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STRATEGIC

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

PLAN

DECEMBER, 1967

BOARD OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

CITY OF ITHACA
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INTRODUCTION

One's view of the future is influenced greatly by comparing past events with those that are occurring in the present. In many cases, the changes that occur over time create a collective view of the future that contains both fear and hope. People seek continuity and stability while at the same time desiring changes that will create a better world. There is an inherent conflict between the desire for stability and the need for change which creates feelings of uncertainty about the future. In Ithaca, the widely-held perception that many of our cherished values and physical characteristics are disappearing due to an increasing number of unplanned and unmanageable changes gave impetus to the development of this plan.

This plan seeks to reconcile the seemingly contradictory forces of continuity and change and to create a positive, more clearly understood view of the future of Ithaca's housing and neighborhoods. It does this by analyzing the trends that have emerged from the past, the problems that we confront today and the changes that are likely to occur in the future so as to create a better understanding of the forces that shape our community. Drawing on that analysis, the plan then seeks to identify planned public activities that can be undertaken for the purpose of holding onto those things that we wish to preserve and changing those things that we wish to make better.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGIC HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS PLAN

In the summer of 1985, the City of Ithaca began to consider the development of a new comprehensive plan for the city. Ithaca had experienced many unanticipated changes since the preparation of its last comprehensive plan in 1971, and that plan was widely seen as being an outdated and ineffective tool for guiding current decisions. In recent years, the pace and scale of development in Ithaca have increased in ways that could not have been foreseen in the early 1970's, leading to a diminishment of the importance of the 1971 plan in public policy debates. In late 1985, the Common Council directed the Planning Board to take the lead role in the development of an updated comprehensive plan for the city.

A review of the successes and failures of the 1971 plan led the Board to an investigation of alternate ways to undertake comprehensive planning. The 1971 plan was developed in accordance with the "traditional" model of a comprehensive plan that had
evolved over several decades of planning practice. It was a land-use based plan which projected a long-term physical imprint of the city thirty years into the future. Maps showing the general desired locations and densities of various land uses were prepared, along with a series of goals and objectives for the development of the community.

The Board felt that this type of plan had proved to be an inadequate tool to guide community growth for several reasons. First, while land use is an extremely important component of long-range planning, it cannot be the sole focus of a comprehensive plan. Other factors, including social, economic, environmental and political concerns also need to be built into the planning process. Each of these areas have become increasingly important in recent years as the interrelationships between people, their institutions and their physical and cultural environment have changed. As these changes have become better understood, the expectations of people toward government have changed as well. Increasingly, they demand that government take an active role in solving social and environmental problems.

Second, it was readily apparent to the Planning Board that Ithaca is a rapidly changing community that is shaped by a variety of forces that originate at the local, state, national and even international levels. Many of the changes that affect Ithaca cannot be anticipated far into the future, as a traditional comprehensive plan attempts to do. For example, the influence of international money markets on local interest rates have had a profound affect on the timing and magnitude of housing development in Ithaca, influencing both the supply and cost of housing. The Board sought a planning process which could be designed to recognize and respond to changes in the community whenever they may occur, rather than at intervals several decades apart. Thus, the ideal planning process should be continuous and responsive to all significant changes in the planning environment.

Third, the Board perceived that there is a very wide gap between the broad objectives contained in a traditional comprehensive plan and the ability of elected officials to translate those objectives into actions that can be easily implemented. The intent of a traditional comprehensive plan is usually expressed in terms of goals and objectives and a "concept" land use map which provide a general sense of direction to future leaders. However, the development of new programs, zoning changes, capital improvements or other actions to implement the intent of the plan are not an integral part of the planning process. This has often led to the adoption of planning objectives which are vague or unrealistic in light of political or financial considerations. The Planning Board felt that the planning process should lead directly to the development of specific, achievable actions that are designed to better manage the changes that are occurring in Ithaca. Once those actions are developed, their implementation should also be made an integral part of the planning process.

An extensive review of the theory and practice of comprehensive planning led the Board to adopt a modified version of the strategic planning process. This process was originally developed and refined in the private sector for use by large, complex corporations. The strategic planning process was developed so that companies could stay abreast of the changing demands of consumers, the threats posed by competitors or
suppliers and the opportunities that may be available to expand a product line or a market. A clear recognition of both the problems and opportunities that confront companies required a structured approach to understanding the changes that are occurring around them and a realistic appraisal of their ability to respond to those changes. It is a proactive rather than a reactive approach to planning. It is also a systemized approach to thinking about problems that is extremely heuristic in its design, with each step in the process building on the previous steps.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Strategic planning focuses on identifying and understanding those issues which are the most critical to the success of an organization, whether it be a business, government agency or other type of institution. Once these issues are understood, the strategic planning process is directed toward the development and implementation of actions which can have an immediate impact on those issues.

A key component of the strategic planning process is that it offers a disciplined approach to an organization's understanding of its problems, opportunities and resources. This discipline is achieved through an adherence to the structure of the strategic planning process, which is comprised of a series of six steps, each of which build on the knowledge gained in the previous steps. A brief explanation of each of the steps, and the Planning Board's actions to follow them, are described below.

COMPONENTS OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

1. ESTABLISH GENERAL PLANNING GOALS

The purpose of this step is to set the general boundaries and guidelines for the planning process. It provides for an examination of the purposes of the organization, establishes what issues, topics or concerns are to be addressed and establishes the overall parameters within which potential solutions to the planning problems may be developed.
2. EXAMINE THE FORCES AFFECTING THE ORGANIZATION

This step is commonly referred to as the environmental scan. Its purpose is to uncover the political, economic, cultural or other forces that are creating problems in the planning areas selected. In this step, the planners make a broad and realistic assessment of what constitutes a problem and undertake research to provide accurate information on the extent and severity of the problems. This research may also reveal problems and issues that were not previously recognized.

3. ASSESS THE ORGANIZATION'S RESOURCES

The third step is a critical examination of the workings of the organization, including a realistic assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. Information on staffing, operating budgets, legal authority and prevailing political attitudes are assimilated with the findings made in the first two steps to provide a realistic assessment of the opportunities and constraints that define the organization's future directions.

4. DEVELOP STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this step is to develop strategic objectives that are designed to address the problems or issues that have been identified earlier in the process. These objectives should be realistic in light of what the organization is capable of accomplishing and should take advantage of potential opportunities or build on existing strengths.

5. DEVELOP ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

This step involves the development of programs, budgets, activities or other direct actions which can be undertaken to fulfil the intent of a strategic objective. These actions should address the problems that the organization is trying to solve and they should be realistic in terms of the organization's potential resources.

6. IMPLEMENT ACTIONS THAT ADDRESS STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The final and most critical step is the implementation of the actions developed in Step Five. The entire strategic planning
The process is designed to lead to the implementation of these actions so that problems can be addressed within a reasonably short time frame.

The "mission" of a local government such as the City of Ithaca can be elusive because it involves the delivery of a broad range of services to a large and varied constituency. The pressing needs of a city's residents are constantly changing and the demands that they make upon the city's elected officials and city departments change as well. While an issue such as public safety may be in the forefront of public policy discussions today, affordable housing, public transportation or solid waste disposal may be tomorrow's major issues. The causes of these changes may be a combination of economic, social, environmental or technological impacts, all of which lead to changes in attitude and ever-shifting political constituencies. One of the most difficult responsibilities of elected and appointed government officials is to recognize and respond effectively to these changes.

