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## I. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) of the Southwest Area Land Use Plan, City of Ithaca, Tompkins County, NY. Figure A, Regional Location Map illustrates the context of the potential development area and Figure B, Key View Location Map identifies the project area and views studied in this report. The format for this Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) follows the guidelines established by the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) as defined in Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects, and is prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the State Environmental Quality Review Act. The purpose of this VIA is to define the visual environment of the hypothetical development area, assess the visual impacts associated with the proposed Southwest Area Land Use Plan alternatives and determine what visual mitigation opportunities will exist to enhance positive visual effects and reduce or eliminate negative visual impacts.

This report was prepared by McCord Landscape Architecture and is intended to be incorporated into the appendix of the Generic Environmental Impact Statement for the project.

This visual analysis was undertaken during the fall of 1998 through the spring of 1999.

### Methodology

The methodology used for preparation of this study was based on procedures described in Foundations for Visual Project Analysis by Smardon, Felleman, & Palmer (1986), Visual Impact Assessment Manual by Smardon, Sheppard, and Newman (1984), and Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects prepared by the Federal Highway Administration. Base data was gathered and assembled including identification of areas from which the hypothetical development could be viewed and a collection of photos in which it could potentially be visible within the foreground or midground. The existing visual environment was then inventoried and described. Within the study area of this visual analysis, the City of Ithaca, views representative of the points from which the sensitive viewers would actually see the potential development were reviewed. Ten key views were selected to serve as a sample of views that residents, motorists, business patrons, and/or pedestrians would actually see from various distances and directions in relation to the potential development area. Key views were used to simulate the appearance of the hypothetical development. The characteristics of the potential development and its site were analyzed. The visual impacts of the potential development were assessed using the prepared simulations and procedures developed by the FHA in the document identified earlier. Impacts were identified and the severity of impacts on the significant visual resources and observers was analyzed. Conclusions were drawn based on predictions of resource change and viewer response to the change. Measures to avoid, minimize or mitigate negative effects on the significant visual resources were discussed. Mitigation of potential impacts was discussed. Views and mitigation efforts were then depicted in ten simulations.

Regional Location Map

## **II. DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREA**

### **A. Existing Conditions**

The Southwest Area under study within this report includes parcels, acreage, owners, and tax account numbers identified in Table 1 and as shown on Figure A, Regional Location Map. Much of the site under study is wooded with some areas of open meadow and lawn. Much of the site under study is either former dump property or is currently used for vegetative debris dumping. A few business uses exist on small areas of the property including a driving range and a putting course/amusement area. Features that are boundaries of the area include railroad tracks and a flood relief channel to the west and south, Elmira Road and assorted commercial establishments to the south and east and a trailer park to the north. A large earthen levee protects much of the property from flooding to the west. Additional drainage channels exist on the site and are vegetated sometimes with trees and shrubs. The levee, areas of the substitute park land area and portions of the railroad tracks that have been abandoned are all potential alignment alternatives for the proposed black diamond trail. With the exception of the mobile home park, land uses surrounding the area of study are generally commercial, industrial, and municipal.

A more detailed description of vegetation, habitats, dump history and conditions, drainage, zoning and other existing conditions within the potential development area can be found in other sections of this report.

### **B. Summary of Hypothetical Land Use Alternatives**

The Southwest Area Land Use GEIS studies development alternatives that include construction of between 500,000 and 1,250,000 square feet of retail, commercial, warehouse, office, and residential uses in various combinations and sizes ranges described in the alternatives section below. The GEIS includes studies of traffic, drainage, environmental and other areas of potential impact other than visual that may be associated with such a development. A conceptual development plan has been included as Figure C which illustrates one possible alternative for development of the area - that being Alternative No. 6. It was necessary to prepare such a plan for this study in order to fully assess the impacts that may be associated with a potential development. In addition to actual buildings, parking and other on site features the plan shows in general terms access roads, drainage areas, existing and substitute wetland areas, landscape buffering and other features that would need to be included with such a development plan.

Table 1 - GEIS Property & Ownership List

GEIS Parcel Name and Letter Designation	Acreage	Owner	Tax
A. Southwest Park	55.21	City of Ithaca	119.-1-2
B. Other City Land	6.62	City of Ithaca	96.-2-5.12
C. Cherry Street Extension	10.27 total (1.65 DOT taking: 0.37 substitute parkland. developable portion 8.25)	Reuben and Milton Weiner	100.-2-1
D1. Railroad Siding	0.5	Conrail	78.-3-5
D2. Railroad Siding	1.7	Conrail	96.-2-4
D3. Railroad Siding	1.7	Conrail	100.-2-3
D4. Rail Adjacent Undeveloped Land	8.0	Conrail	96.-2-5.11
E1. Former Dump	21.55	Reuben Weiner	101.-1-1.1
E2. Former Dump	1.49	Reuben Weiner	101.-1-1.2
E3. Former Dump	36.07	Reuben and Milton Weiner	118.-1-1
F1. Levee Site ( Old Walmart site -Weiner)	4.87	Reuben and Milton Weiner	130.-1-1
F2. Levee Site	17.96 total (SW-2=3.16 flag, developable portion .999 pole, recycling center 13.8)	Tompkins County	126.-1-2.2
F3. Levee Site (old Walmart SW-3 substitute parkland)	15.59 total (SW-3=9.48, developable portion 6.11)	Widewater	127.-1-2
F4. Levee Site	0.32	Vasilios and Ruth Zikakas	131.-1-2
F5. Levee Site (Petrol Site)	4.23	Widewater	131.-1-1
F6. Levee Site	16.164 total (SW-4=3.352, developable portion 12.812)	City of Ithaca	127.-1-1

Table 2 -Hypothetical Land Use Alternatives

Alternative	Overall Size (sq. ft.)	Land Use Mix			
		Retail (sq. ft.)	Office (sq. ft.)	Light Industrial (sq. ft.)	Residential (units)
Alt. 1	1,050,000	600,000	250,000	200,000	
Alt. 2	600,000+ 600 units residential	400,000	100,000	100,000	600 units residential
Alt. 3	500,000	500,000			
Alt. 4	750,000	500,000	250,000		
Alt. 5	1,000,000	800,000	200,000		
Alt. 6	1,250,000	1,000,000	250,000		

**C. Proposed Action - Potential Developed Condition, Alternative 6**

The proposed action under this alternative includes 1,250,000 SF. of development, approximately 1,000,000 SF. retail space and 250,000 SF. of office space. Entrance roads are included in the proposal which would bring business patrons and workers from the north via a connection to the Taughannock Boulevard, from the east via three connections to Elmira Rd. (Route 13), and from the south via a link through the County Recycling Facility property over the levee to the southernmost property under study known as >F= areas 1 to 6. The concept plan incorporates preliminary guidelines for development of the entire southwest area many of which directly affect visual values of possible development.<sup>1</sup> Some of these are:

1. Landscaping and retained natural vegetation buffering between residential and proposed retail, office, and warehouse uses.
2. Size of building, construction materials, and color/texture
3. Location of buildings and parking in relation to proposed streets and R.O.W.
4. Design of parking and landscaping (i.e., trees) so as to reduce visual impact of parking areas.
5. Street tree planting and medians.
6. Proposed land uses (residential, commercial, office)

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<sup>1</sup>The City of Ithaca is in the process of developing design guidelines for the development area.

Concept Plan

### **III. DEFINITION OF THE VISIBLE ENVIRONMENT**

#### **A. Existing Project Site and Vicinity**

It is useful when working in the context of a visual assessment to segment views in terms of foreground, midground, and background.

The three distance zones possess definable characteristics for describing the degree of perception a viewer would have of the area (Source FHWA-HI-88-054):

- Foreground (0 to 2 mile)

The limit of this zone is based upon distances at which details can be perceived, all components of the proposed development would be recognizable.

- Midground (2 to 2 miles)

Details are lost and colors become muted. Individual shapes are discernable only when in high contrast or silhouetted.

- Background (2 to 4 miles +)

Areas of color contrast (certain areas of the development and seasons of the year) are the only discernible features.

