WEST HILL
MASTER PLAN

FINAL REPORT

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WEST HILL MASTER PLAN

Final Report

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Introduction

The City of Ithaca's West Hill has long been seen as its last frontier. Isolated from the rest of the City due to the vagaries of topography, waterways and road access, it has developed more slowly and in a less intensive fashion than the rest of the City. During 1988, however, West Hill became the focus of renewed interest for real estate development. West Hill contains much of the remaining undeveloped land in the City of Ithaca, and the region's growth suddenly made this area attractive for new residential development. In less than one year, seven new large residential projects were proposed for West Hill, an unprecedented level of development compared to the two prior decades.

The response to this potential for rapid and dramatic change on West Hill was to reevaluate whether the City's existing development regulations and land use plans provided an adequate basis for the control of new development. It was apparent to all who looked into this issue that many conditions and needs have changed in the City of Ithaca since the development of the City's last master plan in 1971. Even more significant is the pace of change that is occurring in suburban areas surrounding the City. Development in the Town of Ithaca and the towns further to the west has created new and more difficult problems for the City, many of which have never been formally addressed in any plan or written agreement.

West Hill residents, who would be most affected by these changes, took the lead in examining how these projects would impact their neighborhood. The West Hill Civic Association's Master Planning Committee met during the summer of 1988 to discuss a series of new neighborhood objectives for the development of West Hill. At the same time, the Board of Planning and Development began to consider how the new subdivision proposals that were before them would relate to each other and to the existing network of roads, utilities and parks on West Hill.

These discussions quickly led to a recognition that the City of Ithaca should immediately begin an effort to update the existing master plan for West Hill. The Department of Planning and Development outlined a series of issues to be addressed in this plan and formulated a process that would enable all of the constituencies with a stake
in the plan to have a part in its development. Public meetings with West Hill residents and City officials were held to discuss this proposal, and in October 1988, the Common Council authorized the development of a new West Hill Master Plan. The City hired the firm of Trowbridge and Associates to provide technical analysis and guidance in the development of the plan, and with the cooperation of the West Hill Civic Association, the planning began.

The Planning Process

Planning in the public arena requires a careful balancing among a variety of competing interests. In the case of West Hill, the constituencies who were concerned about the development of a new master plan included the current residents of West Hill, developers proposing new residential projects, the Board of Planning and Development, the Board of Public Works, the Common Council and officials from the Town of Ithaca. Each of these groups formulated its own objectives for the development of West Hill, based in large part on the special concerns and interests of each group. In cases where these interests overlapped, the objectives of different groups were often in conflict with each other. A primary goal of the West Hill Master Plan planning process was to provide a forum where representatives of each of these constituencies could discuss differing objectives and resolve differences to each party's mutual satisfaction.

The development of the West Hill Master Plan was initially driven by the following factors:

* The need to complete the plan quickly in order to be able to effectively respond to the subdivision applications under consideration by the Board of Planning and Development.

* The need to develop a plan which addressed all of the development issues confronting West Hill and which contained sufficient detail to guide future decisions about individual projects.

* The need to coordinate planning efforts with the Town of Ithaca so that a high level of planning may be applied to projects that are located outside of the City yet profoundly affect our quality of life.
In order to develop a plan which responded to these needs, the Department of Planning and Development proposed that a "working group" be established and charged with the responsibility of undertaking the detailed formulation of the plan. This group consisted of staff from the City's Planning and Public Works Departments, members of the Board of Planning and Development, the Board of Public Works and Common Council, residents of West Hill and staff from the Town of Ithaca's Planning Department. The working group met frequently with Trowbridge and Associates to evaluate their work and to make decisions about the directions the plan should take.

It was clearly understood that the plan developed by the working group would also have to be approved by the various boards and organizations represented as well as the community at large. Presentations and reports were made to these groups to gather their comments on the plan at key points in its development. Ultimately, the plan developed by the working group was refined and brought before each of the constituent groups for approval and adoption.

The working group functioned on a consensus-building basis. In cases where conflict existed over alternative planning strategies, the members of the group articulated their respective positions and sought to reach compromises with each other. In all cases, this approach proved to be successful in resolving conflicts.

Purpose of the Master Plan

The West Hill Master Plan serves as a general guide to the development of West Hill. It was developed with the understanding that the process of land development is one in which private property owners play a key role in determining where, when and how development will occur. A master plan cannot accurately anticipate either the timing or location of development; instead it provides a framework within which project-specific decisions can be made. It is expected that minor deviations from the plan will be necessary and desirable in order to respond to individual development proposals and that major amendments to the plan might be needed at some future date in order to accommodate larger unforeseen events.

Even though a master plan can be officially adopted by the Common Council, the plan does not carry with it the legal authority needed to make its contents become the binding
guide to land development. The plan can only be implemented through other actions that are within the legal authority of various components of City government. These include the Planning Board's approval of subdivisions under the subdivision control law, amendments to the zoning ordinance by the Common Council, the development of public infrastructure by the Board of Public Works, and the adoption of an official highway map by the Common Council. Each of these actions, undertaken under authority granted to cities by the State of New York, will serve to implement the provisions of this plan.

Throughout this document, necessary actions that will needed to implement the plan will be noted. The approval of these actions are important elements in the success of this plan, for without the commitment to adopt the implementing measures, the plan's effectiveness will quickly become diluted and it will lose its value as a guide to decision-making.
West Hill Planning Issues

An important component in the development of the West Hill Master Plan was the compilation of information which documented the existing conditions on West Hill and showed the trends and features that produced those conditions. This analysis helped to define the issues which needed to be addressed in the West Hill Master Plan. The following is a summary of the conclusions reached by the working group regarding the most significant West Hill planning issues.

