
68. The last time a developer wanted to develop the Wal-Mart site, the proposal would have destroyed the viewshed from Buttermilk Falls. Leaving the area commercially zoned will allow a similar development.
69. There needs to be a study for the commercial market (as well as the housing market), and how it may be soft as well.
70. I do not agree that housing in the area is bad.
71. I believe that mall-type commercial development will hurt the downtown.
72. We need a Wal-Mart and a large plant like Corning Glass Works.
73. We need a campus-style development, like a sports complex and minor league baseball team.
74. We could have a silicon valley type development, if Cornell University could work with Syracuse University, it could happen. We need good jobs.
75. The plan should enhance the greenway that runs through the area by providing adequate buffers (e.g. wooded corridors, not just rows of trees).
76. If Cherry Street is extended, we need 100' of woods between the path and the buildings on Cherry Street.
77. The levee does not provide the perfect buffer; we should still see trees behind it even if it's developed.
78. We should be doing a serious environmental review now, before the plan.
79. Why not leave the southern part of Southwest Park as woods and wetlands and develop on the filled portion?
80. Building a road to and up West Hill will have major, long-range planning implications that have not received adequate public notification and attention.
81. I do not think the public has had time to receive notice of, comprehend and publicly discuss this plan. The process seems to be fast tracked.
82. Why not include the southern portion of the 3.3 acres of SW-4 as parkland to help buffer the trail?
83. The trees and wetlands in the southern part of Southwest Park should be preserved. It would be a great natural corridor.
84. The Department of Public Works should stop dumping in the wetlands. Their fill activity is encroaching on the wetlands.
85. Why do we need to extend the proposed east-west road connector to cross the Flood Control Channel?
86. It will be extremely expensive to bridge both the Conrail tracks and the Flood Control Channel and will lead to suburban sprawl in the Town and become a Route 96 bypass.
87. Through roads should be discouraged, the road system needs only to provide access into the site from South Meadow Street/Elmira Road, not throughways to parallel South Meadow Street/Elmira Road or east-west crossings of the Flood Control Channel.
88. Convert proposed through roads to cul-de-sacs and loop roads; traffic associated with commercial development of the southwest area should be confined to the South Meadow Street/Elmira Road corridor.
89. Do not allow the proposed road network to serve the southwest area to become another Route 13.
  90. Buffer the newly acquired substitute parkland from the new commercial development in Southwest Park by planting/retaining trees on the north side of the levee.

91. Preserve the two small ponds located between the railroad tracks and the Flood Control Channel in the southern portion of the Cherry Street Industrial Park expansion area.
92. Increase the size of the park substitution purchases along Cayuga Inlet.
93. Expand the substitute parklands to include the former proposed Wal-Mart site and develop a park gateway (Buttermilk Falls – Negundo Woods) along the southern approach to the City.
94. Provide greater buffering to protect the residents of Nate's Floral Estates mobile home park from commercial development. The proposed 100-foot buffer from the southernmost mobile home is inadequate.
95. Provide a large buffer around the "old growth" tree line located along the eastern boundary of Southwest Park.
96. Substitute parkland should be buffered from Elmira Road's commercial development. Such buffer should be located in the commercial zone, not within the parklands.
97. The plan is entirely too suburban and provides far too much commercial development. Commercial development in the southwest area will weaken downtown's prospects for revitalization.
98. The proposed route of the Black Diamond Trail involves far too many costly bridges. Where is the money coming from to pay for four bridges?
99. The trail should stay on the west side of the Flood Control Channel, rather than cross over to the Cherry Street Industrial Park, to save money.

100. In large measure, the problems of urban areas are attributable to the creation of large single-use areas. The zoning of southwest for heavy commercial use will prevent the creation of a mixed-use urban village perpetuating the problems of suburbanization increasing our reliance on the automobile, etc.

101. The new urban planning principles suggest that urban centers should be created, not just single-use retail areas.
102. It is unwise to give up any chance to hold a portion of the area in southwest in reserve for future development. Part of the area should be saved for housing.
103. Suggested that mention should be made in the plan that the developer of the land next to the proposed substitute parkland should be required to provide public access to the park over their property.
104. The proposed plan is a continuation of the march of housing away from the center city. The commercial development will be a part of suburban sprawl.
105. The area should be designed for new traditional neighborhoods.
106. A mixed-use area should be created in human scale. A big box retailer could be included in such a neighborhood.
107. Was Conifer or Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services (INHS) invited to participate in the focus group?
108. There is a demand for low-income housing. Increased commercial development in the southwest will force people to move out of the cities.
109. Welfare reform exacerbates the problems of limitations in housing for low-income people.
110. The plan calls for the acquisition of rights-of-way, not the construction of roads.
111. We still have Carpenter Business Park unleased, why now expand Cherry Street?
112. The Citizens Planning Alliance (CPA) has been called a group of knee-jerk obstructionists. The record should show that CPA has been asking for a meeting for over a year and for a table at tonight's meeting. Common Council's rush to act on the adoption of the plan at the May meeting is unconscionable.
113. A great deal of time has elapsed since the 1992 start of work on the 1994 plan. Lots of development has occurred in the interim.

114. The demand for commercial real estate may not exist. More time is required to make a good decision.
115. In support of the idea of a traditional village.
116. Cherry trees should be planted along the Flood Control Channel, west of the proposed extension of Cherry Street.
117. The softness of the housing market is cyclical.
118. Has the City considered an office park for southwest?
119. The City should put the report on the Internet.
120. The City should develop the southwest with a hotel/motel, a high-tech business center and a sports complex.
121. The housing market is cyclical. It is short sighted to base plans on the market conditions at any particular time.