Most of the views under study in this report are within the 2 mile foreground radius. A 2 mile radius around the potential development area constitutes the visual study area and includes most of the City of Ithaca. Cornell University is located in the background zone northeast of the site and just beyond the 2 mile zone. Ithaca College is located directly southeast and approximately 3/4 mile from the potential development area and is in the midground range.

The area encompassed by the midground and much of the background zones is either built urban environment or wooded, rural, hill and valley topography with substantial areas of steep sloped wooded terrain. Landform and dense wooded vegetation are recognized as the primary visual barriers for views of the area from locations within the foreground and midground zones. That is to say that from any particular point within the two zones, views may be blocked by either landform or dense vegetation.

#### **B. Viewer Groups**

There are four general viewer groups within the project area that were identified for consideration. The Viewer Groups are: bicyclists; motorists; pedestrians (business patrons, business owners, workers and hikers); and residents. These groups were identified based on an overview of land uses, travel patterns, viewer activity, and the approximate number of viewers

from each viewer group that were impacted within the project area.

#### Motorists (including commuters and passengers)

This viewer group is traveling through the visual environment, and the exposure to views is less in duration (1 to 3 minutes). Vehicle driver activities are oriented toward negotiating traffic, turns, braking, etc. Shorter duration of views and driver activities tend to reduce sensitivity of the viewer to the visual environment. Many motorists stop and park at some point as they pass by the study area and become business patrons.

#### Bicyclists

The cyclist is traveling through the visual environment, and his/her exposure to views is moderate in duration relative to pedestrians and motorists (1 to 5 minutes). While the cyclist is somewhat more sensitive to the visual environment as well as the air temperature and weather, he/she is often intent on negotiating traffic along or across a busy highway. No bicyclists were observed stopping and parking to patronize businesses; however, we assume that they occasionally will.

#### Pedestrians (business patrons, business owners, workers and hikers)

This viewer group is more sensitive to views than motorists and cyclists but, with the exception of hikers, tends to be focused on the task at hand. Hikers are more intent on enjoyment of nature and views and may be more sensitive than the average pedestrian. Pedestrians as a group may tend to be somewhat less sensitive to views and changes in the visual environment than residents. Many viewers in this group may reside nearby and can be expected to be sensitive to negative visual impacts despite not having them in their "backyard".

#### Residents

This viewer group is more sensitive to changes in the visual environment. Scenery and views are more important to residents. Views will be longer in duration and more frequently encountered, and this viewer group is more sensitive to elements in view. There are many residences with direct and indirect views of the study area.

### **IV. IDENTIFICATION OF KEY VIEWS**

Having established the geographic parameters in which a visual impact may potentially be recorded, specific key views to the proposed action were identified.

The following list represents ten key viewpoints located within the visual study area from which the potential development area may be viewed which were identified for evaluation. Figure B locates these points by numerical index.

Table 3 - Description of Key Views

<b>View No.</b>	<b>Location of View</b>	<b>Areas visible from view</b>
V1	Gorge Trail Buttermilk Falls	Levee (Areas F-1 thru 6)
V2	Top of Levee	Levee (Areas F-1 thru 5)
V3	Top of Levee	Southwest Park (Area A)
V4	Substitute Parkland	Southwest Park (Area A)
V5	Elmira Road	Old Dump Site (Area E3)
V6	Spencer Road	Old Dump Site (Area E3)
V7	Spencer Road	Old Dump Site (Area E3)
V8	Nate's Floral Estates	Old Dump Site (Area E1)
V9	West Village Apartments	Areas A, B, C, D, & E
V10	West Village Apartments	Areas A, B, C, D, & E

Locations for Key Views were chosen based on a review of topographic maps, aerial photos, on-site and area-wide inspection. Key views represent the receptor locations identified in GEIS scoping most likely to incur the highest visual impact from potential development. Numerous potential key view locations were discussed during scoping and during initial stages of this study. A review of topographic mapping and aerial photos revealed possible locations within the foreground and middleground distance ranges that would have views of the potential development. Additionally, views from the northeast including the Cornell Campus and nearby locations were observed in the field. Consultants and City staff drove to the various locations and hiked trails to other locations from which views were likely. Key views were chosen based on the scale contrast, spatial dominance, and compatibility with which the potential development was suspected to have in relation to other observable features in the view. Other nearby views may be available but would have a suspected lower impact from changes in the view brought about by the potential development.

Key view photos were taken both under the “foliated” and “leaf-down” conditions. With the exception of the Buttermilk Falls west trail, all photos and analysis consider the “leaf-down” condition which, while representing greater visibility, allows for the greater potential for visual impact of changes in views afforded during some times of the year. Since the Buttermilk Falls

Key View Location map

trail is most used during the summer, both conditions were documented. Due to the fact that the gorge trail closes on November 10 and does not reopen until the following spring, the simulation utilizes the Afoliated A condition.

## **V. ANALYSIS OF EXISTING VISUAL CONDITIONS**

### **A. Visual Character**

Visual character is the evaluation of the visible environment as a whole rather than view by view or element by element. The visual "pattern elements" which help to define visual character include the primary attributes of objects such as form, line, color and texture. In addition, several aspects of "pattern character" are also described; these are dominance, scale, diversity and continuity. It is the condition of these pattern elements and pattern character which determine the visual character of a landscape as a whole. These terms are further described as the Definition Of Key Terms found in Appendix A1.

The perceived visual character of the landscape within the study area varies significantly as a function of distance. Close-up views to the potential development area reveal a detailed interrelationship of pattern elements within the natural and structural environment. Form, line, color and texture tend to be more complex when they are within the foreground view. Individual elements may be perceived as dominant and the diversity of the landscape is more likely to be considered high while the continuity of pattern may be considered low.

When the same landscape is viewed within the context of the middle or background, the clarity of pattern elements decreases. Atmospheric bluing, combined with sheer distance, de-emphasizes the detail of individual components. Elements which are dominant within foreground views become less distinct. Colors fade to gray and textures are reduced to a more fine grain. The reduction in detail often causes individual elements to be perceived as a single more continuous form when compared with the diversity of pattern elements in a detailed foreground landscape.

#### **Southwest Area Landscape Unit**

The Southwest Area Landscape Unit offers a common array of visual character features. The undulating form of the hills defining the valley creates a sinuous sense of line which seemingly surrounds an observer. Earth tone colors and soft vegetative textures predominate as views are focused on vegetated hillsides and occasional manmade structures that dot the valley bottom and hillsides. Dense vegetation minimizes the visual effect of man-made development on the visual environment, although manmade development is often visible along the valley below and hill tops. The visual diversity of these elements is diminished as the landscape recedes into the distance. Visual attention is focused on the larger scale singular hillside developments such as Ithaca College on the South Hill and the West Hill Apartments rather than on development in the valley below. Although the chaotic development of the city is considered to be the dominant feature within this landscape unit, the valley is framed on all sides by enclosing landform and the

consistent flow of pattern elements of the hillsides marks a high level of visual continuity.

From a long range view, the horizontal pattern of the hills and valley bottom is temporarily broken by the noticeable vertical character of the individual trees and occasional manmade development. Only when a viewer is located within the immediate potential development area does the diversity of pattern elements such as form, line, color and texture become apparent. The variety of structural form, geometric angles, surface material and color of the manmade features within the Southwest Area mark a contrast to the visual character of the landscape unit as a whole. The presence of recognizable structural elements reduces the perceived scale of the visual environment to a comfortable human level.

Within the study area, the existing roadside development often becomes a dominant feature. It is not until the viewer puts the wooded hills behind him that these features, the levee and flood relief channels become important features. At this close proximity, the visual clutter of cars, commercial buildings, residences, signs and utility poles combine with the scenic landscape to create a low level of pattern element continuity. A more detailed discussion of the visual character of the study area is found in the analysis of key views.

#### Visual Absorption Capability

The visual absorption capability was determined by evaluating the degree of visual penetration and the complexity of the landscape. Factors that contribute to Visual Absorption include observer position, observer distance, view duration, landscape description, and slope. The aim of a VAC evaluation is to determine how much can be done to a landscape site before its visual absorption capability is exceeded.