The process of identifying the critical, or strategic, issues that confront the City of Ithaca involves analyzing both the internal and external factors that affect its residents, determining how well the city is responding to those pressures and evaluating what resources the city has available to deal with them.

The Planning Board began the strategic planning process by first focusing on those areas over which it could be expected to have a direct influence. Police, fire protection and water supply, to give three examples, are services which are governed by other boards, and with which the Planning Board has little involvement. The Planning Board elected to confine its planning to topics over which it has some direct influence such as land use, housing, economic development and transportation. The Board found that all of these topics have many significant elements, each of which will require an intensive planning effort. However, the Board felt that the limited staff time available and the press of other planning efforts would preclude a full analysis and public discussion of each of these major topics simultaneously, so it decided instead to initiate a sequential planning process. Under this arrangement, each major topic, starting with the most critical, is to be addressed separately and in great depth, one after another. This will permit an intensive look at each of these major issues and the development of actions that are designed to address the problems contained within each topic. It was recognized that each of these topics is tied to the others in many ways, and that they cannot be viewed in isolation from each other. In order to account for these connections, each topic was viewed in the broader context of the long-term development of Ithaca and its residents.

The first major topic selected by the Planning Board was housing and neighborhoods. The issues of neighborhood stability, housing affordability, housing quality, parking and traffic have been at the forefront of many of Ithaca's policy discussions in recent years; the Board felt that these issues, above all others, demanded immediate attention.

Having made a decision to concentrate on the broad area of housing and neighborhood issues, the Board's next step was to begin to look closely at exactly what these issues were
and to what extent they were found throughout Ithaca. The Board adopted a four-part process that was designed to focus on these issues while at the same time allowing for extensive public participation in the process.

First, through letters and newspaper advertisements, Mayor Gutenberger sought out Ithaca residents who were interested in working to solve housing and neighborhood problems. This resulted in the appointment of a sixteen-member housing and neighborhoods advisory committee whose charge was to examine housing and neighborhood problems and make recommendations about ways to address those problems. This group, called the Technical Advisory Committee, was comprised of representatives from neighborhood civic associations, members of housing production and housing finance organizations, renters, low-income housing advocates, property managers and Cornell University administrators. This group met twenty times over a one-year period to evaluate what was happening with respect to Ithaca's neighborhoods and housing, how those forces were affecting Ithaca's residents and what could be done about the problems that were uncovered. A synopsis of the Technical Advisory Committee's activities can be found in the report entitled "Recommendations of the Technical Advisory Committee", dated April, 1987. The Technical Advisory Committee provided a valuable forum for an in-depth discussion of housing and neighborhood issues. Their analysis and recommendations were transmitted directly to the Planning Board and the Common Council and were also made available to the general public.

Second, the Board felt that all Ithaca residents should have frequent opportunities to participate in the planning process. To further this goal, a series of public meetings were held to exclusively discuss housing and neighborhood issues. At those meetings, the public was invited to express their views about housing and neighborhood problems, help the Board focus on which of those problems were the most serious and suggest alternate ways that those problems might be addressed. The public was also asked to comment on research that the Planning Department staff had undertaken on the local housing market, the Board's long-range goals for housing and neighborhood development and the planning process in general. The public was also invited to participate in all of the open meetings held by the Planning Board and the Technical Advisory Committee.

Third, the Planning Department staff undertook detailed research on a number of subjects relating to housing and neighborhoods in order to better understand the nature and reasons for the problems that the Board was trying to address. The staff prepared a detailed analysis of the Ithaca urban area housing market which examined demographic trends, housing production, housing cost and housing affordability. This analysis is contained in a report entitled "Supply, Demand and Affordability of Housing", released in May, 1987. The staff also did extensive research on over fifty possible solutions to local housing and neighborhood problems. That research included information on the probable cost and effectiveness of those solutions, the legal framework for their implementation and the results achieved by other communities who implemented similar programs.

Finally, the Planning Board itself discussed housing and neighborhood issues at virtually all of its meetings over an eighteen-month period. Using the input gained from
the Technical Advisory Committee, the general public and the Planning Department staff, the Board formulated and ranked in order of magnitude the various problems that the planning process should address.

The list of housing and neighborhood problems raised during the numerous public meetings, Technical Advisory Committee meetings and Planning Board meetings covered a wide variety of issues ranging from housing affordability to the environmental problems created by local businesses. Through public discussions and the use of a structured ranking procedure, the Planning Board pared the original list of problems and issues down to a list that numbered twenty-six significant housing and neighborhood problems. This list represented the priority items that the Planning Board felt needed to be addressed through the strategic plan. That list is shown as Appendix I to this report.

This list was further refined by dividing the problems into six major housing and neighborhood study areas. These areas include the following:

1. Housing Affordability  
2. Housing Availability  
3. Reducing Neighborhood Conflicts  
4. Improving Building and Grounds Maintenance  
5. Improving Input By Neighborhood Residents  
6. Neighborhood Parking and Traffic Issues

The remainder of this report will discuss in detail the Planning Board's assessment of the problems in each of these areas, their strategic objectives to alleviate these problems and the recommended actions to achieve each of these objectives.

**HOUSING AFFORDABILITY**

**PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The issues of housing affordability, housing availability and housing quality are intimately related to each other. The changes in demand created by the local population, the impacts of national and international economic forces and the local response to the need for housing all affect the housing affordability issue.

The diversity of Ithaca's population and the fact that nearly half of Ithaca's residents are college students has created a housing demand which is very dissimilar to comparably sized communities in the United States. To the casual observer, it may appear that Ithaca possesses an adequate supply of good quality housing available at reasonable prices.
However, there is intense competition for all of the available housing in Ithaca between several major groups of housing consumers, including students, upper-income households and middle and lower income households. This competition has caused the prices of both rental and owner-occupied housing in Ithaca to rise dramatically in recent years, making it increasingly difficult for lower or middle-income households to find affordable housing in the City of Ithaca.

DIMENSIONS OF ITHACA'S POPULATION

Ithaca's population contains a variety of types of households which fall into all income ranges. The traditional family household, a husband, wife and children, does not constitute the majority in Ithaca, where only 41% of all households are comprised of families. (Families are a subset of all households, which may include a single person, a combination of related or unrelated people who occupy a dwelling unit, or a family.) Ithaca has a greater concentration of lower and middle income households, single person households, elderly households and renter households than the norms for either Tompkins County, New York State or the United States.

Several examples help to illustrate the dimensions of Ithaca's population. In 1980, 31% of all family households with children in Ithaca were households in which a woman was the sole head of the household. Female headed households typically have incomes well below the median income levels in any community, but in Ithaca, female headed households accounted for 69% of all families with children that have incomes below the poverty level.

The median family income for Ithaca in 1980 was $16,283, which compared to $18,790 for Tompkins County and $20,853 for New York State. Within the City of Ithaca, there are neighborhoods where the median income is considerably below the city-wide median. For example, in the West End neighborhood, median family income in 1980 was $8,686, about one-half of the city-wide figure. The figures shown above for family income generally do not include student households, which are prevalent in Ithaca. Household income levels in Ithaca are much lower that the comparable measures for Tompkins County and New York State, which is partly due to the student population, but also a result of the poverty of many of the non-student households that reside in Ithaca.