Natural Features

The physical characteristics of West Hill have been and will continue to be a major factor in the development of the area. Near the base of West Hill, along Floral Avenue and Cliff Street, extremely steep slopes present a formidable barrier to access and development. The average grade of the land in these areas exceeds twenty percent, making construction impossible in the absence of major cut and fill operations. The average grade of the land gradually diminishes as the land slopes away from the Inlet Valley, but much of the area within the City of Ithaca still has grades of between ten and twenty percent. These steep slopes pose difficulties in the construction of roads, which should not have grades which exceed ten percent, making it difficult for emergency vehicles such as fire equipment to move about the area, and raising the cost of building construction. These steep slopes also help to define the visual character of West Hill, creating often spectacular views of the rest of the City.

The City of Ithaca's portion of West Hill comprises a relatively small part of a much larger watershed that extends into the Town of Ithaca. All of the water collected in this watershed flows through the City of Ithaca to the Flood Control Channel. The flow of water has created several small gorges in the West Hill neighborhood which serve to move water as well as provide a scenic and natural habitat resource.

New development both within and outside the City of Ithaca has the potential to
dramatically alter the amount and intensity of water that flows through the West Hill neighborhood. The development of buildings, roads and other impermeable surfaces destroys the natural ability of the land to moderate storm water runoff, thus increasing the potential for erosion and flooding. The quality of water can also be significantly degraded by urbanization.

Open Space and Recreation Areas

The availability of large amounts of open space within the West Hill neighborhood has been a significant factor in defining the character of this area. Most of this open space is privately owned and not developed or developed at a very low density. Public access to some of this land has been permitted by property owners on an informal basis; in other cases this open space is clearly seen as being part of someone's yard and public access is discouraged. Even in cases where access by the public is not permitted, the presence of privately held open space adds to the feeling of spaciousness that prevails in this area.

Three major issues for West Hill residents are how the visual character of West Hill will change as additional development occurs, how development will affect the availability of open space for public use and how the loss of open space will affect wildlife populations.

The West Hill neighborhood is currently served by a variety of public recreation spaces, each of which serve very different functions. According to the City of Ithaca's park standards, Cass Park is classified as a "community park" and is intended to serve city-wide and regional recreational needs. It has a playground, ball fields, tennis courts, skating rink, swimming pool, picnic and passive recreational areas. The Treman Marine State Park and the Hangar Theater augment the City's facilities at Cass Park.

A "neighborhood park," according to the City's classification, should be centrally located and should serve a population of no more than 3,000 people. It may have a variety of active and passive recreation features, and should be easily accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists. MacDaniel's Park meets the criteria for a neighborhood park. It serves approximately 1,200 people within the southern West Hill neighborhood, and it provides space for both active and passive activities. The grounds of the Alternative Community School also serve as a neighborhood park, providing some of the active recreation opportunities that are absent from MacDaniel's Park. The
remaining public open space available to City residents is the open land that lies along the west side of the Flood Control Channel. This land is landscaped and has a park-like atmosphere.

The major issues related to parks on West Hill are access to the existing parks by pedestrians and bicyclists, the need for additional park land in several parts of the West Hill neighborhood, the elimination of the possible extension of Warren Place across the top of MacDaniel's Park, and the preservation of natural areas.

Cass Park, although proximate to the homes of many West Hill residents, is physically isolated due to the barriers imposed by the steep slopes at the base of West Hill. Pedestrian access to Cass Park from West Hill is difficult, forcing the users of the park to walk through the Octopus to reach it. This limited access particularly affects children, who cannot make full use of the park without assistance from their parents. The lack of adequate pedestrian and bicycle access encourages people to drive, rather than walk, to Cass Park. Improved pedestrian connections between the West Hill neighborhood and Cass Park would make the park more usable to West Hill residents.

Within the developed portion of West Hill, there are very few sidewalks along the existing streets. Walking on the edge of streets has proved adequate to date for most West Hill residents, but as the area continues to develop and more traffic is present on the streets, pedestrian safety will become an issue of growing importance. The development of sidewalks along both new and existing streets as well as pedestrian paths that provide access to parks or open space are significant needs for West Hill.

The northern end of West Hill is almost fully developed yet, unlike the southern end, it does not have any neighborhood parks. The central portion of the West Hill neighborhood, which is now undeveloped, should also include a new park or land that is set aside as natural open space. The reservation of land for new neighborhood parks to serve these two areas is a priority for West Hill planning.
Environmental Protection

The drainage patterns dictated by the topography of West Hill mean that storm water runoff from a large drainage area passes through the City as it flows toward the Flood Control Channel. The natural state of the streams that carry this water have evolved in a way that provides protection against flooding, erosion and sedimentation. The natural vegetation along the edges of these streams augments the protection that streams provide by slowing the flow of storm water runoff, promoting groundwater infiltration and reducing erosion. These areas also provide an important habitat for various species of wildlife which live near the streams.

An important issue for West Hill planning is the protection of the natural conditions of streams and their adjacent areas. As development occurs, the natural state of streams is often changed and their protective functions are degraded. Vegetation along the edges is removed, streams are channelized or piped and the volume of water that is added to the stream is increased beyond the stream's capacity to handle it. In order to maintain the natural drainage controls that streams provide, protective measures must be put in place both within the City of Ithaca and upstream, in the Town of Ithaca. These measures should preserve the stream corridors and limit the speed and volume of additional runoff that streams are required to carry. Wooded areas near streams should also be evaluated for preservation in order to provide additional protection to the streams, wildlife habitat and passive recreational opportunities.