### **B. Visual Quality**

The visual quality of the key viewpoints was determined by evaluating each view using three criteria: vividness, intactness, and unity. None of these is itself equivalent to visual quality; all three must be high to indicate a high quality.

Vividness is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive visual patterns. Intactness is the integrity of the natural and man-built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements. Unity is the visual coherence and harmony of composition for the landscape considered as a whole.

The visual quality of each of the key views is discussed within the following analysis.

Table 4 - Summary Table of Visual Quality Evaluations

<b>Key View Location</b>	<b>V= Vividness</b>	<b>I= Intactness</b>	<b>U= Unity</b>	<b>(V+I+U)/3</b>
V1	1.5	5.5	6	4.17
V2	3.25	5	4.5	4.25
V3	2.75	4	5.5	4.08
V4	2.75	6	6	4.92
V5	1	1	1	1
V6	1.25	1.5	1.5	1.4
V7	1.5	2	2	1.8
V8	1.75	3	2.5	2.4
V9	3.5	5	6	4.8
V10	3.5	4	5	4.2

### C. Existing Conditions Analysis of Key Views

The following pages contain a narrative and photographic description of the key views which may be impacted by the proposed action. Discussed are the components of visual character (pattern elements and pattern character), visual quality (vividness, intactness and unity), visual absorption capability, as well as the visual impacts which could be expected at each key view location under the various development alternatives.

## Key View V1 - Existing Conditions Analysis Buttermilk Falls From Falls Trail

LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Southwest Area
VIEW DESCRIPTION:	This view is of the southwest end of the GEIS study area from a trail ascending the west side of the falls within the Buttermilk Falls State Park.
Pattern Elements:	<p>Form - The background landform defines the principle form within view. The individual forms visible within the project area including the fuel tanks and open field are of lower importance due to distance.</p> <p>Line - A strong horizontal line is created by the West Hill line. The gently sinuous and irregular line flow of layers of vegetation reinforces this horizontal character.</p> <p>Texture - Fine. Distance reduces visual textures. Contrast with vegetation framing the view serves to reduces the perceived texture further.</p> <p>Color - Earth tone colors of the existing vegetation predominates. More vivid colors of buildings and foreground vegetation accents the earth tones.</p>
Pattern Character:	No single element is dominant within this view. The existing open field within the potential project area creates an area of visual interest . The uniform flow of pattern elements as the view recedes into the distance provides a strong sense of continuity to the visible landscape. Recognizable vegetative forms such as larger trees create a balanced sense of scale and perceived depth within the view.
VISUAL QUALITY:	<p><b>Medium/high increasing to high during spring and autumn.</b> Vividness - Low/Medium      Intactness - High      Unity - High.</p> <p>The lack of water or a stand-out or singularly interesting physical forms especially landform prevents this view from having a high degree of vividness. It is anticipated that spring and autumn colors of vegetation will increase vividness of this view. The absence of significant manmade encroachments (excepting the fuel tanks) produces a high degree of intactness and the highly repetitive vegetative forms sets unity at a high level as well.</p>
VISUAL ABSORPTION CAPABILITY:	<b>Low</b> - The high observer position, simplicity of the landscape, nearness to the valley bottom/potential development area as well as very steep slopes directly in front of the viewer lower VAC significantly for this view. Views are enclosed and so “directed” toward the potential development area. It is anticipated that at times, view duration may be long (30 + seconds) while much of the time, hikers will stop for only a brief view.
VISUAL IMPACT POTENTIAL:	<b>High</b> - From this distance, a disturbance of large proportions (i.e. a large scale commercial development) may be of sufficient mass to overshadow the highly repetitious form and line of the visible landscape. The removal of existing mature vegetation and the open field and the substitution of large areas of gray pavement and roof will reduce the intactness and unity of the view.
MITIGATION RECOMMENDATION:	<p>X      Preservation of existing mature trees and vegetation where possible, and provision of site landscaping will have an impact on perceived continuity of the project area with the existing landscape setting.</p> <p>X      Building color and texture will have little affect on the visible landscape from this distance.</p> <p>X      Buildings need to be sensitive to color and roof mechanicals/color need roof treatment.</p>

An existing condition photo and a photo simulation of the proposed potential development as it would be viewed from this key view location are shown on pages 17 & 37.



## Key View V3 - Existing Conditions Analysis Top of Levee Looking Southwest

LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Southwest Area	
VIEW DESCRIPTION:	This view is looking southwest from the top of the levee toward the undeveloped land designated as area AF=.	
Pattern Elements:	Form -	The background steeply hilly landform, the open field and sky define the principle forms within view. The individual forms visible within the project area including trees, the roadway, commercial and residential buildings reinforce the horizontal separation of the forms and are of lower importance due to distance.
	Line -	A strong curvilinear line of the levee creates a dramatic effect against the arcing lines of the south hill ridge. The gently sinuous and irregular line flow of layers of vegetation reinforces this horizontal character.
	Texture -	Fine. Distance reduces visual textures of trees along the roadside and the hillside and fine textured grass and gravel continue this theme to the foreground.
	Color -	Earth tone colors of the existing vegetation predominates. More vivid colors of buildings and foreground vegetation accents the earth tones.
Pattern Character.	The steeply sloped hills through which Buttermilk Falls flows are dominant within this view. The open field juxtaposed to the hills and the sky creates an area of high visual interest. The curvilinear line of the levee receding into the distance combined with strong horizontal forms provides a strong sense of continuity to the visible landscape. Mid-ground trees framing the view create a balanced sense of scale and perceived depth.	
VISUAL QUALITY:	<b>Medium.</b>	Vividness - Medium    Intactness - Medium    Unity - High.
	The landform and uniform masses of vegetative cover bring medium overall vividness of this view. It is anticipated that spring and autumn colors of vegetation will increase vividness of this view. The confined nature of manmade encroachments to a mid-distance horizontal band produces a medium degree of intactness and the striking juxtaposition of field and hill forms set against the sky brings a high level of unity to the view.	
VISUAL ABSORPTION CAPABILITY:	<b>Low</b> - The nearness to the developable land and long duration of views (30+ seconds) reduce VAC significantly. Views are focal because of the linear nature of the levee and so “directed” toward the potential development area.	
VISUAL IMPACT POTENTIAL:	<b>High</b> - From this distance, a disturbance of large proportions (i.e. a large scale commercial development) to the foreground undeveloped land would significantly alter the form and line of the visible landscape within this view. The introduction of large building mass and large areas of pavement will reduced the intactness and especially the overall unity of the view.	
MITIGATION RECOMMENDATION:	X	Preservation of existing mature vegetation where possible, and provision of screen plantings and general site landscaping will have a large impact on perceived continuity of the project area with the existing landscape setting.
	X	Building color and texture and architecture may have a strong affect visual quality from this distance.

An existing condition photo and a photo simulation of the proposed potential development as it would be viewed from this key view location are shown on pages 19 & 38.