In the City of Ithaca, 35% of all households are comprised of a single person living alone. This compares to 26% for both Tompkins County and New York State. More significantly, 24% of all households in Ithaca are comprised of two or more unrelated people living together, compared with 13% for Tompkins County. The high percentage of households with unrelated people living together is primarily due to the large student population that resides in Ithaca. The large student population that resides in off-campus housing also accounts for the unusually high percentage of renter-occupied housing units in Ithaca. 69% of all housing units in the city are renter-occupied, with the remaining 31% owner-occupied. This is the reverse of the owner/renter proportions for the United States, where nearly two-thirds of all housing units are owner-occupied.
DEFINITION OF HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Housing affordability can be defined in terms of the percentage of a household's gross income that can be applied toward all housing costs. The general rule of thumb is that housing costs should not exceed 30% of the combined gross income of all members of the household. Nationally, the cost of buying a home has risen dramatically in recent years while increases in income have gone up much more slowly. The National Association of Realtors has reported that between 1980 and 1986, average household income in the United States has risen only 7% while the cost of buying a home increased 32%, with both figures adjusted for inflation. The disparity between increases in income and increases in housing costs has been even greater in Ithaca, where the price of a single family home increased 41% in the last three years alone, and where rents have increased at a similar rate. The impact of this disparity is that homeownership is no longer a realistic goal for many low and moderate-income households. The percentage of households in the United States who own their own homes increased from 44% in 1940 to 66% in 1980, but that trend has been reversed and the percentage gain realized in the fifteen years prior to 1980 was erased in only the six years between 1980 and 1986.

The situation for low and moderate income renters is no better than for prospective homebuyers. Rents have increased dramatically in Ithaca and have created the situation where renting a house or an apartment consumes an unacceptably high percentage of a household's gross income. Housing is not a discretionary commodity for consumers; it is a basic necessity that must be purchased. When the cost of rent consumes an unreasonably large proportion of household income, other purchases, even basic necessities such as food or clothing, must be foregone. Because of the high cost of rents, many households are also forced to live in dwelling units that are in extremely poor condition, are expensive to heat and are too small for the household. The high rents in Ithaca have also forced many of the city's workers to live in rural areas far away from Ithaca, where housing prices are lower.

Table 1 shows the increases in the median purchase prices for different types of housing in the City of Ithaca over the last three years. It should be noted that for both triplexes and apartments, there were several years during the survey period when there were few or no sales of these types of dwelling units. Thus, the information is not as statistically relevant as the information for single family and duplex units.
TABLE 1

MEDIAN HOUSING SALES PRICES
CITY OF ITHACA
1983 - 1986

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<td>SINGLE FAMILY</td>
<td>$46,000</td>
<td>$47,500</td>
<td>$53,000</td>
<td>$65,000</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUPLEX</td>
<td>$51,000</td>
<td>$57,000</td>
<td>$61,000</td>
<td>$68,250</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRIPLEX</td>
<td>$75,875</td>
<td>$95,480</td>
<td>$83,750</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APARTMENT (PER UNIT)</td>
<td>$22,250</td>
<td>$22,333</td>
<td>$23,837</td>
<td>$23,939</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tompkins County Department of Assessment

In order to purchase a home, a household must possess sufficient savings for at least a 10% down payment and a steady income sufficient to cover annual housing expenses including principal, interest, taxes and insurance. Most banks will not approve a mortgage application if these regular housing expenses exceed 28% of the household's gross income. An analysis of the 1980 income distribution of all families in the City of Ithaca, adjusted upward to 1986 income levels, shows that only families with incomes greater than $30,943, which is approximately 30% of all families in Ithaca, could afford to purchase a median-priced single family home in 1986. This analysis best illustrates the situation for a first-time homebuyer, since building equity in a home that one owns significantly eases the financial burden of buying a second home. However, there are large numbers of potential first-time homebuyers in Ithaca, and their numbers are growing rapidly. The fastest growing age group in Tompkins County are people in the range of 35 to 44 years old. This population is expected to increase by nearly 48% between 1980 and 1990, and they comprise the prime homebuying age group.

Graph 1 shows the full range of housing affordability for all families in Ithaca in 1986.
Both the average and median incomes of households in Ithaca are significantly less than the average and median incomes of families. Using the typical underwriting requirements of banks, only 20% of all households would possess sufficient income to purchase a median priced home in the City of Ithaca in 1986.

It is possible for a household or a family at the lower end of the income range to purchase a home that sells for less than the median price. However, the prices of houses are not evenly distributed across the entire range. The majority of the houses that sold below the median price of $65,000 were clustered just below the median, in the $55,000 - $64,000 range, which still left them unaffordable for many households. In addition, virtually all of the few homes in the least expensive price ranges, $30,000 - $45,000, were in very poor physical condition and required large renovation, maintenance and utility expenses.
The inability of many households to achieve the goal of homeownership leaves renting a home as their only option. However, the cost of rental housing in Ithaca is also very expensive and prices are rising rapidly. The 1980 Census of Housing revealed that rent levels in Ithaca were considerably higher than in similar-sized cities in Upstate New York. This disparity has likely worsened in the intervening years due to a steady increase in the demand for rental housing in Ithaca and the declining vacancy rate, which is symptomatic of inadequate levels of new housing production.

A general guide to rental affordability is that a household should not pay more than 30% of its gross income toward rent and utilities. Using a typical rent for a two-bedroom apartment as an example, one can see that the rent levels in Ithaca are clearly a burden for low-income households. A typical rent for a two-bedroom apartment in 1986 was $400 per month, or $4,800 per year. This rent level would consume more than 30% of the gross income of any household making less than $16,000 per year. In Ithaca, 67% of all households had incomes of less than $16,000 in 1986. The fact that there are many student households in Ithaca, most of which qualify as low-income households, tends to skew all household income statistics for the city. Also, there are a significant number of low-income households in Ithaca that receive rent subsidies, which eases the burden of high rents. While it is not possible to completely isolate these two groups from the rest of the population, it is a fair assumption that most of the student households and households receiving rent subsidies have incomes of less than $10,000 per year. When one removes all households with annual incomes under $10,000, only 33% of the remaining households can still afford a $400 per month rent, using 30% of gross income as the affordability threshold. When one considers that renters do not share the tax advantages and potential for property appreciation that homeowners receive, it is clear that rising rent levels have become an increasing financial burden for many households in Ithaca.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR HOUSING AFFORDABILITY**

The Planning Board has adopted the following strategic objectives to promote housing affordability in Ithaca.

1. **THE CITY OF ITHACA SHOULD TAKE AN EXTREMELY ACTIVE ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING.**

   The Planning Board recognizes that the private housing market does not produce sufficient affordable housing, and virtually none that is affordable for low-income residents. Without an active role by the City of Ithaca, the housing affordability problem will continue to grow. The Board feels that the City should investigate and pursue
all realistic approaches to alleviating the housing affordability problem.

2. IN ADDITION TO MAINTAINING ITS HOUSING COMMITMENT TO HOUSEHOLDS BELOW THE POVERTY LINE, THE CITY OF ITHACA SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON RETAINING ITS EXISTING SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND ENCOURAGING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADDITIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR MODERATE-INCOME FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS WHO DO NOT QUALIFY FOR SUBSIDIZED HOUSING PROGRAMS.

