

June 12, 2013

City of Ithaca Planning Board
Ithaca, NY 14850
Via Email

Dear Planning Board,

The ideas behind this redevelopment project at Purity have been straightforward.

- Improve the long term viability and survivability of Purity, essentially a seasonal business.
- Improve the look of one of the entry points to Ithaca
- Make the area beautiful, ala the NYC High Line and connect the waterfront to the neighborhood east of Fulton and Meadow.

Please start thinking about this project from the reality of the present:

- Purity exists on a very skinny sliver of land (further constrained, from a building standpoint, by a sewer easement that cuts across about 40% of the property).
- Purity is located between two 3 lane state highways where people seldom drive the posted 30 mph speed limit. It is not a Family-pedestrian-friendly environment and certainly not a Family-cycling-friendly environment.
- It is an ugly area, surrounded by ugly highways, not-so-pretty buildings. It is not known as a place to live. It is not known as a place to shop.
- There is no TCAT bus service within a reasonable distance.
- The vast majority of Purity customers come by car (the reasons why are many and varied and have available time, distance-from-home, and Purity's location between highways as major influencers). They always will.

I have been interested, as a citizen, business owner, and NOT as an experienced developer, in doing my part to change the reality points noted above. While I respect the effort and theory of the 1999 West End Urban Design Plan, I would respectfully point out that it has resulted in not much quality development in the intervening 15 years. I am willing to take serious financial risk as a first-mover, but not stupid risk.

To pay for such a quality building as well as landscaping that I don't believe has been supplied by anyone in Tompkins County other than a major university, I need to make sure I can pay for it through increased retail business at Purity and via a fully rented building to apartment dwellers and office tenants.



As much as I agree with the points made by the Board and the Conservation Advisory Council, I do not take responsibility for 60 years of car culture and everyone wanting to "drive everywhere we may wish to go". Purity customers come to Purity by car. They come from all over Tompkins County and beyond. To say that we should redesign Purity to be more pedestrian- and bike-friendly means doing things I can't do: providing TCAT service AND convincing everyone to take the bus; making Meadow and Fulton Streets so "calm" that parents will feel comfortable crossing them with little kids or biking along them with a kid on the back of the bike or in a tow along. I have raised 4 kids towing them places on bikes, but it would never occur to me to bike with them on Route 13.

It would be great to have lots of needed parking on-site. It is not possible given the size, shape, and location of the property.

It would be great to have tenants that have no need of cars. I am sure that some might be attracted to my cool building and not mind that it is "off the TCAT grid". Most would feel the need to have a car to go places, I think.

It appears to me that most businesses like to make things travel-convenient for their patrons. If, as a society and a city, we want instead to set the bar higher and say cars are not the way to go, then I am right there with you. BUT... the infrastructure to make living in that sort of world needs to be in place FIRST: Greatly improved bus or light rail service, car sharing at every corner, vastly more taxi cabs with more affordable rates. Those sorts of things. To ask people to forgo their cars without giving them a way to be mobile is not good for them. To ask a business owner to do the same means they will, until that needed infrastructure is in place, go elsewhere.

As much as we would like the part of the West End where Purity exists to be a pedestrian and biking haven, it is not. It is not as dense as Collegetown. If the goal is truly to get to that, then it is important that you let businesses that depend upon customers from far as well as near know that. Be clear and concise and reject not just the parking you don't like, but the development of a business that 'perpetuates the car culture'. This is a whole project, well thought-out vis a vis parking needs.

My wife and I have spent 15 plus years saving, owning, fixing, and running Purity. It was just about out of business when we bought it. Perhaps, given the strictures of the West End Urban Design Plan, Purity is either a business that has outlived its time or is in the wrong place. In a way, that is probably true...we are like an ice cream superstore that serves a wide region, where maybe the better model is small ice cream shops that serve only small, densely settled areas. You guys think about urban planning...I think about ice cream planning...!

There is a reason that Ben and Jerry's failed downtown (and why we did as well). Not enough walk-by customers and no place to park for those wanting to come from further afield. And that area is pretty "dense". It is the nature of the ice cream business to be a drop-in and drive away business. Surely if the City is OK with banks with lines of cars in drive-thru lanes sitting and belching exhaust, then a place to park, turn off the motor, and enjoy some quality family time isn't so bad.

Mitigations provided by the project include:

On State land: extensive plantings on Fulton and Meadow Streets

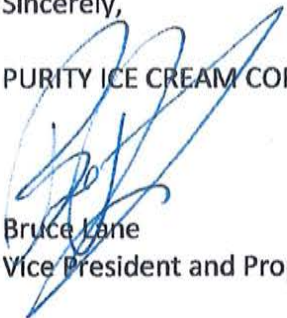
On City land: extensive plantings on Cascadilla and Esty Streets, a bus shelter if a TCAT routes comes by 621 Cascadilla Street within 3 years of a project approval date, permeable paving at 621 Cascadilla St., a very nice wall with vegetation at 621 Cascadilla St., bike lockers at 555 N. Fulton St.

Other sustainable features that provide mitigation: Solar hot water system, PV solar collectors. Electric car charging station.

Thanks for your attention and your reviews of this proposed project. I have learned a lot and greatly appreciate the time that you, as citizens, give to the City in serving on this Board.

Sincerely,

PURITY ICE CREAM COMPANY, INC.



Bruce Lane
Vice President and Property Owner