## Key View V2 - Existing Conditions Analysis Top of Levee Looking North

LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Southwest Area	
VIEW DESCRIPTION:	This view is looking north from the top of the levee toward the substitute park land to the left and the existing Southwest Park and developable land in the background.	
Pattern Elements:	Form -	The levee, flood control channel, and gentle hill in the background are the primary forms that define the view. The individual forms visible within the view such as the apartment buildings are of lower importance due to distance.
	Line -	A strong curvilinear line of the levee along with the strong horizontal lines of the distant levee and tree line and the vertical element of trees to the left create a strong assemblage of lines.
	Texture -	Medium/Fine. Distance reduces visual textures of trees along the roadside and the hillside and fine textured grass and gravel continue this theme to the foreground. Trees and shrubby vegetation framing the view augment this affect.
	Color -	Earth tone colors of the existing vegetation predominates. More vivid colors of the blue water and white apartment buildings serve to accent the earth tones.
Pattern Character.	The strong linear/curvilinear line of the levee and channel receding into the distance and blending with strong horizontal forms provides a strong sense of continuity to the visible landscape. The strong vertical tree line brings a sense of scale and perceived depth to the view.	
VISUAL QUALITY:	<b>High.</b> Vividness - Medium    Intactness - High    Unity - High.	
	The levee landform and masses of vegetation and especially the presence of water bring a relatively high degree of vividness to this view. It is anticipated that spring and autumn colors of vegetation will increase vividness. The confined nature of manmade encroachments to a background element produces a high degree of intactness and the striking juxtaposition of fields, water, and trees against the sky brings a high level of unity to the view.	
VISUAL ABSORPTION CAPABILITY:	<b>Low</b> - The nearness to the developable land and long duration of views (30+ seconds) reduce VAC significantly. Views are focal because of the linear nature of the trail and so “directed” toward the project area.	
VISUAL IMPACT POTENTIAL:	<b>High</b> - From this distance, a disturbance of large proportions (i.e. a large scale commercial development) to the mid-ground undeveloped land would significantly alter the form and line of the visible landscape within this view. The substitution of existing mature vegetation and the open field with large areas of gray pavement and large building mass will reduce the intactness and unity of the view.	
MITIGATION RECOMMENDATION:	X	Preservation of existing mature trees and vegetation, where possible, along the levee, and provision of site landscaping will have a large impact on perceived continuity and unity of the existing landscape setting.
	X	Building color and texture and architecture may have a strong affect on the visible landscape from this distance.

An existing condition photo and a photo simulation of the proposed potential development as it would be viewed from this key view location are shown on pages 21 & 39.



## Key View V4 - Existing Conditions Analysis Substitute Park Land Looking East

LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Southwest Area		
VIEW DESCRIPTION:	This view is looking east from the substitute parkland toward the existing Southwest Park and developable land.		
Pattern Elements:	Form -	The levee, flood control channel & the existing tree line are the primary forms that define the view. There are no significant individual forms visible in this view.	
	Line -	The horizontal lines of the levee, flood control channel, the existing tree line create a strong uniform assembly of line.	
	Texture -	Fine/glassy. A layered affect of fine textured grass, stone embankment, and tree line create an interesting and unique textural assemblage especially in reflection from the smooth glassy surface of the channel.	
	Color -	Earth tone colors of the existing vegetation predominates. Vivid blue water and white bark of trees beyond serve to accent the earth tones of the grass slopes..	
Pattern Character.	The strong linear and horizontal forms of the levee, channel, and tree line provides a strong sense of continuity and unity to the visible landscape. The lack of vertical forms reduces any sense of scale and perceived depth in the view.		
VISUAL QUALITY:	<b>Medium.</b>	Vividness - Low/Medium	Intactness - High      Unity - High.
	The levee landform and organic massing of trees beyond and especially the presence of water bring a relatively high degree of vividness to this view and would be higher but for the lack of a more singularly interesting form. It is anticipated that spring and autumn colors of vegetation will increase vividness of this view. The lack of manmade encroachments to the view brings a high degree of intactness and the striking juxtaposition of grass, stone, water, and trees against the sky brings a high level of unity to the view.		
VISUAL ABSORPTION CAPABILITY:	<b>Intermediate</b> - The nearness to the developable land, simplicity of the landscape, and long duration of views (30+ seconds) lower VAC significantly. Views are panoramic from this location.		
VISUAL IMPACT POTENTIAL:	<b>Medium</b> - From this distance, a disturbance of large proportions (i.e. a large scale commercial development)to the mid-ground undeveloped land would significantly alter the form and line of the visible landscape within this view. The substitution of existing mature trees with large areas of gray pavement and large building mass will reduce the intactness and unity of the view.		
MITIGATION RECOMMENDATION:	X	Preservation of existing mature trees and vegetation, where possible, along the levee, and provision of site landscaping will have a large impact on perceived continuity and unity of the existing landscape setting.	
	X	Building color and texture and architecture may have a strong affect on the visible landscape from this distance.	

An existing condition photo and a photo simulation of the proposed potential development as it would be viewed from this key view location are shown on pages 23 & 40.



## Key View V5 - Existing Conditions Analysis Elmira Road Looking Northwest

LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Southwest Area		
VIEW DESCRIPTION:	This view is taken from the parking lot of Friendly's restaurant looking northwest across Elmira Road		
Pattern Elements:	Form -	Many diverse forms are found within view. Existing structures, cars, trees, pavement and miscellaneous site details are perceived to be individual elements.	
	Line -	In the foreground, the horizontal pattern of curbing and pavement is strong. The variety of visible elements creates a complex pattern of insignificant individual line patterns.	
	Texture -	The complexity of visible elements may be perceived as a coarse texture.	
	Color -	Earth tone colors of the existing vegetation lawn, and pavement predominate. More vivid colors of structures accent the earth tones.	
Pattern Character:	Little continuity of view is found. The complex character of existing pattern elements is perceived as being quite diverse. The lack of foreground and background elements reduces any sense of balanced scale and perceived depth within the view.		
VISUAL QUALITY:	<b>Low.</b>	Vividness - Low	Intactness - Low      Unity - low.
VISUAL ABSORPTION CAPABILITY:	<b>Intermediate</b> - The complexity of the landscape versus and nearness to the developable land moderate a VAC rating. View duration is expected to be short - depending on the specific activity (3 - 10 seconds).		
VISUAL IMPACT POTENTIAL:	<b>Low/moderate</b> - A disturbance of large proportions (i.e. a large scale commercial development) will dominate this view. The removal of existing mature vegetation and the substitution of large areas of gray pavement and roof will further reduce visual quality.		
MITIGATION RECOMMENDATION:	X	Preservation of existing mature vegetation, where possible, and provision of site landscaping will have a large impact on visual quality.	
	X	Building color and texture, and architecture will have a large impact on the visible landscape from this distance.	

An existing condition photo and a photo simulation of the proposed potential development as it would be viewed from this key view location are shown on pages 25 & 41.



## Key View V6 - Existing Conditions Analysis Spencer Road Looking Northwest

LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Southwest Area		
VIEW DESCRIPTION:	This view is taken from Spencer Road looking northwest toward Friendly's restaurant across Elmira Road and toward the developable land.		
Pattern Elements:	Form -	Many diverse forms are found within view. Existing structures, cars, trees, pavement and miscellaneous site details are perceived to be individual elements.	
	Line -	In the foreground, no clear overall pattern is identified. In the background, the hill creates a minor horizontal line. The variety of visible elements creates a complex pattern of insignificant individual line patterns.	
	Texture -	The complexity of visible elements may be perceived as a coarse texture.	
	Color -	Earth tone colors of the existing vegetation and lawn predominate. More vivid colors of structures accent the earth tones.	
Pattern Character:	Little continuity of view is found. The complex character of existing pattern elements is perceived as being quite diverse. The recognizable vegetative and built elements within the view create a balanced sense of scale.		
VISUAL QUALITY:	<b>Low.</b>	Vividness - Low	Intactness - Low      Unity - Low.
VISUAL ABSORPTION CAPABILITY:	<b>High</b> - The complexity of the landscape versus and proximity to the developable land raise a VAC rating. Due to the nature of the viewer as resident, view duration will be considered long (30 + seconds) and they are constant year round.		
VISUAL IMPACT POTENTIAL:	<b>Low/moderate</b> - A disturbance of large proportions (i.e. a large scale commercial development) will be only one of an assortment of developments within this view. The removal of existing mature vegetation and the substitution of large areas of gray pavement and roof will further reduce visual quality.		
MITIGATION RECOMMENDATION:	X	Preservation of existing mature trees and vegetation, where possible, and provision of site landscaping will have a large impact on visual quality.	
	X	Building color and texture, and architecture will have a large impact on the visible landscape from this distance.	

An existing condition photo and a photo simulation of the proposed potential development as it would be viewed from this key view location are shown on pages 27 & 42.