The Planning Board's investigations into housing affordability revealed that moderate-income households are increasingly victimized by rising housing costs. It is important to promote affordable housing for all income levels in order to maintain housing opportunity and diversity of population in Ithaca.

3. THE CITY OF ITHACA SHOULD TAKE ACTIVE STEPS TO LIMIT THE DISPLACEMENT OF EXISTING RESIDENTS BY NEW OR WEALTHIER RESIDENTS.

The Board recognizes that the improvement of housing and neighborhood conditions in certain areas, the increased demand for housing and the relative affluence of new residents have all contributed to rising costs and the displacement of low and moderate-income households in certain neighborhoods. The preservation of affordable housing for Ithaca's present residents should take priority over providing housing for new residents.

**ACTIONS TO PROMOTE HOUSING AFFORDABILITY**

The following actions received the highest priority by the Planning Board and are recommended for immediate implementation by the Common Council.

1. DEVELOP A HOUSING TRUST FUND.

The Planning Board's assessment of the housing affordability problem has revealed that while there are variety of actions that the City can undertake to address affordability, the most effective actions are those that supply direct subsidies to the households that are most in need of assistance.
There already exist a number of Federal and state programs that address the housing affordability problem; these are administered on the local level by agencies such as Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services, the Ithaca Housing Authority, the Economic Opportunity Corporation and the City of Ithaca. In recent years, the funding for these agencies has been severely reduced even while the need for additional funding has dramatically increased. It is feared that no new funding will be available from the Federal government in the coming years, but even if it is, it is clear that obtaining those funds will be increasingly competitive and that there will be no clear indication from year-to-year that funding is assured.

The purpose of a Housing Trust Fund is to establish a stable source of funding that could be used to promote affordable housing in the City of Ithaca. A locally developed and financed program for affordable housing will permit the City to target the funds to those purposes that it deems most critical and at the same time develop a long-term strategy for housing affordability. A program with continuity of purpose is particularly important when addressing housing problems, since it may take many years to make a significant impact on a particular neighborhood or target population.

The uses of Housing Trust Fund monies can range from low-interest loans for housing rehabilitation to direct grants that subsidize the cost of purchasing a home. A Housing Trust Fund can be designed to be self-perpetuating, since loans made from it are paid back and reused to aid other households in need. A stable local source of housing funds would also permit these funds to leverage other Federal and state funds which require a local share, an approach increasingly used by funding agencies to spread scarce grant dollars. Public funds for affordable housing have also been shown to leverage significant amounts of private investment, thus creating better quality housing, an enhanced tax base and additional local employment. These advantages are all in addition to the social benefits that come from preserving housing and economic opportunities for Ithaca's residents through affordable housing.

Funding for a Housing Trust Fund would need to be established at a level sufficient to make a significant contribution toward addressing the housing affordability problem. A minimum of $300,000 per year would be likely be needed. The Planning Board has identified a number of potential sources of funding for the Housing Trust Fund, including repayments of UDAG, HODAG
and CDBG loans, tax exempt bonds sold by the City or another eligible organization, a real estate transfer tax or exactions on major building projects within the City. Several of these potential sources require additional detailed research to determine whether legal obstacles to their implementation exist, how much money could be raised and how much effort would be required to utilize them.

The administration of a Housing Trust Fund should be done in the most efficient manner possible in order to reduce administrative and overhead expenses. The City of Ithaca will need to decide whether the administration should be accomplished under the immediate supervision of Common Council, some other board such as the Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency or by an outside, not-for-profit agency. Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services has expressed an interest in becoming the management agency for the Housing Trust Fund, and since they have been an active partner with the City of Ithaca since their inception and have had great success in the development of affordable housing, the Planning Board recommends that INHS be seriously considered for this role.

2. ACTIVELY SEEK OUT AND PURSUE ALL AVAILABLE FEDERAL AND STATE PROGRAMS THAT SUBSIDIZE AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

The Planning Board recognizes that even though the total amount of funding for affordable housing has diminished greatly in recent years, some programs are still available. New York State has attempted to compensate for the loss of Federal funds by developing several new initiatives which provide subsidies for the development of affordable housing. Examples of the New York State programs are low cost financing available through SONYMA, the Homeless Housing Assistance Program and the Low-Income Housing Trust Fund. At the Federal level, the Community Development Block Grant and Housing Development Grant programs are still active.

Given the difficulty in achieving a significant impact in the area of housing affordability on a community-wide basis, the Planning Board has concluded that the City of Ithaca should take advantage of every opportunity that exists to compete for funding under state and Federal programs. These programs generally provide direct housing assistance benefits to those households that need them the most, can provide low cost financing through the ability of the state and Federal governments to sell tax-exempt bonds and the funds may be reused locally for other housing purposes if a loan is involved.
Obtaining funding under these programs often involves working with a private developer who might be the recipient of the funds, preparing an application under enormous time pressure or having to comply with the funding agency's administrative requirements or social objectives. While these and other factors might involve some compromise of the local process or the local needs, the Planning Board believes that the benefits of obtaining direct financial assistance for affordable housing generally outweigh the disadvantages. It is recognized that the Common Council, IURA or other city agency that approves applications for funding under a Federal or state program cannot commit to such approval in advance of the actual application. The city must retain the right review each application on a case-by-case basis.

The Planning Board feels that the approval of this action will provide a clear signal to housing developers, non-profit agencies and the city's own staff that the city is committed to the concept of using Federal and state housing funds and that each application prepared in Ithaca will receive a thorough and meaningful review by the city's elected officials.

HOUSING AVAILABILITY

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Ithaca's population is characterized by constant change in both the total number of people who reside in the City and the ways that those people form living groups. For many decades, Ithaca conformed to the typical pattern of a small city in the Northeast United States: it experienced steady population growth until the 1950's, when increased suburban development, changes to the central city employment base and changes to transportation systems caused it to lose population. The loss of population in many cities in the Northeast continues to this day, but Ithaca has diverged from this trend by experiencing significant gains in population in the 1970's and 1980's. The areas immediately surrounding the City of Ithaca, including the Town of Ithaca, the Village of Lansing and the Village of Cayuga Heights, have experienced steady and often dramatic increases in population since 1950. From 1950 to 1980, Tompkins County experienced double-digit population increases in each decade. Table 2 shows the population increases in the Ithaca urban area from 1950 to 1980.
TABLE 2

POPULATION CHANGE IN TOMPKINS COUNTY
1950 - 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MUNICIPALITY</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>% CHANGE</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>% CHANGE</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>% CHANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CITY OF ITHACA</td>
<td>29,257</td>
<td>28,799</td>
<td>-1.57%</td>
<td>26,226</td>
<td>-8.93%</td>
<td>28,732</td>
<td>9.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOWN OF ITHACA</td>
<td>7,282</td>
<td>9,072</td>
<td>24.58%</td>
<td>15,620</td>
<td>72.18%</td>
<td>16,022</td>
<td>2.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VILLAGE OF CAYUGA HEIGHTS</td>
<td>1,131</td>
<td>2,788</td>
<td>146.51%</td>
<td>3,130</td>
<td>12.27%</td>
<td>3,170</td>
<td>1.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VILLAGE OF LANSING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,039</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOMPKINS COUNTY</td>
<td>59,122</td>
<td>66,164</td>
<td>11.91%</td>
<td>77,064</td>
<td>16.47%</td>
<td>87,085</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Population projections by the New York State Department of Commerce for Tompkins County and its municipalities predict that the County's population will continue to grow into the 1990's, but at a slower rate than was seen in the decade from 1970 to 1980. The Commerce Department projects that Tompkins County will experience an overall population increase of 6.28% between 1980 and 1990.