Another significant planning issue for West Hill is the protection of street trees and significant stands of trees on private property. Trees are an important element in defining the environment of West Hill, and measures should be taken to ensure that large scale destruction of valuable trees does not occur.
Public Infrastructure

The components of the public infrastructure system include roads, sidewalks, street lighting, the water supply system, storm drainage and the sanitary sewer system. Each of these components serves an independent function, but one component may be closely related to another in terms of design and efficiency. The layout of the road system, for example, also dictates the layout of the water supply and sanitary sewer systems since these systems are usually built within the road right-of-way. Each of these systems also requires a different set of design criteria that must be taken into account when designing the system. The water supply system, for example, is a pressurized system that can provide water to a building that is uphill of the water main. In contrast, the sanitary sewer system is primarily a gravity-operated system, which means that new development should be located in places that permit sewage to flow downhill.

Much of the public infrastructure that currently exists on West Hill was developed in accordance with a 1954 Master Plan prepared by the Department of Public Works. Most of the infrastructure improvements that have been built since 1954 have been constructed in accordance with this plan, but in many cases the systems delineated by the plan remain incomplete because land development simply has not yet occurred in parts of West Hill. For example, roads that are shown on the plan as connecting with other roads remain dead-ends, placing limitations to travel in parts of West Hill. The water supply system also does not function efficiently because it is incomplete with respect to important system connections.

A major issue for West Hill development is the completion of the public infrastructure system in a manner that provides for efficient and economical operation. The development of each of these system components is heavily influenced by the steep slopes that are prevalent throughout much of West Hill. These slopes pose design and safety issues that must be addressed in the planning of the public infrastructure system. The cost of building and maintaining the public infrastructure system is also directly related to the design and timing of land development.

A second major planning issue affecting the development of the public infrastructure system is the fact that the City of Ithaca shares portions of its public infrastructure with the Town of Ithaca. The City and Town share the regional sewage treatment plant, and waste from the Town of Ithaca flows through the City's trunk lines to reach this facility. While most of the Town of Ithaca is supplied with water from the Bolton Point
system, the West Hill portion of the Town of Ithaca uses the City's water supply system to serve its residents. The City's roads are heavily used by residents of outlying communities to reach destinations within and beyond the City of Ithaca. Cliff Street, Elm Street, Floral Avenue and Hector Street currently function as thoroughfares between points within the City and outside the City. Future development outside the City is expected to result in continued increases in traffic volumes on these streets, with potentially deleterious effects on the residences that now line them. The City and Town must coordinate their planning efforts to ensure that new development that is planned for West Hill will not overburden the existing or planned infrastructure systems.

The following general planning objectives were developed for each component of the public infrastructure system:

**Roads**

* The traffic circulation system should efficiently serve all of the potential new development within the West Hill neighborhood but should not encourage traffic from outside residential areas to pass through these neighborhoods.

* The City's existing road design standards should be maintained. The maximum grades of new roads should not exceed ten percent, cul-de-sacs should not exceed five hundred feet in length, and and block faces should not be larger than 1200 feet.

* The road system should be laid out so that multiple points of access to the neighborhood are developed. Access to the interior of the West Hill neighborhood by emergency vehicles particularly should be improved.

**Water Supply**

* The existing system, which contains two independent parts, should be connected in order to promote better water quality and water pressure.
* New development in the Town of Ithaca that utilizes water from the City system should be limited if the supply of water becomes overburdened.

**Sanitary Sewers**

* The sanitary system should continue to be gravity-fed to the maximum extent feasible.

* Sanitary sewers should be placed within the right-of-way of a public street, unless not practical.

**Sidewalks**

* Additional sidewalks should be developed within the West Hill neighborhood to provide pedestrian connections between major destinations such as parks, schools and bus stops.

**Street Lighting**

* Street lights should be provided at street intersections, park entrances and other locations where safety is a concern.

**Storm Water Drainage**

* Storm water drainage should utilize the natural drainage systems to the greatest extent feasible. These natural systems should be preserved and protected against degradation from nearby development.
Parking

* Adequate on street parking, or suitable alternatives to on street parking, need to be provided for sections of Cliff Street and Hector Street.

Emergency Vehicle Access

The steep grades at the base of West Hill have limited the number and location of the roads that provide access into the interior of the neighborhood. Some of these roads, such as Sunrise Road, have grades as high as seventeen percent. These roads are barely adequate for cars, which can maneuver up and down them, but they are grossly inadequate for large emergency vehicles such as fire trucks.

Large fire trucks also have long wheelbases and can only maneuver within a large turning radius. There are a number of intersections in the West Hill neighborhood that have steep grades, sharp curves or a combination of both conditions, and which limit access to large fire trucks. Because of these conditions, emergency vehicles must use more distant entrances to the neighborhood, increasing response time and lessening safety.

The incomplete development of the West Hill street system has left several dead-end streets with lengths that exceed the five hundred foot limit established by the City's subdivision regulations. Long dead-end street segments also pose a potential safety problem due to the possibility of these streets being blocked and the inability of fire equipment to turn around at their ends.

The provision of good access for emergency vehicles is an important planning consideration for West Hill. New roads that are developed on West Hill should be built in accordance with both the City's existing design standards as well as standards that are needed to accommodate the requirements of modern fire fighting equipment. In addition, new points of access into the neighborhood must be developed in order to promote the safety of West Hill residents.
Neighborhood Character

West Hill is characterized by a variety of different development styles and densities. The differences between these areas depend on the era in which they were developed, the zoning regulations, the layout of lots and positioning of buildings on these lots and the types of improvements such as street trees or sidewalks that were built along with the housing.

Six distinct development patterns have been identified for West Hill. These patterns are shown and described below.

A. Multiple-family residential development. These areas are characterized by large, self-contained sites with an internal traffic circulation system, preserved open space, and high density residential development. West Village is an example. These areas were developed within the last twenty years.