## Key View V7 - Existing Conditions Analysis Spencer Road Looking North

LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Southwest Area		
VIEW DESCRIPTION:	This view is taken from Spencer Road looking north across Elmira Road toward the developable land and substitute parkland.		
Pattern Elements:	Form -	Many diverse forms are found within view. Existing structures, cars, trees, pavement and miscellaneous site details are perceived to be individual elements.	
	Line -	In the foreground, no clear overall pattern is identified. In the background, the hill creates a minor horizontal line. The variety of visible elements creates a complex pattern of insignificant individual line patterns.	
	Texture -	The complexity of visible elements may be perceived as a coarse texture.	
	Color -	Earth tone colors of the existing vegetation lawn, and pavement predominate. More vivid colors of structures accent the earth tones.	
Pattern Character:	Little continuity of view is found. The complex character of existing pattern elements is perceived as being quite diverse. The recognizable vegetative and built elements within the view create a balanced sense of scale.		
VISUAL QUALITY:	<b>Low.</b>	Vividness - Low	Intactness - Low      Unity - Low.
VISUAL ABSORPTION CAPABILITY:	<b>High</b> - The complexity of the landscape versus and proximity to the developable land raise a VAC rating. Due to the nature of the viewer as resident, view duration will be considered long (30 + seconds) and they are constant year round.		
VISUAL IMPACT POTENTIAL:	<b>Low/moderate</b> - A disturbance of large proportions (i.e. a large scale commercial development) will be only one of an assortment of developments within this view. The removal of existing mature vegetation and the substitution of large areas of gray pavement and roof will further reduce visual quality.		
MITIGATION RECOMMENDATION:	X	Preservation of existing mature trees and vegetation, where possible, and provision of site landscaping will have a large impact on visual quality.	
	X	Building color and texture, and architecture will have a large impact on the visible landscape from this distance.	

An existing condition photo and a photo simulation of the proposed potential development as it would be viewed from this key view location are shown on pages 29 & 43.



## Key View V8 - Existing Conditions Analysis Nate's Floral Estates Looking Southwest

LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Southwest Area
VIEW DESCRIPTION:	This view is looking southwest from the middle access road toward the developable land in the foreground.
Pattern Elements:	<p>Form - Although diverse forms are found in the foreground such as existing pavement, light poles and residence, the strong horizontal forms of the tree line and hill beyond as well as the meadow provide the primary forms that define the view. The diverse forms visible within the view are perceived as individual elements.</p> <p>Line - From this location, the horizontal forms of trees, hills, and meadow creates a strong line pattern. A strong perspective linear form is created by the pavement and grass banding in the foreground.</p> <p>Texture - Fine. The simple line and form arrangement in this view increases the awareness of fine textures.</p> <p>Color - Earth tone colors of the existing vegetation predominates. More vivid colors of the pavement and reflected sky, green grass and residence serve to accent the earth tones.</p>
Pattern Character.	The horizontal line of the tree line and hill beyond as well as the meadow are conflicting with the form and line of the foreground reducing the sense of continuity to the visible landscape. The lack of vertical elements reduces any sense of scale and perceived depth to the view.
VISUAL QUALITY:	<p><b>Low.</b> Vividness - Low      Intactness - Medium      Unity - Medium.</p> <p>The absence of memorable forms lowers vividness of this view. The absence of significant manmade encroachments in the mid-ground or background produces a medium degree of intactness. The degree of encroachment presented by the foreground buildings significantly lowers. The highly repetitive and uniform vegetative forms sets unity at a high level. It is anticipated that spring and autumn colors of vegetation will increase vividness of this view.</p>
VISUAL ABSORPTION CAPABILITY:	<b>Low</b> - The nearness to the developable land, simplicity of the landscape, and long duration of views (30+ seconds) reduce VAC significantly. View residences are enclosed and perhaps focal because of their unchanging nature in relation to the project area.
VISUAL IMPACT POTENTIAL:	<b>High</b> - From this distance, a disturbance of large proportions (i.e. a large scale commercial development) to the fore/mid-ground undeveloped land would significantly alter the form and line of the visible landscape within this view. The substitution of existing mature vegetation and the open field with large areas of gray pavement and large building mass will reduce the intactness and unity of the view.
MITIGATION RECOMMENDATION:	<p>X      Preservation of existing mature trees and vegetation, where possible, along the property, and provision of site landscaping will have a large impact on perceived continuity and unity of the existing landscape setting.</p> <p>X      Building color and texture and architecture may have a strong affect on the visible landscape from this distance.</p> <p>X      A buffer area 100' in width should be considered to screen existing residences from the potential development area.</p>

An existing condition photo and a photo simulation of the proposed potential development as it would be viewed from this key view location are shown on pages 31 & 44.



## Key View V9 - Existing Conditions Analysis West Village Apartments Looking East

LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Southwest Area
VIEW DESCRIPTION:	This view is of the GEIS study area from West Village Apartments.
Pattern Elements:	<p>Form - The rectilinear building shapes, and background hill and valley land forms define the principle forms within view. Existing cars, sidewalks, trees, pavement and miscellaneous site details are perceived to be individual elements.</p> <p>Line - In the foreground, no clear overall line pattern is identified. In the background, the valley bottom and hills beyond create a strong horizontal line pattern. The gently sinuous and irregular line flow of layers of vegetation reinforces this horizontal character.</p> <p>Texture - The complexity of visible elements may be perceived as a coarse texture. There is a strong juxtaposition of coarse foreground texture and fine background textures.</p> <p>Color - Earth tone colors of the existing vegetation is in striking contrast to the bright black and white of the foreground buildings. Colors of foreground building appurtenances, grass and vegetation accents the earth tones.</p>
Pattern Character.	The bright and high contrast angled shapes of the foreground buildings reduce the potential dominance of Ithaca College campus on the far hill. The campus serves as an area of visual interest amidst an otherwise featureless forested valley bottom and hillside. The lack of mid-ground elements reduce the sense of balanced scale and perceived depth within the view.
VISUAL QUALITY:	<p><b>Medium/high increasing to high during spring and autumn.</b> Vividness - Medium    Intactness - High    Unity - High.</p> <p>The interesting physical forms relationship of the foreground buildings and buildings on the distant hill increase the overall vividness of this view. The absence of significant manmade encroachments on the valley floor and hillside produces a high degree of intactness. The degree of encroachment presented by the foreground buildings is greatly reduced by their nature of hugging the hillside allowing wider panoramic views beyond. The highly repetitive vegetative forms and the strong relationship of the buildings to the landform sets unity at a high level as well. It is anticipated that spring and autumn colors of vegetation will dramatically increase vividness of this view.</p>
VISUAL ABSORPTION CAPABILITY:	<b>Low</b> - The high observer position, simplicity of the landscape, and nearness, to the valley bottom/project area below as well as moderately steep slopes directly in front of the viewer lower VAC significantly. Views are panoramic but in the general direction of the project area. Due to the nature of the viewer as resident, view duration will be considered long (30 + seconds) and they are constant year round.
VISUAL IMPACT POTENTIAL:	<b>High</b> - From this distance, a disturbance of large proportions (i.e. a large scale commercial development) may be of sufficient mass to overshadow and/or disrupt the highly repetitious form and line of the visible landscape. The removal of existing mature vegetation and the substitution of large areas of gray pavement and roof will reduce the intactness and unity of the view.
MITIGATION RECOMMENDATION:	<p>X    Preservation of existing mature vegetation, where possible, and provision of site landscaping will have a large impact on perceived continuity of the project area with the existing landscape setting.</p> <p>X    Building color and texture will have little effect on the visible landscape from this distance.</p>

An existing condition photo and a photo simulation of the proposed potential development as it would be viewed from this key view location are shown on pages 33 & 45.



