

**City of Ithaca**  
**FULL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FORM (FEAF) — Part III**  
**Purity Ice Cream Mixed-Use Project**  
**700 Cascadilla St., 520 Esty St., & 619 Cascadilla St.**  
**Date Created: 4/1/13 | Revised: 5/3/13, 5/22/13 & 6/19/13**

**Revisions incorporating applicant's June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013 memorandum  
& associated materials are underlined.**

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The applicant is proposing to expand its ground floor operations, add four stories to the existing building and develop two off-site parking areas. The building will have a footprint of 7,434 SF and a gross floor area of 35,252 SF, and will include 20-24 one-bedroom and two-bedroom residential rental units and up to 1,000 to 6,000 SF of rental office space. The Purity Ice Cream store will maintain 1,800 SF in its existing location and include a new addition with a kitchen, seating, and loading area. The ground floor will also include retail space, lobby, and ancillary space for residents. The major structural system will be a steel frame, with friction piles and concrete grade beams as the anticipated foundation system. The project will employ a brick cavity wall on the north façade, while the south façade will be mostly glazing with a composite metal panel cladding system. Site work and exterior improvements include outside seating, sidewalk improvements, landscaping, paving, a 17-space parking area, and a guardrail along N. Fulton Street. The off-site parking areas (totaling 54 spaces) are located at 520 Esty and 619 Cascadilla Streets. The Fulton Street parking area has 40 spaces, with ingress on N. Fulton Street, and ingress and egress off Esty Street. The parking lot at 619 Cascadilla Street will have 14 parking spaces, with ingress and egress on Cascadilla Street. The project is in the WEDZ-1a and -1b Zoning Districts. This is a Type I Action under the City of Ithaca Environmental Quality Review Ordinance §176-4 B. (1). (k) and an Unlisted Action under the State Environmental Quality Review Act and is subject to environmental review. The project requires approval by NYS DOT for relocation of the curbcut.

**IMPACT ON LAND**

No impact anticipated.

**IMPACT ON WATER**

No impact anticipated.

**IMPACT ON DRAINAGE**

No impact anticipated.

**IMPACT ON AIR**

No impact anticipated.

### **IMPACT ON PLANTS & ANIMALS**

The parking lot at 520 Esty Street appears to require the removal of one street tree in the State's right-of-way.

No impact anticipated.

### **IMPACT ON AESTHETIC RESOURCES**

Project site is in a highly visible location at the confluence of N. Meadow and N. Fulton Streets. The site is a gateway to the West End and to Ithaca, for travelers from any points north. At 5 stories, the building will be one of the tallest and most prominent in the West End and could have a character-defining impact on this quickly-developing part of the City.

The applicant has submitted visual simulations and renderings. The Lead Agency has requested the applicant explore ways to give the north façade a more welcoming and residential character. In response, the applicant has added clerestory windows and water table detailing into the brick wall, and landscaping along the Fulton Street right-of-way. Further development of this façade will be done during Site Plan Review.

The project includes three parking lots. The applicant has submitted landscape plans for each of the sites; however, the plans need to be developed with a finer level of detail to determine if the plantings provide adequate required screening. Much of the screening for the Esty Street parking lot appears to be in the State's right-of-way — over which the City has no jurisdiction.

### **IMPACT ON HISTORIC RESOURCES**

No impact anticipated.

### **IMPACT ON OPEN SPACE AREA**

No impact anticipated.

### **IMPACT ON TRANSPORTATION**

The City Transportation Engineer has requested the following from the applicant:

- Information regarding pedestrian access during construction-related sidewalk closure along Cascadilla Street.
- Trip generation analysis. — The applicant has provided this.
- Removal of existing driveway/curbcut on Cascadilla Street, along the new portion of the building. If the applicant is expecting deliveries from the street, a concrete wall will be allowed to a full-height curb. If not, the Lead Agency requests the installation of a tree lawn.
- Extension of the sidewalk along the east property line a few more feet to the south, to connect to the Esty Street sidewalk.

- In addition, the following City Transportation Engineer comment was submitted about the Esty Street parking lot:

“I still don't think the Esty Street parking lot dimensions will work. Coming in from Fulton Street, they are showing an 18' long parking space and a 12' wide drive aisle, for a total of 30' between the curbs. Architectural Graphic Standards (8<sup>th</sup> edition) recommends a 48' dimension instead, suggesting that it will be very difficult to get in or out of these spaces, which include the ADA accessible spaces. Similarly, the rest of the lot is shown as either the same condition (western half) or as a double-loaded two-way aisle. For this condition, AGS suggests a 66' dimension and the plan shows 56 feet.”