The City of Ithaca's Department of Planning and Development projects that the city's population will increase by 5% during the 1980's, to 30,169 residents. This projection takes into account the new residential construction that has occurred in the city between 1980 and 1986, the continued growth of Cornell University and Ithaca College in students, faculty and staff and the expected impacts of spin-off businesses from research and development activities conducted at Cornell.

A change that is even more significant for the City of Ithaca than its projected population increase is the steadily diminishing size of households that reside in the city. The decline in household size has been a long-term trend in the United States, dating back to well before the turn of the century. The City of Ithaca has long been characterized by smaller households than either the rest of Tompkins County or New York State, as can be seen in Table 3. This is due to the unusual composition of its population, which is composed of many students, single persons, elderly residents and childless couples.

The significance of a diminishing average household size is that as household size decreases, the same population creates a demand for increasing numbers of dwelling units.
The reasons for the decline in household size include the desires of couples to have fewer or no children; the increasing number of people, including the elderly, who live alone; the splitting of families through separation and divorce and the decline of the "extended family" composed of several generations of family members who live together.

The effects of this change are readily apparent in the City of Ithaca, where a significant number of large, single family homes have been converted into two or more dwelling units; and where the demand for apartment construction has been great. It is expected that the average size of households will continue to decrease, although at a slower rate of change. Table 3 shows actual and projected changes in median household size.

### TABLE 3

**CHANGE IN MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD SIZE**  
1960 - 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT OF GOVERNMENT</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>% CHANGE</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>% CHANGE</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>% CHANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CITY OF ITHACA</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>-8.6%</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>-5.7%</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>-2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOMPKINS COUNTY</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>-10.7%</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>-10.4%</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>-9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW YORK STATE</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>-7.1%</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>-10.7%</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>-6.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1990, City of Ithaca Department of Planning and Development Projections

The population increase projected for the City of Ithaca by 1990, coupled with the declining household size of its residents, are expected to create a demand for dwelling units that will not be met if the current rate of residential building construction is maintained through the remainder of this decade. The City of Ithaca Department of Planning and Development estimates that by 1990, there could be a gap between the need created by new households and the number of housing units that actually exist of 1,129 housing units. Assuming that the composition of households in 1990 is similar to the 1980 composition, this translates into about 462 families and 667 non-families who will have sought or who will be seeking housing in the City of Ithaca by 1990.

Two obvious indicators of the strong demand for housing in Ithaca are the rapid increase in the cost of housing, which was discussed earlier, and the chronically low vacancy rate for housing. The 1980 Census showed that the overall vacancy rate for all
housing in the City of Ithaca was 3.4%. A vacancy rate below 5% is generally considered to be a sign of a tight housing market, which promotes a lack of competition among landlords, high prices and reduced housing choices for consumers. The vacancy rate for the city has worsened since 1980, in spite of the new units that have been produced. Surveys of vacancy rates in residential apartment buildings conducted by the Tompkins County Planning Department show that the vacancy rate has declined steadily since 1983, when it was 3.01%, to 1.61% in 1986. A survey by the City of Ithaca Department of Planning and Development in 1986 showed that the vacancy rate for residential units in the East Hill area approached zero.

The supply of housing in the City of Ithaca has undergone enormous changes in the decades since 1950. For example, 60 residential buildings containing 90 dwelling units were lost to demolition due to the construction of the Flood Control Relief Channel. Other activities which have resulted in a loss of residential buildings include roadway widenings, conversions of residential buildings to retail and office uses and building condemnations. Many single family homes have been converted to multiple occupancy, which has often precipitated a drastic decline in the quality of these dwellings, and in recent years new residential construction has largely been concentrated in the development of apartment buildings. From 1980 to 1986, only 26 of the 365 new dwelling units constructed in the City of Ithaca were single family homes. However, due to demolitions and conversions, there are fewer single family homes today than there were in 1980.

The changing demographic profile of Ithaca has also created a demand for different types of housing units. The proportionally larger numbers of elderly persons, single persons and small families has created a need for smaller, easier to maintain units. Although families are no longer in the majority among Ithaca's households, they constitute the largest single household type and exert a powerful force on the market. There is a strong demand for large single family homes in quiet and stable neighborhoods. Finally, the demand for housing by students continues to grow, continuing the economic competition between student households and other households in which lower-income families usually lose.

The competing demands of different housing consumers are creating undesirable impacts in virtually every neighborhood in the city. These impacts include the loss of stable, family neighborhoods to student residency; the inappropriate conversion of low density housing to higher density apartments; a mismatch between the changing needs of the population and the types and locations of housing that is available; and inflated housing costs for all consumers. The City of Ithaca has little vacant land which can be developed for new housing. However, it does possess the potential to meet some of the demand for housing through the development of new and creative approaches to residential construction. These include the adaptive reuse of existing buildings for residential purposes, mixed use residential/commercial development and higher density residential development under new and more stringent review procedures.
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR HOUSING AVAILABILITY

1. THE CITY OF ITHACA SHOULD BE OPEN TO NEW RESIDENTS WHO WANT TO LIVE HERE, BUT THE CITY SHOULD NOT BE COMPELLED TO HOUSE ALL OF THE PEOPLE WHO MAY WANT TO LIVE HERE. THE CITY SHOULD ACCEPT ONLY THE NUMBER OF NEW RESIDENTS THAT CAN BE ACCOMMODATED WHILE STILL PRESERVING THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF NEIGHBORHOOD ENVIRONMENTS.

The Planning Board recognizes that Ithaca is a desirable place to live, but it does not support the notion that there should be unrestricted residential growth in the city. Rather, growth should be encouraged only if new residents do not unreasonably displace existing residents and if new residential development does significantly alter the existing character of neighborhoods.

2. THE CITY OF ITHACA SHOULD PRESERVE THE EXISTING RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER OF ITS NEIGHBORHOODS WHILE RECOGNIZING THAT CERTAIN SITES CAN BE CONSIDERED FOR ADDITIONAL HOUSING.

The Planning Board feels strongly that one of Ithaca's greatest assets is the character and stability of its residential areas. The preservation of the existing density of residential development is important to all neighborhoods, but it is also recognized that some additional development can be accommodated in most areas without compromising the overall character of the area. Future decisions on residential development in all neighborhoods should include a careful and realistic assessment of the impacts that a project will have on neighborhood change.

3. THE CITY OF ITHACA SHOULD MAKE AN EFFORT TO SUPPORT THE PRODUCTION OF APPROPRIATE LEVELS AND TYPES OF ADDITIONAL HOUSING FOR ALL POPULATION GROUPS THROUGH REHABILITATION, ADAPTIVE REUSE AND NEW CONSTRUCTION.

The Planning Board recognizes that some additional housing will be needed in the City of Ithaca in order to preserve
housing opportunities for all of the city's residents. This housing should be provided through a variety of strategies and in a variety of locations in ways that are sensitive to the existing environments that surround them.