## Key View V10 – Existing Conditions Analysis West Village Apartments Looking Northeast

LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Southwest Area
VIEW DESCRIPTION:	This view is of the northeast end of the GEIS study area from West Village Apartments.
Pattern Elements:	<p>Form - The rectilinear building shapes, grassy slope, and background hill and valley land forms define the principle forms within view. Many diverse forms are found within the foreground view. Existing buildings, cars, sidewalks, trees, pavement and miscellaneous site details are perceived to be individual elements.</p> <p>Line - In the foreground, no clear overall line pattern is identified. In the background, the valley bottom and hills beyond create a strong horizontal line pattern. The gently sinuous and irregular line flow of layers of vegetation reinforces this horizontal character. In the middle-ground, a complex pattern of insignificant individual line patterns, such as buildings, cars and pavement edges.</p> <p>Texture - The complexity of visible elements may be perceived as a coarse texture. There is a strong juxtaposition of coarse foreground and mid-ground textures and fine background textures.</p> <p>Color - Earth tone colors of the existing vegetation is in striking contrast to the bright black and white of the foreground and mid-ground buildings. Colors of foreground building appurtenances, grass and vegetation accents the earth tones.</p>
Pattern Character.	The bright and high contrast angled shapes of the foreground and mid-ground buildings reduce the potential dominance of Ithaca College campus on the far hill. The campus serves as an area of visual interest amidst an otherwise featureless forested hillside. The recognizable vegetative and built elements create a balanced sense of scale and perceived depth within the view.
VISUAL QUALITY:	<p><b>Medium/high increasing to high during spring and autumn.</b> Vividness - Medium Intactness - High Unity - Medium.</p> <p>The interesting physical forms relationship of the foreground buildings and buildings on the distant hill increase the overall vividness of this view. The presence of manmade encroachments on the valley floor reduces the degree of intactness. The degree of encroachment presented by the foreground buildings is greatly reduced by their nature of hugging the hillside allowing wider panoramic views beyond. The highly repetitive vegetative forms and the strong relationship of the foreground buildings to the landform is offset in terms of unity by the degree of encroachment of the trailer park and commercial buildings in the mid-ground. It is anticipated that spring and autumn colors of vegetation will dramatically increase vividness of this view.</p>
VISUAL ABSORPTION CAPABILITY:	<b>Low</b> - The high observer position, and nearness, to the valley bottom/project area below as well as moderately steep slopes directly in front of the viewer reduce VAC significantly. Views are panoramic but in the general direction of the project area. Due to the nature of the viewer as resident, view duration will be considered long (30 + seconds) and they are constant year round.
VISUAL IMPACT POTENTIAL:	<b>Medium/High</b> - From this distance, a disturbance of large proportions (i.e. a large scale commercial development) may be of sufficient mass to overshadow and/or disrupt the highly repetitious form and line of the visible landscape. Such a disturbance may also be perceived as one of a handful of such disturbances within view. The removal of existing mature vegetation and the substitution of large areas of gray pavement and roof will reduce the intactness and unity of the view.
MITIGATION RECOMMENDATION:	<p>X Preservation of existing mature vegetation, where possible, and site landscaping will have a large impact on perceived continuity of the project area with the existing landscape setting.</p> <p>X Building color and texture will have little affect on the visible landscape from this distance.</p>

An existing condition photo and a photo simulation of the proposed potential development as it would be viewed from this key view location are shown on pages 35 & 46.

## **VI. SIMULATION OF PROJECT APPEARANCE**

Several key views have been selected as representative locations for which a photographic simulation of the proposed action was prepared. As it was impractical to simulate all development alternatives considered in this report within each view, Alternative 6 is illustrated through the various photographs as representative of a maximum practical development scenario anticipated. In general, it is anticipated that this alternative would be perceived to be the visual Aworst case from the individual view point. Alternative 6, although greater impact could be expected from this development, was determined to be unfeasible for reasons of traffic volumes generated.























## VII. ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IMPACTS

### A. VIA Basic Procedure Worksheet

The visual characteristics of pattern elements and pattern character of the hypothetical land use scenario have been quantitatively assessed for evaluative purposes using the standard methodology of the Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) Basic Procedure (Visual Impact Assessment Manual, ESF 89-009, by Smardon, R.C., S.R.J. Sheppard, and Sara Newman [1984]). VIA Basic Procedure Worksheets were completed for the Alternative 5 and 6 development scenarios from each of the ten Key View locations. Completed VIA Basic Procedure Worksheets are found in Appendix B. A summary is shown on Table 5.

The VIA Basic Procedure measures the overall visual change of a potential development alternative when it is compared against the existing visible landscape. The photographic simulations of potential development appearance were used to compare existing and proposed conditions. **Hypothetical mitigative measures including landscape screening, buffering, and mounds based on the design guidelines were included in determining the anticipated visual change.** Total Visual Impact Severity (visual change) is based on the quantitative rating of the defined visual elements [*synonymous with "visual character"*] of landscape compatibility (color, form, line and texture [*"pattern elements"*]), scale contrast, and spatial dominance [*"pattern character"*].

A basic shortcoming of the VIA Basic Procedure is that it does not differentiate between adverse and beneficial visual impacts created by the proposed action; it only determines that an impact exists. For this reason the Basic Procedure ratings have been used only as a tool to evaluate the potential effects of individual visual elements on the visible landscape. Little emphasis has been given to the Total Visual Impact Severity rating in determining the project alternative of least visual impact.

The following is an analysis of both adverse and beneficial visual impacts created by the proposed development. This analysis is presented in qualitative, yet objective terms primarily based on the assessment of the individual and cumulative affects of the visual change identified through the VIA Basic Procedure.

Additionally, viewer activity needs is a considerable factor in the overall equation of impact of a project on visual quality. For example, although a view may indicate substantial impact based solely on the Basic Procedures Worksheet, if the activity of the vast majority of viewers is as a motorist, this substantially reduces the overall impact of the view. Conversely, residents may be few in number but since their view duration is much longer and they have a much higher stake in view quality, a relatively moderate BPW impact rating may be magnified accordingly.

## Viewer Distance and Elevation

Analysis of the VIA Basic Procedure Worksheet results indicates that the overall level of visual impact is at least partially a function of viewer distance from the project site. The ratings of individual visual elements for potential development alternatives are lower when viewed from Key Views located the furthest from the potential development site (Key View #1, 9, and 10) than they would be from a closer range. However, a higher elevation at each of these view points brings more of the potential development into view even at that greater distance. This tends to

Table 5 - Summary of Basic Procedure Worksheets

<b>Key View Location</b>	<b>Development Alternative</b>	<b>Landscape Compatibility</b>	<b>Scale Contrast</b>	<b>Spatial Dominance</b>	<b>Total Visual Impact Severity</b>
V1	5	7	9	9	25
	6	7	9	9	25
V2	5	1	1	1	3
	6	3	5	5	15
V3	5	6	7	6	19
	6	6	7	6	19
V4	5	0	0	0	0
	6	3	9	7	25
V5	5	2	5	6	13
	6	2	5	6	13
V6	5	3	3	4	10
	6	3	3	4	10
V7	5	2	3	3	8
	6	2	3	3	8
V8	5	5	8	7	20
	6	5	8	7	20
V9	5	5	7	7	19
	6	5	7	8	20
V10	5	5	7	7	19
	6	5	7	8	20

Severe, 36-27

Moderate, 26-18

Minimal, 17-9

None, 8-0

cancel the reduced visual impact that could be expected based solely on the greater distance of these viewpoints from the development area.

The factor of distance attenuates the visible detail of the elements of color, form, line and texture. The detail of these components tends to be more pronounced when observed within the composition of the foreground landscape. For example, components such as parking, lighting, signage and other site details are perceived as individual foreground elements which combine to create well defined patterns of color, form, line and texture. Clearly identifiable contrast in foreground pattern elements is viewed as being somewhat incompatible with the existing landscape. Conversely, when such site detailing is viewed from a distance it is more likely to be perceived as being part of the overall middle or background landscape form, and thus more compatible with existing visible color, form, line and texture.