B. Urbanized edge character areas are typical of Cliff and Hector Streets and Floral Avenue. Development is characterized by small building lots, older single family and duplex dwellings built close to the front property lines with the gable end toward the street and a streetscape that includes sidewalks, tree lawns and street trees.

C. Older residential areas with single-family dwellings built close to the street, lots 75 to 100 feet in width, large side
yards and a streetscape that includes sidewalks, tree lawns and street trees. Hook Place is an example of this type of development.

D. Recent single-family residential development on quarter to half acre lots. Lots are generally 100 feet wide with low buildings positioned so that the long side of the building faces the street at the rear of a large front yard. Landscaping is limited to the private lot, with no street trees or sidewalks. Warren Place is characterized by this type of development.

E. Recent residential development characterized by one or two story single-family homes on quarter to half acre lots. The long side of the buildings faces the street, the roads are wide, and there are no sidewalks or street trees present. This suburban type of atmosphere is found on streets such as Taylor Place and Oakwood Lane.

F. Rural development character is found along Elm Street. Older farmhouse type buildings are set well back from the street on self-contained sites. There is usually a great deal of private open space separating these buildings from adjacent
development, outbuildings are
often present and there is a great
deal of variety in building types.
These buildings represent the earliest
form of development on West Hill.

As revealed by the preceding analysis, there are many factors that define the
class of a neighborhood. These include the size of the lot, the width of the lot's street
frontage, the architecture and positioning of the buildings on the lot, the width of the
street, the presence or absence of street amenities such as sidewalks or street trees, and
the landscape of the area. There is already a great deal of variation in the way these
elements interact on West Hill, creating variety and interest in separate parts of the
neighborhood.

West Hill is an area in which the majority of the homes either are or have the
appearance of being single family homes. The maintenance of this neighborhood
class is an important issue for West Hill development. However, given the many
design configurations that may be utilized to create a neighborhood, no single
prescription for the development of a neighborhood character should prevail. New
development should respond to the changing needs of households in the City of Ithaca,
which include the size, location and price of dwelling units; the need to protect the
environment; the creation of park and recreation areas and the feeling of safety and
security.

A major issue related to maintenance of neighborhood character are the potential
adverse impacts of traffic on existing residences along Cliff Street, Elm Street and
Hector Street. Each of these streets now carries large amounts of through traffic, and
unless measures are taken each can be expected to experience higher traffic volumes in
the future as development outside the City increases. The narrowness of the roadway and
proximity of homes to the edge of the roadway on portions of these streets creates
problems such as traffic noise, dust and other adverse impacts associated with heavy
traffic. The long term ability of these areas of West Hill to continue as viable residential
neighborhoods may be in jeopardy unless the City acts to address their specific needs.
Land Use and Zoning

Land use on West Hill is almost entirely limited to residential development. The few commercial or industrial land uses that currently exist are for the most part non-conforming uses which existed prior to the enactment of the zoning regulations and are permitted to remain or uses that have received variances. (They include Glenside Monument Company at the southern end of Floral Avenue and Kolar Machine Shop on Cliff Street. In addition to these are the U.S. Army Reserve Center off Sunrise Road and Hector Street and Orthopedic Associates at 821 Cliff Street.)

While the majority of West Hill is zoned for low density residential development, some areas are zoned for medium and high density residential development. In the City of Ithaca's zoning scheme, there are zoning districts with the designations R-1, R-2 and R-3, with R-1a the lowest density and R-3b the highest. The locations of these zoning districts on West Hill appear to have been placed in accordance with the conventional wisdom of traditional zoning, which provides that lower intensity uses should be separated from higher intensity uses, and that there should be a buffer of a medium intensity use district between the most and least intense uses. The zoning on West Hill follows this format by placing the lowest intensity residential zone at the center of West Hill, and then progressively moving toward a higher, more urban development density on the southern and eastern sides of West Hill. Thus, the areas along Cliff Street and Floral Avenue, the edges of West Hill, are zoned R-3a, while the center is zoned R-1a.

There are currently approximately 140 acres of land zoned R-3a in the West Hill Master Plan study area. Between one-half and two-thirds of this land is presently undeveloped. Some of this undeveloped R-3a zoned land is located in relatively flat areas. A major concern of West Hill residents is the type of development which may occur in the future on this land. Intensive development of the areas now zoned R-3a could result in dramatic changes to the character of these areas. Since neighborhood preservation is an important West Hill planning objective, the future development of these R-3a areas should be moderated so that the potential differences in development density are not as great as is presently allowed, yet the opportunity for more dense attached or detached housing is still available. The availability of sites where newer or more creative forms of housing can be built will help to promote the City of Ithaca's goals of increasing housing availability and housing affordability.
The West Hill Master Plan

The West Hill Master Plan seeks to respond to the issues enumerated above by providing a guide for future decision-making by City of Ithaca officials. The elements of this plan include the suggested locations of physical features such as streets, utilities and parks, the creation of logical circulation systems such as pedestrian walkways and emergency vehicle access and recommendations for policy or regulatory changes in zoning and environmental protection. Taken together, all of these items provide a basis for the development of West Hill that will preserve and enhance the goals articulated by West Hill residents and City of Ithaca officials. The following is an itemization of the recommendations made for the West Hill Master Plan.

Open Space and Recreation Areas

As West Hill continues to develop, the provision of additional parks in new subdivisions will enhance the recreational opportunities available in the neighborhood and provide open space that is accessible to the public. The City of Ithaca's subdivision regulations currently provide that up to ten percent of the gross area of a subdivision may be reserved for park or recreation areas. A fee may also be collected in lieu of the reservation of the land. The consensus within the West Hill neighborhood with regard to the development of new parks has clearly been to reserve as much land as possible for future park development. The West Hill Master Plan recommends the development of new parks in the following areas:
Central West Hill

The central part of the West Hill neighborhood contains the largest tracts of undeveloped land and will be subjected to the greatest development pressure. It is recommended that a large, four to five acre park be developed to serve the new residents who will move into the area. This park should be sited so as to preserve the existing stand of spruce trees near the extension of South Taylor Place. In this location, several proposed subdivisions can contribute to the reservation of property for the park. This park should be developed by the City of Ithaca as an area that includes mostly passive recreational opportunities, the exception being active playground areas for children.