4. THE CITY OF ITHACA SHOULD STRONGLY PROMOTE THE MAINTENANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF ADDITIONAL ON-CAMPUS STUDENT HOUSING AND DEVELOP POLICIES THAT PROMOTE STUDENT HOUSING CLOSE TO CORNELL AND ITHACA COLLEGE, WHILE ALSO ALLOWING STUDENTS TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS TO RESIDE WHEREVER THEY CHOOSE IN THE CITY, SUBJECT TO THE RESTRICTIONS CONTAINED IN THE ZONING ORDINANCE.

The impacts of the off-campus student population are felt throughout the city's neighborhoods in a variety of ways. The Planning Board believes that the city must recognize that students constitute nearly one-half of Ithaca's population, and that they generally possess an economic advantage over families in the competition for available housing. The Board recommends as its highest priority the development of additional student housing on both the Cornell and Ithaca College campuses. The second highest priority should go toward the development of student housing near the campuses, in areas that are appropriate for the needs and lifestyles of students.

**ACTIONS TO PROMOTE HOUSING AVAILABILITY**

1. SUPPORT THE RETENTION AND REHABILITATION OF EXISTING HOUSING UNITS THROUGH FINANCIAL AND IN-KIND SUPPORT.

One of the best ways to maintain the availability of housing units, particularly those that are affordable for low and moderate income families, is to support the retention and rehabilitation of the existing housing supply. This means preventing the demolition of dwelling units that are in poor physical condition, limiting the conversion of residential units to commercial uses and preserving the quality of existing units through a program of active rehabilitation and maintenance.

Several programs currently exist in the City of Ithaca which
seek to accomplish those objectives. These include the various housing rehabilitation initiatives sponsored by Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services and the City of Ithaca's Section 17 Rental Rehabilitation Program.

INHS currently provides low-interest loans to homeowners for the purpose of making physical improvements to their homes. These homes are brought up to current building, electrical and plumbing codes, making them safer and more energy-efficient. The appearance of buildings is also improved, which provides a stimulus to the overall upgrading of the neighborhood.

The INHS House Recycling Program has as its primary objective the improvement of the city's most dilapidated housing units. The House Recycling Program obtains through purchase or gift dwelling units that have been condemned or abandoned and rehabilitates these units. They are then sold to low or moderate income families at below market interest rates, with future resale limited to other low income families for at least 15 years.

The City of Ithaca's Section 17 Rental Rehabilitation Program provides low-interest loans to the owners of rental properties for the purpose of upgrading the property. In return for the favorable interest rate on the loan, the rehabilitated units must be rented at below market rate rent levels for the life of the loan.

These programs have been primarily funded through grants from the New York State and Federal governments. The level of future funding of these programs is unclear, but the Planning Board believes that the City of Ithaca should aggressively seek any outside funding for these or similar programs as long as such funding is available. A commitment to assist in the renovation of rental housing is particularly important, since two-thirds of Ithaca's households are renters.

2. DEVELOP NEW PROJECT REVIEW PROCEDURES THAT PROVIDE MORE DISCRETIONARY REVIEW BY THE CITY AND MORE FLEXIBILITY IN PROJECT DESIGN.

One of the primary conflicts between the need to provide additional housing and the desire to preserve the stability of neighborhoods is that new projects are often found by neighborhood residents to be unacceptable in terms of location or design. Under the city's current zoning ordinance, most projects are developed under regulations which specify the overall parameters of height, bulk,
lot coverage and parking. If a developer can meet all of the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance, the project must be approved.

This system provides no opportunity for the public to comment on a proposed project, does not allow the city any discretion to seek modifications to the project, and does not give the developer any flexibility when it comes to modifying the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance.

It is also apparent that there are relatively large areas of the City of Ithaca that are zoned R-3a or R-3b where the potential for undesirable or out-of-scale residential projects exist. One example of this is the Northside neighborhood. These areas are at risk and the zoning for them should be immediately amended to reduce the potential intensity of as-of-right development.

There are two basic types of changes that are recommended by the Planning Board. The first is an enhanced site plan review procedure that will permit a discretionary review of large projects by City boards and staff. The appropriate boards to be involved in such review might be the Board of Zoning Appeals, the Planning Board and the Design Review Board, or some combination of these boards. Staff from the Building, Engineering, Fire and Planning Departments should also play a more active role in the review of proposed projects. The new site plan review procedure should be written to provide for more notice to the public about proposed projects and more ability for the public to make comments on these projects. It should also take into consideration in a more formal manner issues such as traffic and parking, landscaping, pedestrian circulation, drainage, lighting, tenancy and protection of the environment.

The second type of project review is intended to introduce more flexibility for developers to design and build creative projects. There are a variety of building types such as townhouse development, zero lot line development and cluster housing that are not now permitted in most zoning districts within the city. If the city is to take advantage of the few development sites remaining, or if wants to achieve the creative redevelopment of dilapidated or poorly utilized buildings, it must develop approval processes in which there is more flexibility in design than currently exists.
The trade-off for increased flexibility by developers must also be more discretion on the part of the city when considering the approval of the project. This proposed approval procedure is similar to the Planned Unit Development concept, which involves the approval of a master project plan which is subject to less restrictive requirements that the normal zoning regulations. This concept must be adapted to meet the development opportunities and project review considerations that are relevant to the City of Ithaca.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONFLICTS

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many of the housing and neighborhood problems that the City of Ithaca is asked to address are the result of differences between the various people that live and work in and around a neighborhood. The most frequently heard complaints involve lifestyle differences, particularly between students and non-students. The issues that cause conflict include noise, parking, the maintenance of buildings and grounds and lack of respect for other people's preferred lifestyle. Students who come to Ithaca are often living on their own for the first time and are primarily focused on the activities that originate on the campuses of Cornell and Ithaca College, not on the wider community of Ithaca residents. Ithaca's permanent residents, on the other hand, frequently characterize students as transients who have no interest in the community and its concerns.

Other neighborhood conflicts originate from concerns about the impacts of land uses that do not fit in with the preferred residential character of neighborhoods. Much of Ithaca was settled and developed before zoning controls that separated conflicting land uses were even conceived of. As a result, there are numerous examples throughout the city of commercial uses in the midst of residential areas. In addition, as Ithaca has developed as the commercial, governmental and service center of Tompkins County, there is increasing pressure on the neighborhoods that surround business areas. The problems that confront these areas include parking, traffic, the conversion of residential buildings to commercial uses and the general loss of neighborhood integrity.

Ithaca residents who live close to Cornell and Ithaca College are constantly confronted with the fear that either of these institutions will undertake expansions that will affect their neighborhood. The conflicts that occur between these institutions and the neighborhoods that surround them are not limited to the threat of development in the neighborhoods themselves; many of the changes that take place on the campuses have
significant impacts outside the boundaries of the campus. Examples of this phenomenon are the redirection of traffic patterns, the increasing incidence of commuter parking in neighborhoods and the constant growth of off-campus student housing.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR THE REDUCTION OF NEIGHBORHOOD CONFLICTS

1. THE POPULATION OF THE CITY OF ITHACA SHOULD GROW ONLY AT A RATE CONSISTENT WITH ITS ABILITY TO PROVIDE SERVICES AND PRESERVE NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY.

The Planning Board can that Ithaca's population be permitted to grow only to the extent that that growth does not unreasonably detract from the present quality of life in its neighborhoods. To that end, population growth should not be measured solely in terms of the number of new residents in a neighborhood, but also in terms of the impact that new residents have on the quality of life of a neighborhood.