The effects of Scale Contrast and Spatial Dominance are also influenced by distance. From the more distant viewpoints (Key Views #1, 9, and 10), the spatial dominance of the proposed development is generally subordinate to the background hillsides. However, the scale of the development (i.e. large buildings and parking lots) and its visibility due to elevation is such that without mitigative measures, such as the parking lot landscaping, landscape screening and buffering, and building color requirements, the potential development could have a greater impact on views. The potential development may be in sharp contrast with the existing landscape. As the observer moves closer to the project area the sense of project scale heightens and the proposed development is perceived to dominate the view but becomes co-dominant or even subordinate when compared with other foreground elements such as other commercial buildings, residences and vehicles.

It is important to distinguish between these distance zones when discussing the impacts of potential development.

## **B. Qualitative Impact Analysis**

### **1. Summary of Existing Conditions**

#### **a) Immediate Potential Development Area**

The visual character of existing man-made and natural pattern elements (form, line, color and texture) exhibit a high level of diversity when compared with the continuity of view found within the landscape region as a whole. Non-unified man-made elements such as the commercial buildings, parking lots, power poles, and signs create a visually random pattern character which is often visually complex. Views of these miscellaneous site features tend to detract from the scenic value of surrounding wooded hillsides. The visual quality of the existing site from views V5, V6, and V7 is considered to be moderately low. The addition of potential development to each of these views does not bring a higher degree of diversity to the view with respect to pattern elements and so visual quality is not measurably reduced.

Within the immediate project area several positive views are found. Areas of moderately high visual quality exist in selected locations where a viewer is not directly fronting a diversity of un-unified pattern elements. Views of the flood relief channel, wooded areas, and fields can be quite pleasant when experienced from the levee and from Nate's Floral Estates residences. Views from these locations (views V2, V3, V4, and V8) are often enhanced by the visibility of wooded hillsides in the background which brings some unity and consistency to the views as a whole.

#### b) Regional Study Area

Longer distance views to the project area are marked by more consistency of pattern and character elements. The wooded hillsides take on an undulating but horizontal linear character when viewed from both the Buttermilk Falls Trail location and from the West Hill Apartments locations. This linear form is broken only by the spatial separation and intermittent mass of buildings within the project area. Longer distance views (views V1, V9, and V10) are, in each instance, also from higher elevations and, as such, the introduction of relatively large scaled and dominant features would, without mitigative measures, have a larger perceived impact on landscape pattern and character.

## 2. Analysis of Alternatives

This analysis is a qualitative assessment of the visual change which has been identified using the VIA Basic Procedure. Visual change is discussed in terms of the cumulative effect of the visual elements (color, form, line, texture, scale, and dominance) to determine the scenic value of the various alternatives to the proposed action on the existing landscape. The scenic value of the project is discussed in the qualitative terms of "adverse" and "beneficial" visual impacts.

#### a) Immediate Project Area - Adverse Impacts

Removal of Existing Vegetation The hypothetical development scenarios require the removal of large masses of existing mature vegetation within the site. Vegetative loss will result in a reduction of non-reflective earth tone colors and fine textures which currently serve to soften views to the built environment. Loss of existing vegetation will leave the developed condition without these components of visual character which help to maintain a sense of continuity and intactness with the surrounding landscape. The visual character of the site will be adversely impacted by this condition in all views except V5, V6, and V7. Impacts are greatest with Alternative 6. With less vegetation removal comes equally less but about equal impacts with alternatives 1, 2, and 5, and considerably less with Alternative 3 and 4.

Addition of Visible Buildings and Parking. The introduction of buildings and parking lots within the hypothetical development will introduce a dominant form(s) and add visual diversity of color and texture. The smooth and uniform color and texture of a mass of building and parking will contrast with the coarse textures of the existing foreground and background landscape. It is expected that these features will detract from the visual importance of the surrounding hillsides. Simulations depict vegetative screening which have been factored into the impact of this element.

Within view from Spencer and Elmira Roads ( Key Views V5, V6, & V7) the proposed buildings and parking is consistent with the existing land use, the pattern elements of the proposed features are compatible with the surrounding landscape.

Under Alternatives 1 through 5, views from Key View locations V2, V4, and V8 will be largely screened by the existing vegetation to remain and by added landscape screening and buffering. Without less available space for screening as is anticipated under Alternative 6, the large massive forms of the buildings and pavement may be more visible due to the reliance on a more narrow planted screen. The buildings themselves are by their very nature less compatible in color or texture to the existing landscape. The Alternative 6 potential development may adversely impact visual character by this condition more at Key view locations 2, 4, 8, 9, & 10.

Increase in Site Scale. Under the potential development action, the existing site features which serve to define a comfortable human scale (vegetation) will be removed. The construction of buildings, drainage channels, parking areas and roads will imply a scale more comfortable for vehicular use than pedestrian level activities. In order to bring potential development features back to a more pedestrian level of scale, the City of Ithaca is developing design guidelines for building mass, height, color, and fenestration as well as for the inclusion of walkways, landscaping, mounding, and pedestrian-level site details.

The visual character of the potential development area will generally be adversely impacted by the increase in site features scale equally under Alternatives 1, 2, and 5. However, under Alternatives 3 & 4, the effect will be less because fewer of these features will be added to the site allowing more vegetation to remain to retain human scale. Conversely, Alternative 6 may allow for only limited screening of this effect and so would bring more of an impact to viewers.

### Beneficial Impacts

The removal of dense growth and trees around existing open-water drainage ways will make this desirable element more visible.

The removal of the construction and vegetation debris storage area will be a beneficial impact.

The visual character of the potential development area will be beneficially impacted by this condition equally under all development alternatives.

## b) Regional Study Area

### Adverse Impacts

Removal of Existing Vegetation. Removal of existing mature vegetation, under all alternatives, will eliminate the existing natural colors and texture as well as the linear horizontal pattern of the potential development area that brings unity to the valley region. From distant viewpoints the undulating and horizontal line definition of the existing wooded areas will appear to have been reduced in the ground plane.

The visual character of the regional landscape will be adversely impacted by this condition equally under all alternatives with the possible slight reduction of this impact with Alternatives 3 and 4.

From views V9 and V10, proposed buildings and parking will increase the perceived scale and dominance of areas occupied by commercial, warehouse, and industrial developments. From Key View V1, proposed buildings and parking introduce a new element of significant scale and dominance to the view and, as such, present a substantial adverse impact.

### Beneficial Impacts

No beneficial impact identified.

## 3. Conclusions

From review of impact analysis it can be concluded that there is substantial qualitative difference between Alternative 1 through 5, and 6. All alternatives will be adversely impacted by the removal of existing vegetation, addition of visible parking, buildings and traffic. The significant horizontality, scale, and dominance of the potential development scenarios cannot be avoided under any alternative. A reduced potential for screening under Alternative 6 presents increased impacts for Key Views V2, V4, and V8. This conclusion may be confirmed by review of the alternatives within the VIA Basic Procedure worksheets for these views.

Subtle distinctions do exist between Alternatives 3 and 4 and all remaining alternatives. Alternatives 3 and 4 will presumably disturb less land area and vegetation - offering even greater opportunities for visual mitigation by retention of greater masses of vegetation in appropriate locations. Also, these two Alternatives would offer less of a scale and spatial dominance intrusion when viewed from Key View locations V9 and V10.

Alternative 5 is consistently rated more compatible with the existing landscape when viewed from a common Key View location. With the exception of Key Views V1 and V3, in which no reduced development plan is anticipated, all views indicate a lower VIA Basic Procedures Worksheet total visual impact with Alternative 5.

## **VIII. MITIGATION OF ADVERSE VISUAL IMPACTS**

### **A. Site Design Considerations**

It can be argued that the potential development will be visible under any alternative. However, it should not be immediately concluded that what is seen will necessarily be perceived as a visual negative. To a certain extent a unified design of the potential development may be perceived as an improvement to the visual complexity of the existing landscape. Site scale design sensitivity could be incorporated into the project to ensure that what is seen utilizes the basic design principles of simplicity, order and unity.

To achieve this goal, careful consideration should be given to the pattern elements of form, line, color and texture. Inasmuch as possible, these elements should be consistent with the natural pattern of the site and surrounding environment. In a sense, this can be considered the incorporation of art into the visible environment.