Southern West Hill

The southern portion of the neighborhood, near West Village, should also be provided with an additional public park to serve the needs of its residents. A small park is recommended to be developed on the west side of Chestnut Street to provide active recreational opportunities for the children who reside in and around West Village.

Northern West Hill

The northern portion of the West Hill neighborhood also requires additional park space, but there is very little vacant land left in this area to provide such a park. However, the Town of Ithaca is currently acquiring land along Williams Brook to develop a new park. Since this park would be located just west of the boundary between the City of Ithaca and Town of Ithaca, it is recommended that City residents living on the north side of West Hill utilize this park as their neighborhood park.

In addition to the development of new parks, the protection of existing parks is an important planning issue. Land that was previously reserved as a right-of-way for the extension of Warren Place adjacent to MacDaniel's Park is recommended to be changed to parkland, thereby protecting the ambiance of MacDaniel's Park against the negative effects of nearby traffic. The plan does recommend that an underground water and sewer
ease LSTM be maintained within the former Warren Place right-of-way in order to provide for logical connections to these systems.

Equally as important as the availability of parks on West Hill is the development of a network of pedestrian connections that will permit access to and from these parks. The recommended system of pedestrian access includes the development of new sidewalks along both new and existing streets and the development of pedestrian paths which will provide overland connections between various park areas.

Sidewalks are proposed to be constructed along the major residential streets on West Hill. These sidewalks are needed to provide safe access between residential blocks and the destinations of importance such as parks, schools or bus stops. On new streets that are built as part of a subdivision, sidewalks should be a required improvement by the developer. On existing streets, the property owners who benefit from the sidewalks would be assessed for the cost of the improvement in accordance with existing City regulations, or a special benefit assessment district could be developed to spread the costs among all of the property owners within the district.

Important pedestrian connections that do not run along streets are recommended for several areas. These include:

**Cass Park Connection**

A network of pedestrian paths and sidewalks that provide access to Cass Park without passing through the Octopus is recommended. This pedestrian connection would utilize the old Hector Street right-of-way, Vinegar Hill Road, Cliff Street and a new pathway from Cliff Street down the remainder of the hill to Cass Park. Two possible locations for this connection between Cliff Street and Cass Park are proposed: a trail beginning north of the Orthopedic Associates building and following Linderman Creek gorge or a pathway beginning in the vicinity of 705 Cliff Street and going down the hill.

**MacDaniel's Park Connection**

The residents of West Village do not use MacDaniel's Park to the extent that they could because they do not have easy access to the park. They must walk around the large block bounded by Elm Street, Chestnut Street, Hook Place and Haller Boulevard to reach the entrance to the park, which
is off Hook Place. A pedestrian path from Elm Street directly into MacDaniel's Park would enormously improve access to the park from the south.

Floral Avenue Connection

The Flood Control Channel which runs along Floral Avenue provides beautiful open space along the water, yet access to this area from most of the West Hill neighborhood is impeded due to the steep topography around the base of West Hill. A pedestrian path from Chestnut Street to Floral Avenue near West Village would improve access to the area around the Flood Control Channel.

Environmental Protection

The West Hill Master Plan makes recommendations for the protection of the key environmental elements that define West Hill. These recommendations include the development of new regulations to preserve streams, trees and woodlands and to decrease erosion and sedimentation.

Streams and Drainage

West Hill's existing drainage ways provide important conduits for storm water runoff from the entire watershed to the Flood Control Channel and Cayuga Lake. The protection of these streams and drainage swales will provide relief from flooding, maintain water quality and eliminate the need for costly engineering solutions to drainage problems. An important component of the West Hill Master Plan is to provide for the legal means to protect the integrity of these streams.

The West Hill Master Plan includes recommendations for two different types of actions to protect the quality of streams and the capacity for storm water runoff. The first level of protection is for streams and the areas immediately adjacent to them. Regulations should be established to prevent the alteration of the physical characteristics of the stream, thus assuring that the stream can continue to function as a natural drainage way, a source for groundwater recharge, a buffer against flooding and a
source for good quality drinking water. This protection should also extend to a buffer area on both sides of the stream so that vegetation and wildlife habitat will be preserved. The size of the buffer area should be based on site specific stream characteristics, including soil type, topography, existing vegetation and the intensity of nearby development. Prohibited activities would include dredging, filling, grading, stream channelization or the removal of trees and groundcover.

The second level of protection is concerned with limiting erosion and sedimentation that results from development activity near a stream. The regulation of land development will help to maintain water quality in streams and will limit flooding. It is recommended that a series of performance standards be adopted to help accomplish this goal. These performance standards include the following:

1. The smallest practical area of land shall be exposed at any one time during development.

2. When land is exposed during development, the exposure shall be kept to the shortest practicable period of time.

3. Important natural features such as trees, groves and drainage swales shall be preserved and shall conform substantially to the natural condition of the land.

4. Temporary vegetation or mulching shall be used to protect critical areas exposed during development.

5. Natural vegetation shall be retained and protected.

6. No top soil shall be removed except from areas intended for structures or to be covered by site improvements. The top soil from areas intended for such improvements shall be redistributed within the boundaries of the lands in question to provide a suitable base for seeding and planting.

7. The development shall be fitted to the topography and soils of the site so as to provide a suitable base for seeding and planting.