2. THE CITY OF ITHACA SHOULD DEVELOP LAND USE CONTROLS THAT PERMIT VARYING TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF DEVELOPMENT IN DIFFERENT AREAS TO SERVE DIFFERENT POPULATIONS.

The Planning Board recognizes that different neighborhoods serve different populations, and that each can have its own special needs. It is appropriate, therefore, to permit different types of development in different neighborhoods. This will enable the development of a variety of different types of housing at varying densities and varying prices, thus increasing the housing opportunities available to Ithaca's residents.

3. THE CITY OF ITHACA SHOULD CLOSELY MONITOR, REGULATE AND DISCOURAGE THE ENCROACHMENT OR ENLARGEMENT OF COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS, PARTICULARLY ALONG THE EDGES OF RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS.

One of the methods that the city can employ to keep its neighborhoods functioning as stable residential areas is to severely limit the enlargement of existing commercial activities or the encroachment by new commercial activities. While some commercial enterprises have proven to be assets to residential areas, the potential for
conflicts between residential and commercial uses is great, and must be watched closely.

**ACTIONS TO REDUCE NEIGHBORHOOD CONFLICTS**

1. **DEVELOP NEW RESPONSES TO PROBLEMS THAT ORIGINATE FROM "LIFESTYLE" DIFFERENCES WITHIN NEIGHBORHOODS.**

The Planning Board has identified a series of possible actions that can be undertaken to help reduce the continuing conflicts that occur because of lifestyle differences. The first is to develop a series of modifications to the Zoning Ordinance that will permit the continued development of new housing, but will make it more difficult to aim that housing primarily at the student market. The suggested changes include reducing the density of development that is now permitted in the R-3a and R-3b zoning districts, placing limits on the number of bedrooms that may be developed in individual dwelling units, and requiring the development of buffer areas between new projects and their surrounding residential areas.

The second proposal is to establish a better relationship between students and non-students. This needs to be done through efforts made by neighborhood civic associations, city officials and the student housing offices at Cornell and Ithaca College. The Collegetown Neighborhood Council is an example of a successful forum for the resolution of student and non-student issues in areas where these groups coexist. The city could build on the experiences of the Collegetown Neighborhood Council to integrate off-campus students more fully into the neighborhoods that they live in. In addition, Ithaca College and Cornell must improve their supervision over student who live in off-campus housing. They can help to inform students about their responsibilities as city residents, the laws that apply to parking, noise, property maintenance and recycling, and the penalties that can be imposed for failing to obey those laws.

The third area that the Planning Board recommends for improvement is the Police Department's response to problems created by students. The most frequently heard complaint about students is they disrupt neighborhoods with loud parties and late hours. While the Police do respond to complaints about these parties, that response often seems to have little or no effect. The city needs to develop clearer and more easily enforceable standards governing obnoxious behavior, and those standards need to be rigidly enforced by the Police Department.
2. ESTABLISH ON-GOING WORKING GROUPS BETWEEN CORNELL AND ITHACA COLLEGE, NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS AND CITY OFFICIALS TO DEVELOP SOLUTIONS TO NEIGHBORHOOD PROBLEMS CAUSED BY CORNELL AND ITHACA COLLEGE.

The relationships between Cornell, Ithaca College and the neighborhoods that surround the campuses are nearly always adversarial because there is almost a total lack of communication between the affected groups. Neighborhood residents feel that there is no place for them to effectively register their concerns about how Cornell and I.C. are affecting their neighborhoods, leading to a sense of frustration and confrontation. Cornell and I.C. make little effort to inform city officials and neighborhood residents about their development plans.

This tension could be reduced if a more formal working relationship were developed. The Planning Board recommends that the Mayor work to establish such working groups, and that these groups meet on a regular basis to discuss issues such as parking, traffic, student behavior, housing and building construction. The City of Ithaca should work more closely with both Cornell and I.C. to coordinate planning activities in the areas where the campuses and neighborhoods interface.

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The maintenance of the quality and appearance of buildings and grounds is an important factor in preserving the stability of residential areas in the city. The feelings of safety and belonging in a neighborhood are strongly tied to the physical appearance of the neighborhood's buildings and the grounds that surround them.

The City of Ithaca's development of a strong program of code enforcement for residential rental properties has resulted in a significant upgrading of the quality of many buildings in Ithaca. Rental properties are now required to maintain at least the minimum
standards required to assure that health, personal safety and energy conservation considerations are adequately met. These standards have also helped to assure that buildings are not allowed to deteriorate to the point that it is more economical to demolish them than to maintain them.

However, it is widely perceived by many of Ithaca's residents that there are still buildings and grounds that are not adequately maintained, and that this lack of maintenance detracts from the overall quality of the surrounding neighborhood. Many, but not all, of these inadequately maintained buildings are rental properties that are owned by absentee landlords. These buildings generally meet the requirements of the Housing Code, but still do not receive a level of attention and investment that is required to make them look attractive and well-maintained. Many of these problems are simply cosmetic, such as peeling paint, untrimmed shrubs, trash on the grounds and cars parked in a chaotic manner. The more serious problems of this type, such as leaking gutters or deteriorating porches, can lead to more serious and expensive maintenance problems later.

Complaints that are registered with the Building Department do receive attention, but the Building Inspectors must rely on persuasion and cajoling to cause many types of repairs to be made, since no clear standards exist for many maintenance items. Even when it is clear that a standard is being violated, the enforcement of that standard may take many months and may require the city to go to court before the property owner can be forced to respond. This is a cumbersome and time-consuming process. In addition, the highest priority of city's Building Inspectors is the enforcement of health and safety codes, not the correction of deficiencies in the appearance of buildings. These types of complaints can occupy many hours of a Building Inspector's day, detracting from his or her more important responsibilities.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS MAINTENANCE**

1. **IMPROVE THE MAINTENANCE OF BOTH OWNER-OCCUPIED AND INVESTOR-OWNED DWELLING UNITS IN THE CITY OF ITHACA.**

   The desired types of improvements are primarily in appearance, but these improvements will significantly help to preserve the quality of Ithaca's housing stock, improve the appearance of neighborhoods, and help to make rental housing more acceptable.

2. **IMPROVE THE RESPONSE BY THE CITY OF ITHACA TO COMPLAINTS ABOUT POOR PROPERTY MAINTENANCE.**

   New procedures that will allow quicker and more effective action on complaints about building and grounds maintenance need to be established.
These procedures should be put in place for the two city departments that handle these issues, the Building Department and the Department of Public Works.

**ACTIONS TO PROMOTE THE IMPROVEMENT OF BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS MAINTENANCE**

1. **DEVELOP PERFORMANCE STANDARDS TO REGULATE THE MAINTENANCE OF BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS.**

   The City of Ithaca currently enforces a series of regulations that include the Zoning Ordinance, the Housing Code, health regulations and a series of local ordinances. Taken together, these ordinances do not create a logical and understandable set of regulations that govern the maintenance and appearance of buildings and their grounds. The Planning Board recommends that a set of performance standards be developed for the purpose of accurately defining the desired level of maintenance for the maintenance issues that are felt to be important. Examples of these issues include the mowing of lawns, the storage of trash or junk, the painting of the exterior of buildings and the parking of cars.