Form The form of any proposed parking lots and road alignments should respond to the natural, sinuous curves (both horizontal and vertical), and should mimic the wooded hillsides. The buildings should be as low as possible to minimize disruption of the horizontal character of the site.

Line Parking should be designed such that treed/landscaped islands run perpendicular to the line of site from surrounding hillsides to maximize the appearance of unity with the surrounding horizontal wooded hill line. Vertical line elements other than vegetation should be avoided.

Color Color should be used to blend the proposed structures into the background. Exposed metals within the structures should be painted in a dark tan or gray color to blend with surrounding hillsides. Concrete elements should match the existing natural tones of the surrounding landscape. Site details such as signs, light standards and guard rails should also be a dark color to blend with the background when viewed from a distance. Such non-reflective colors will be perceived a visually neutral in the foreground. Colors that contrast sharply with existing natural color palette such as red, orange, and yellow should be avoided.

Texture From a distance, unnecessary site detail will be perceived as a course texture on a

relatively smooth landscape. Visible details such as signage, light standards, power poles, and visible mechanical components on rooftops should be minimized. Necessary site details should be simplistic in form and unified.

A uniform site design vocabulary should be developed which will reinforce a controlled sense of unity and order. A commonality of form, line, color and texture should be found within all project elements.

Human scale features should be incorporated into designs that reduce the perceived overall scale of the potential development and make spaces more comfortable for pedestrians and bicyclists. The addition of pedestrian scale furniture, light poles, shrub plantings and the like will go far to help accomplish these ends. Berms and screen plantings that break up large open expanses can also be useful.

## **B. Landscape Treatment**

Site landscaping should be used to the degree possible to buffer and screen the potential development to reduce adverse impacts. Plantings must be used to eliminate or at least reduce the perceived mass of the proposed structures, parking lots and roads and restore pedestrian areas to a comfortable human scale. New plantings should be included with each particular development that will soften the mass of these elements and begin to recreate the natural character of the existing site. Fast growing deciduous trees should be planted along roadways, in parking lots and in buffer areas to help reestablish the strong natural character which will be lost upon removal of existing mature trees.

Plantings should be used to break up the scale of proposed parking areas. Well placed planting islands will help segregate the overall parking areas into smaller sub-sections. Carefully sited trees and shrubs may be used to screen views to the parking areas from both off-site and on-site views. Consideration to site security issues must be given during planting design. Well placed revegetation will do much to restore lost greenspace and reduce the perception of visual complexity.

It is recommended that site design be considerate, to the degree practical, to avoid disturbance to existing mature vegetation. Retention of existing vegetation is the mitigation item which will have the greatest effect on the visual quality of the project.

## APPENDIX A1: Definition of Key Term

<u>Aesthetics:</u>	The science of philosophy concerned with the quality of sensory experience; in this assessment, limited to visual experience.
<u>Key View:</u>	A view of or from a project that is representative of the views that people will actually have after the project is completed; also, an important or critical view of a project
<u>Landscape Components:</u>	The basic physical elements that make up the landscape, including landform and land cover (water, vegetation and manmade development)
<u>Landscape Unit:</u>	An area of distinct, but not homogeneous, visual character which is spatially enclosed at ground level; a visually identifiable place or "outdoor room"; useful for visual assessment and management, particularly of visual quality.
<u>Landscape Type:</u>	A visually homogeneous area formed by a combination of relatively uniform landform and land cover, such as a residential hillside or forested valley bottom; useful for visual assessment and management, particularly of visual compatibility.
<u>Regional Landscape:</u>	A large area defined by similar patterns of landform and land cover, also, the characteristic visual resources of such an area; examples include the Blue Ridge and the Atlantic Coastal Plain; regional landscape classification is useful as a framework for visual assessment
<u>Viewer Response:</u>	Measures of viewer response to change in visual resources include viewer exposure, viewer sensitivity, cultural significance and local values.
<u>Viewers:</u>	The people who are likely to see a project; a basic distinction among viewer groups is between highway users, who will have views from the road, and highway neighbors, who will have views of the road; other groups can also be distinguished by the probable nature of their visual response to highway facilities.
<u>Viewer Sensitivity:</u>	The viewer's variable receptivity to the elements within the environment that he is viewing, affected by viewer activity and awareness; a person cannot readily notice every object and all the attributes of the objects that compose the total visual environment

Visual Absorption Capability The physical capacity of a landscape to screen proposed development and still maintain its inherent visual character. Two critical factors determining VAC include: 1) the degree of visual penetration- the distance into the landscape that you can see from a vantage point - is affected by both vegetation and topography. The higher the visual penetration, the lower the ability of the landscape to visually absorb development and still maintain its existing visual character. 2) The higher the visual complexity within a landscape, the greater the visual absorption.

Visual Character: The visual character of a landscape is formed by the other of the patterns composing it; the visual elements of the patterns are the form, line, color and texture of the landscape's components; their inter-relationships can be described in terms of dominance, scale, diversity, and continuity.

Pattern Elements: Form - visual mass bulk or shape.

Line - introduced by the edges of objects or parts of objects, horizons and silhouettes.

Color - the reflected hue (red, yellow, blue) and value (light and dark) and reflective brightness.

Texture - apparent visual surface coarseness.

*The term "Visual Elements" used by the VIA Basic Procedure is synonymous with the term "Pattern Elements".*

Pattern Character: Dominance - position extent or contrast of basic pattern elements. *The term "Spatial Dominance" used by the VIA Basic Procedure is synonymous.*

Scale - apparent size relationship between a landscape component and its surroundings. *The term "Scale Contrast" used by the VIA Basic Procedure is synonymous.*

Diversity - a function of the number, variety and intermixing of visual pattern elements.

Continuity - the uninterrupted flow of pattern elements in a landscape and the maintenance of visual relationships between immediately connected or related landscape components.

<u>Visual Compatibility:</u>	The degree to which development with specific visual characteristics is similar in character to its setting
<u>Visual Impact:</u>	The degree of change in visual resources and viewer response to those resources caused by a development project.
<u>Visual Quality:</u>	<p>An evaluative appraisal of the relative excellence of a view or a sequence of views; individual judgements of quality are affected by the values and activity of the viewer; nevertheless, broad consensus can usually be established on the relative quality of different landscapes within the same region; trained observers can predict the consensus by using explicit evaluative criteria based on public testing.</p> <p>Vividness - the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive visual patterns.</p> <p>Intactness - the integrity of the natural and manmade landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements.</p> <p>Unity - the visual coherence and harmony of composition for the landscape considered as a whole.</p>
<u>Visual Resources:</u>	The appearance of the features that make up the visual landscape.

**APPENDIX A2: VIA Basic Procedure Worksheets**

**APPENDIX A3: Visual Quality Evaluation of Existing Conditions**

Visual Quality Evaluation Legend

Land Use

- U = Urban
- P=Parks, Recreational, & Open space
- S = Suburban
- T=Transportation
- I = Industrial
- A= Agricultural
- C= Commercial
- F= Forested
- B=Institutional
- M= Municipal
- R=Residential

Observer Position

- S= Superior
- N= Normal
- I= Inferior

Site Distance

- F = Foreground = to 2 miles (0.80 km)
- M = Midground = 2 to 2 miles (0.80 to 3.2 km)
- B = Background = beyond 2 miles (3.2 km)

Evaluation Scale: 1-7 (1=Very Low, 4=Medium, 7=Very High)

<u>VIVIDNESS</u>	<u>MANMADE DEVELOPMENT</u>	<u>UNDESIRABLE EYESORES</u>	<u>ENCROACHMENTS UNITY / INTACTNESS</u>
Very high	None	None	Very high
High	Little	Few	High
Moderately high	Some	Some	Moderately high
Average	Average	Average	Average
Moderately low	Moderately high	Several	Moderately low
Low	High	Many	Low
Very low	Very high	Very many	Very many

**VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**  
**SOUTHWEST AREA LAND USE STUDY**

CITY OF ITHACA  
THOMPkins COUNTY, NEW YORK

**ITHACA DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING**  
**GENERIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**MAY, 1999**

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