8. Runoff from the site after development shall not exceed the maximum rate and volume that existed before development.
9. Sediment basins or traps shall be installed and maintained to remove sediment from runoff waters from land undergoing development.

The implementation of conservation overlay zones will also provide the added benefit of helping to preserve existing natural areas which provide habitat for animals, visual barriers between developed areas and open space within the neighborhood. These ancillary benefits are also important planning considerations for West Hill.

Trees and Woodlands

The second major area of environmental concern is the protection of significant trees and woodlands. The benefits of preserving existing trees include decreasing erosion, protecting water quality, moderating climatic extremes, providing visual and sound barriers, absorbing air pollution and serving as scenic and recreational resources.

The West Hill Master Plan recommends the following measures to protect trees and woodlands:

1. Adopt and implement the Street Tree Ordinance proposed by the Street Tree Committee. This ordinance will help to preserve and enhance the street trees that are such a valuable resource in the City of Ithaca.

2. Identify and preserve contiguous areas of significant woodlands based on such factors as steep slopes, extent of coverage and species composition. Identify single large or rare trees for individual protection. During the process of land development, take steps to ensure that as many of the valuable trees are preserved as possible.

3. During the inventory of woodland areas, if specific areas warrant special protection, provide protection by designating them as Critical Environmental Areas or by adopting a Woodland Protection Ordinance.
Public Infrastructure

Roads

The planning of a road network has major implications for traffic circulation, the development of the utility system and the quality of life within West Hill's neighborhoods. The three major issues that have been identified with regard to roads are: 1) the desire of residents to prevent through traffic from using the interior streets within the area's neighborhoods; 2) the impact of high volumes of traffic on some residential areas, especially those along Cliff Street, Elm Street and Hector Street; and 3) access to the interior of the area by emergency vehicles and the need for development of a traffic circulation system that adequately serves future development on West Hill. Each of these issues is complicated by the steep road grades created by West Hill's topography.

A primary goal of the West Hill Master Plan has been to plan a road network that conforms to the standards in the City of Ithaca's Municipal Code. Many of the existing streets on West Hill do not meet these standards. The standards include provisions that dead-end streets do not exceed five hundred feet in length, that the grade of major streets be less than six percent and that the grade of minor streets be less than ten percent. In addition, new streets should allow the development of an efficient system of public utilities and conform to the needs of modern fire equipment in terms of grade, turning radius and visibility.

The proposed road network developed for West Hill addresses all of these concerns. It is based on a system of new streets that connect with the existing streets but that are laid out so that they move diagonally across the steep slopes of West Hill. The diagonal pattern keeps all of the street grades under ten percent and also directs traffic flow in directions that run counter to the direction that non-West Hill residents use when travelling between major destinations. This helps to prevent through traffic from entering the interior of West Hill's neighborhoods. To further the goal of preventing through traffic, several streets, including Sunrise Road and Warren Place, will be broken into two parts instead of being developed as continuous roads as indicated in previous master plans for West Hill.
This proposed road network provides for the dispersal of local traffic through the neighborhood and the development of additional points of access into the neighborhood. Traffic, whether it is generated by the residents of the West Hill neighborhood or not, is seen as a burden by almost all residents. The burden of traffic is lessened if it is spread across a number of streets instead of being concentrated on a few streets.

The suggested road network also eliminates dead-end streets to the greatest extent possible. The dead-end streets that do exist are laid out so that sanitary sewage may flow down through the gravity system that is located in the street rights-of-ways. A street system that does not feature dead-end streets benefits emergency vehicle access and traffic circulation. It also enhances the efficiency of the water supply system by allowing loops to be created, thereby improving pressure and water quality.

The Master Plan also anticipates the possibility of new development by recommending the reservation of several road rights-of-way in order to facilitate the extension of roads to serve new projects. The ability to keep road options open into the future is an important element in planning a rational road network.

The traffic impacts created by new development in the Town of Ithaca and beyond were also a major issue in the West Hill Master Plan. Both planned and potential new projects west and north of the City of Ithaca will generate traffic that will travel to and from various parts of the City. Increased development in the Southwest portion of the City of Ithaca, along Meadow Street and Elmira Road, has increased the number of vehicle trips moving between the Southwest and West Hill. Driving through the West Hill neighborhood to reach Route 13A has become an increasingly attractive alternative to travelling through the Octopus. With the current configuration of roads on West Hill this traffic is and will continue to be restricted primarily to Cliff Street, Elm Street and Hector Street. The capacity of these streets to handle increased traffic loads without further deterioration of the quality of life for residents along them is extremely limited.

The West Hill Master Plan proposes to address at least part of this problem through the construction of a new collector road that is located west of the City boundary. This proposed road would run in a north/south direction between Mecklenburg Road and Elm Street and would then turn east, dropping down West Hill where it would cross the Flood Control Channel. It would then connect with either Meadow Street or Elmira Road in the southwest part of the City of Ithaca. This collector road would serve as a convenient route for vehicles travelling from West Hill to the Southwest and would keep most traffic from passing through the West Hill neighborhood. It would serve to divert much of the expected traffic increase from development west of the City away from Hector
Street and Elm Street. This road is proposed to be developed jointly by the City of Ithaca and Town of Ithaca, since parts of it are situated within both municipalities.

With the choice of Alternative A for the reconstruction of the Octopus by the State, Cliff Street will continue to serve as a major arterial into and out of the City. Under Alternative A traffic on the street is expected to increase from a current level of approximately 14,000 vehicles per day to between 20,000 and 25,000 vehicles per day over the next two decades. The problems faced by Cliff Street residents due to lack of parking and safe sidewalks can thus be expected to increase in the coming years, and the quality of life in the neighborhood will continue to decline unless action is taken by the City. Since widening of the street or development of an alternative route to the street is not likely in the foreseeable future, the West Hill Master Plan recommends that other actions be implemented. These actions, described further below, should include provision of off-street parking, safe sidewalks and other measures to assist the neighborhood in adapting to an urban traffic environment.