   The standards that are developed need to be specific enough and understandable enough so that both property owners and city enforcement personnel can determine whether a standard has been violated. The standards should be strict enough so that a minimum acceptable level of maintenance is maintained, but they should not be so strict as to violate a property owner's individual rights.

2. **DEVELOP NEW PROCEDURES FOR THE ENFORCEMENT OF BUILDING AND PROPERTY PERFORMANCE STANDARDS.**

   An efficient system for the enforcement of building and grounds maintenance performance standards requires that sufficient staff time can be allotted to enforcement and that the penalty for violations of the standards be administered quickly and easily.

   The Planning Board proposes that the enforcement of these standards be administered through a system that is similar to the writing of a traffic ticket. If it can be documented that a performance standard has been violated, a ticket can be written immediately as the penalty for not obeying the standard. As with a traffic ticket, the property owner would have the right to appeal the fine. Correction of the deficiency would have to occur within a certain time period, or a second fine could
be instituted.

The Planning Board recommends that the responsibility for enforcing the performance standards be given to personnel who have a level of authority similar to the city's parking meter checkers. This would free the Building Inspectors to concentrate on the life safety and structural concerns that are legitimately a higher priority, but would also provide for an appropriate level of effort to adequately enforce these standards.

INPUT BY NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The residents of Ithaca's neighborhoods frequently call the city to register complaints, ask for information or request that a service or facility by provided. The city's response to these calls is a frequent source of frustration. Callers are often routed to the wrong department or wrong person, their calls are not returned, there is frequently little or no response to a call and there is often no follow-up from the department that is handling the concern. This has left neighborhood residents with the impression that the City of Ithaca is unresponsive to their concerns.

The types of requests that the city receives range from a complaint about a zoning or building issue to a request for a new neighborhood park. Within the city, each of these requests make trigger a different response by elected officials, city staff and other members of the general public, including the press. The city needs to develop a more consistent and efficient approach to the handling of these requests when they are initially received, through the investigation of the issues surrounding the request, and in the disposition of the matter.
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR INPUT FROM NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS

1. IMPROVE THE RESPONSE BY CITY DEPARTMENTS TO COMPLAINTS, REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION AND REQUESTS FOR SERVICES.

Throughout the public meetings sponsored by the Planning Board, city residents have expressed frustration with the city's response to requests. While these requests are generally not significant public safety or broad policy concerns, they almost always are of immediate and important concern to the caller, and they should produce a serious response by the city.

ACTIONS TO IMPROVE INPUT FROM NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS

1. DEVELOP AN IMPROVED SYSTEM FOR CITY DEPARTMENTS TO RESPOND TO COMPLAINTS AND REQUESTS FROM NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS.

All city departments that handle requests from city residents should develop a formalized, consistent system to respond to those requests. The minimum requirements of such a system would be procedures to log the day, time and type of request, the routing of the request to the appropriate person, having that person deal with the request in a timely manner, and following-up with the person who made the request so that that person knows that some action has been taken. This would increase the accountability of the city's departments and provide residents with more assurance that the city is acting in a manner that is responsive to their request.

The Building Department, Police Department, Department of Public Works and Planning Department most often receive requests for information or action. However, it would be beneficial to all departments if a city-wide set of guidelines for handling requests and complaints were established.
Parking and traffic issues are one of the most prominent concerns of Ithaca's residents. Truck traffic, excessive speeds, traffic congestion and lack of parking are constant reminders that Ithaca is a city where urban densities create traffic problems such as safety for pedestrians, noise, vibration, accidents and inconvenience.

Many people believe that the city's existing traffic and parking regulations are sufficient to control most of the problems that exist, but they are not satisfied with the level of enforcement of those regulations. For example, most of Ithaca's streets have a thirty mile per hour speed limit, yet motorists regularly exceed that limit with little fear of being caught. A number of streets are posted with signs that prohibit through truck traffic, yet there is virtually no enforcement of those regulations. Cars are often parked so that they block driveways or remain in the same on-street parking space for days at a time, yet the Police appear to be unable to respond to complaints about these matters in a timely manner.

The city's Alternate Side of the Street parking regulations are a constant source of confusion and frustration to City residents. New residents of the city do not understand how the regulations work, and frequently learn only after having received numerous parking tickets. Long-term residents fail to comprehend the logic behind a law that requires them to move their cars every night of the year when street maintenance occurs infrequently and usually during the day, when parking is not restricted. For many years, this issue has drawn the ire of city residents because it does not serve the purpose that it was intended to serve.

**Strategic Objectives to Improve Parking and Traffic**

1. **Improve the Enforcement of the City's Existing Parking and Traffic Regulations.**

   Enforcement of the parking and traffic regulations that are already on the books needs to be made a higher priority. The lack of effective enforcement renders the existing regulations ineffective, and results in a constant source of frustration for the residents of residential neighborhoods.
2. DEVELOP AN IMPROVED SYSTEM TO MANAGE ON-STREET PARKING AND STREET MAINTENANCE TO REPLACE THE CURRENT ALTERNATE SIDE OF THE STREET PARKING REGULATIONS.

On-street parking regulations must be logically tied to the city's needs for street maintenance and snow plowing. On-street parking needs and concerns also vary considerably from neighborhood to neighborhood within the city. Proposed regulations should recognize those differences and respond to them in different ways.

### ACTIONS TO IMPROVE PARKING AND TRAFFIC

1. DEVELOP A PROGRAM OF IMPROVED ENFORCEMENT OF THE CITY OF ITHACA'S EXISTING PARKING AND TRAFFIC REGULATIONS.

The City of Ithaca needs to make the enforcement of its existing traffic and parking regulations a higher priority. It can do this by developing a program of strict enforcement at key times and key locations throughout the city. For example, on roads where speeding is prevalent, a police car could be positioned to catch speeders and issue tickets for an hour at a time at random intervals. A highly visible effort to catch speeders at key locations would create a presence that would help to dissuade speeders throughout the city. Similarly, strict enforcement of parking regulations in the areas where parking is an especially difficult problem would help to maintain the intent of the city's regulations.

2. REVISE THE CITY OF ITHACA'S EXISTING ALTERNATE SIDE OF THE STREET PARKING REGULATIONS.

The Planning Board recommends that the City of Ithaca revise its existing Alternate Side of the Street Parking Regulations and create new regulations that make more sense with respect to the city's maintenance needs and the demands created by on-street parkers. The new regulations need to recognize that both parking and street conditions and needs vary considerably throughout the city. A system that makes sense in one neighborhood might create unnecessary burdens on the residents of other neighborhoods.

An ad hoc committee studying the existing Alternate Side of the Street parking regulations recently made recommendations for improving the regulations, but these recommendations were not adopted. The effort to improve these regulations should build on the the work...
completed by this committee and move forward toward implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

These recommendations represent the results of an eighteen-month long effort by the Planning Board to identify Ithaca's housing and neighborhood problems, determine which problems are the most critical and develop actions that can address those problems. There are many other housing and neighborhood issues which, although have been judged at this time to be less significant, nevertheless demand future attention.

The strategic planning process is also designed to be a process which constantly recognizes and responds to new issues as they come up. The Planning Board fully intends to continue to look at housing and neighborhood issues, and they will recommend further actions to the Common Council as may be necessary.
## APPENDIX 1

### SIGNIFICANT HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD PROBLEMS

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