Water Supply

West Hill's existing water supply system is fed from two storage tanks which serve the north and south ends of the neighborhood respectively. These two tanks effectively serve two independent service areas, which create limitations in both the pressure and water quality that is available to the users.

The water supply system on West Hill would be greatly improved if these two independent parts of the system could be joined. The West Hill Master Plan proposes that a new water main be constructed between the existing water tank south of Elm Street and the existing system on Hook Place. This new connection should be built within the area that was formerly reserved for the right-of-way of the extension of Warren Place. This is located just west of MacDaniel's Park and would run through the block bounded by Elm Street, Chestnut Street, Hook Place and Haller Boulevard. In the West Hill Master Plan, this former right-of-way is designated to become part of MacDaniel's Park.

A second issue with regard to the water supply system on West Hill is the fact that the Town of Ithaca shares the City's water supply system. The supply of water and the infrastructure needed to carry it must be capable of handling the new development that will occur in the Town of Ithaca without overburdening the system. This issue must be addressed through agreements between the City and the Town, with appropriate cost sharing measures implemented.
Sidewalks

The West Hill Master Plan recommends that a network of new sidewalks be developed on selected streets within West Hill's neighborhoods. The higher level of development with attendant traffic increases makes walking on streets increasingly dangerous, particularly for small children. A network of sidewalks that connect the major destinations on West Hill such as parks and schools and that are located on the roads with the highest traffic volumes will help to increase pedestrian safety.

The issue of pedestrian safety for Cliff Street residents can be addressed through construction of a sidewalk on the west side of the street to serve homes in the 500 to 700 block of the street. In addition, an alternative to parking on the existing sidewalk on the east side of the street should be developed. This would allow the sidewalk to be dedicated to pedestrian use, which would greatly enhance its utility to residents.

Sidewalks in new subdivisions should be planned as part of the subdivision approval process. The subdivision regulations of the City of Ithaca provide that the Board of Planning and Development may require developers to construct sidewalks. The location and design of these new sidewalks should conform to the recommendations contained in the West Hill Master Plan.

The cost of building new sidewalks on existing streets is, under the City's Municipal Code, charged to the adjacent property owner. However, the Board of Public Works should also investigate whether a sidewalk improvement district may be established to finance the construction of sidewalks in these areas. A sidewalk improvement district would permit the costs to be shared by all of the property owners in the district, thus more fairly distributing the costs to those who benefit from the improvements.

Street Lighting

It is recommended that new street lights be considered at key locations where visibility, personal safety and traffic safety are concerns. These include intersections, public parks, bus stops and the areas around schools. It is not recommended that street lights be placed on all streets throughout West Hill; this neighborhood does not require the high level of lighting that is typically found in a more urban area such as Fall Creek or East Hill.
Parking

The West Hill Master Plan recommends that the City develop alternatives for providing parking in those areas of West Hill where off street parking is inadequate. Parking in the 500 to 700 blocks of Cliff Street, for example, is a critical issue for the neighborhood. The current practice of allowing parking on the only sidewalk serving the area presents safety problems for residents. Several potential sites exist for one or more neighborhood parking lots to serve this section of Cliff Street. It is recommended that the concept of neighborhood parking lots be incorporated into the design of the Alternative A Octopus reconstruction as a mitigating measure to offset the impact of increased traffic on Cliff Street that will result from the project. Currently, use of the sidewalk provides parking for about 30 cars, a situation that should not be disallowed unless and until at least an equal amount of parking is provided through the proposed neighborhood lot(s).

Emergency Vehicle Access

Emergency vehicles have historically had a difficult time gaining access to portions of West Hill due to the limited number of routes that are available to enter the area from downtown Ithaca. Several streets, such as Elm Street, Sunrise Road and Campbell Avenue, have steep grades and sharp turns, which are especially difficult for fire equipment to maneuver through.

The West Hill Master Plan provides for three additional entrances to the West Hill area, particularly to those places where most of the new development will occur. The first will provide quick access into the interior of the neighborhood from the new fire station to be constructed on Route 96 near the Tompkins Community Hospital. This entrance to the area will require the improvement of the Campbell Street/Cliff Street intersection to reduce its grade and increase the radius of its curves to make turning easier, and the completion of the unfinished portion of Campbell Avenue between Hector Street and the existing Campbell Avenue. Campbell Avenue is also proposed to be extended into the undeveloped center of West Hill through the land development process.

The second proposed new entrance to the area would also be off Cliff Street, between Hopper Place and Vinegar Hill Road. This road would provide improved access to the
center of the West Hill neighborhood for vehicles coming from the eastern side of the City of Ithaca. This road is primarily intended to serve the new residential projects that are anticipated to be built.

The third new entrance into the interior would be at the south end off of Floral Avenue. Beginning on Floral Avenue just below West Village, this new road would provide access into the interior of the large undeveloped parcel located south of West Village. This parcel contains approximately forty acres and could sustain the development of a significant number of new homes.

Two other elements of the West Hill Master Plan will also serve to improve access to the area by emergency vehicles. First, the proposed collector road located west of the City in the Town of Ithaca will have a positive impact on emergency vehicle access because its proposed northern terminus would be at Route 96 near Bundy Road, making access to and from the hospital and the new West Hill fire station much faster than is currently possible. Second, the layout of the interior road network minimizes dead-ends to the greatest extent possible. This means that there will be very few streets on West Hill that do not provide two means of access to any single location.

Neighborhood Character

West Hill is divided into several sub-areas, each with its own distinctive neighborhood character. The size and shape of lots, the orientation of buildings on the lots, the landscape around the streets and the availability of open space are all important elements that define West Hill's character.

This plan proposes to maintain West Hill's existing character by ensuring that new development over most of West Hill is built in a manner that is consistent with historical development patterns. The exception to this might be the area encompassed by the Cliff Street neighborhood. Given that the street is to continue functioning as an arterial, combined with the limitations imposed by terrain, a more urban residential architecture might be more appropriate for portions of Cliff Street, especially the portion between the Octopus and Vinegar Hill.
The parts of West Hill currently zoned R-1a have been developed at a density that is approximately fifty percent lower that the maximum density permitted by the zoning regulations. In the R-1a zone, lot sizes are required to be at least ten thousand square feet in area and the lot must be at least seventy-five feet wide. For historical reasons the majority of the lots in the R-1a zone on West Hill are approximately fifteen thousand square feet in area and one hundred feet in width. The proposed street system for the central portion of West Hill is laid out in a manner that will encourage continued development at this same density. The streets are spaced so that the best use of the land will be through the development of lots that average fifteen thousand square feet in area and one hundred feet in width. No changes to the existing zoning regulations in the R-1a zone are proposed in this plan.

This plan does recommend, however, that the streetscape in the R-1a areas be improved over what currently exists on many streets such as Warren Place. Many of the roads that have been built in the last thirty years on West Hill have excessive pavement widths and do not have sidewalks or street trees. These wide expanses of pavement encourage traffic to travel faster and pose additional risks to pedestrians, who are forced to walk in the streets. The addition of street trees would soften the barren look of the pavement and help to create a streetscape that is more intimate and comfortable.

Land Use and Zoning

An important planning objective of the West Hill Master Plan is to retain the character of the existing neighborhoods while still permitting the development of new housing. In furtherance of that goal, no zoning changes are recommended for the majority of West Hill. The areas now zoned R-1a should not be changed to another zoning district designation, nor should the R-1a zoning regulations be changed. Retaining these zoning regulations will promote stability and continuity within the West Hill neighborhoods.

Some zoning changes are seen as desirable in order to further the objective of preserving the existing character of the area. The areas now zoned R-3a, which are located on both sides of Floral Avenue and on the east side of Cliff Street, hold the potential for large scale multiple family housing which would be very different from the
type of development that primarily exists in these areas. While R-3 zoning is appropriate for some limited areas of West Hill, the development allowed in this zone is so longer considered appropriate for all those areas on West Hill zoned R-3.

The West Hill Master Plan recommends that much of the land zoned R-3a west of the Flood Control Channel be rezoned to lower density zoning. The areas recommended for rezoning include all the land south of the Octopus and west of the Flood Control Channel currently zoned R-3a, except for the West Village Apartments and Polygon Associates sites. The areas to be changed are proposed to become a new zoning district similar in density to the existing R-2 residential districts. This new district would permit the development of a variety of different building types, including multiple-family and owner-occupied forms of housing, at densities that are similar to those found in the City's R-2b zone, about fifteen units per acre. It would facilitate the development of affordable family housing by allowing greater flexibility and efficiency in the development of land. In addition it would result in residential development on West Hill that will be more compatible with the existing development pattern than that permitted under the R-3a regulations. The proposed district would also provide for a better transition between development densities allowed within the City and those allowed in the adjoining Town of Ithaca.

The West Hill Master Plan recommends that the City also consider tightening its development review regulations to ensure thorough review of future multi-family development on West Hill. Specifically, the City should investigate the feasibility of lowering the thresholds above which such development would be subject to Site Development Plan Review by the Planning and Development Board.
Plan Implementation

The West Hill Master Plan will not be a successful guide to development unless the recommendations contained within the plan are implemented. Implementation will rely on coordinated, consistent actions by each of the City's boards and elected bodies that are responsible for making decisions about these matters. The following is a summary of the major actions that will need to be completed.

1. **Adopt An Official Map**

   An Official Map is a map that indicates the location of both existing and proposed roads. The indication of a proposed road on an Official Map helps to protect the road right-of-way from development, thus assuring that the plan may be carried out in the future. Without the adoption of an Official Map, the City of Ithaca would have little power to prevent development in the right-of-way of a future road.

2. **Approve Subdivisions In Accordance With The Master Plan**

   New housing projects are often proposed with little regard for the overall plan for the development of an area. The West Hill Master Plan will have the most impact if all new projects are approved in accordance with the guidelines contained in this plan. This includes the reservation of land for parks, making provisions for the future extension of roads, providing sidewalks and pedestrian paths and approving projects that conform to the desired neighborhood character.
3. Approve Zoning Map Amendments

The West Hill Master Plan's goals of preserving the character and stability of neighborhoods cannot be accomplished unless the recommended changes to the Zoning Map are adopted by Common Council. These changes should be made immediately in order to halt the possibility of inappropriate development.

4. Park Development

The West Hill Master Plan envisions the development of new parks and pedestrian connections for West Hill. The Board of Planning and Development may require the reservation of land for these facilities, but they can be parks only if the City of Ithaca allocates funding and staff time to purchase and develop these areas. This must be undertaken by both the Common Council and the Board of Public Works.

5. Conservation Area Development

The West Hill Master Plan recommends that the streams and woodlands of West Hill including the Flood Control Channel be protected through the adoption of new and stronger regulations. The Conservation Advisory Council and the Common Council must commit to evaluating and protecting these areas in a fair and consistent manner.

6. Infrastructure Development

The Board of Public Works must oversee the development of a program of infrastructure improvements that includes sidewalks, street improvements, new roads and water and sewer lines. These improvements must be budgeted and completed in a timely manner.

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