In a memo to the Planning Board, dated June 17, 2013, the City Transportation Engineer stated that a two-way driveway on Cascadilla Street will be allowed and should be located as far to the east as possible. He also requested the lot be signed for employee-only parking.

**[INSERT APPLICANT'S RESPONSE TO TRAFFIC ENGINEER'S CONCERNS & RESOLUTION]**

In a memo from the Ithaca Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) to the Planning Board, dated May 28, 2013, CAC members remarked the project does not adequately consider and incorporate the needs of pedestrians and cyclists, and they requested the applicant provide additional pedestrian and bike amenities. The CAC also requested the applicant substantiate its stated parking needs and attempt to integrate the site more into the City's existing transportation system.

In response, the applicant has provided updated and clarifying information, prepared by SRF Associates, and dated June 11, 2013, on the parking evaluation. The information concludes that the project requires a total of 47-49 off-site parking spaces, in addition to the proposed on site spaces. ***The applicant is proposing 54 off-site parking spaces.***

#### **IMPACT ON ENERGY**

No impact anticipated.

#### **IMPACT ON NOISE & ODORS**

No impact anticipated.

#### **IMPACT ON PUBLIC HEALTH**

No impact anticipated.

## **IMPACT ON GROWTH & CHARACTER OF COMMUNITY OR NEIGHBORHOOD**

Although the project as a whole implements several City goals, the stand-alone parking area on 619 Cascadilla Street is problematic. The proposed lot is contiguous to two residential properties. The applicant has proposed a 6'-tall fence along the east, and a portion of the south, property line. Parking spaces are nose-in on the eastern side and approximately 3' from the fence. The 14-space parking lot has one two way curbcut on Cascadilla Street. The NYS DOT has requested that the applicant close the current curb cut on North Meadow Street.

The proposed parking lot is in the WEDZ-1b Zoning District, which, along with WEDZ-1a, was created to implement the *West End Urban Design Plan* (1999). Both the Zoning Districts and the plan set forth standards to foster dense, mixed-use, pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly redevelopment, and an urban visual character. They also promote the creation of a strong *street wall*, with buildings pulled close to the sidewalk and a broad tree lawn between sidewalk and curb. Breaks in the street wall were intended to be kept at a minimum, by requiring any parking areas be located behind buildings, where possible, and between buildings, where rear parking is not feasible.

The principal aims of creating the WEDZ zones included the following planning objectives:

- redevelopment that results in a visually appealing, urban, mixed-use district, including retail, and encouragement of office and residential uses; and
- protection of the traditional residential neighborhoods east of Meadow Street; and
- easing of impacts of the anticipated transition west of Meadow Street from single-family houses to denser mixed uses, which may include residential uses, without diminishing the overall potential for redevelopment; and
- creation of an attractive and safe pedestrian environment, co-existing with high-volume traffic.

In a memo from the Ithaca Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) to the Planning Board, dated May 28, 2013, CAC members remarked the project does not adequately consider and incorporate the needs of pedestrians and cyclists, and they requested the applicant provide additional pedestrian and bike amenities, including those that make travel to the site more appealing and hospitable, like enhanced plantings, strengthening the street wall by developing all three corners with multi-story buildings that anchor the corner lot and reinforce the street wall, and providing additional bike infrastructure. The CAC argues that enhancing multi-modal amenities “will not only enable patrons to more readily walk or bike to Purity, but also enhance the visual urban character of the neighborhood.”

The CAC also requested the applicant substantiate its stated parking needs and attempt to integrate the site more into the City's existing transportation system.

In response, the applicant has provided updated and clarifying information, prepared by SRF Associates and dated June 11, 2013, on the parking evaluation. The information concludes that the project requires a total of 47-49 off-site site parking spaces in addition to the proposed on site spaces. ***The applicant is proposing 54 off-site parking spaces.***

In a March 26, 2013 letter from Ed Marx, Tompkins County Commissioner of Planning, to Lisa Nicholas, Senior Planner, the following initial comments were provided:

- In support of the City's *West End Urban Design Plan* (1999), the applicant should be required to restructure the way in which parking is proposed. The current proposal is both inefficient and runs counter to one of the plan's principal aims: "[...] creation of an attractive and safe pedestrian environment co-existing with high-volume traffic." We support the plan's design standards, which call for the creation of a strong street wall, where "[...] on site parking must be located at the rear of the building where possible and shared parking is encouraged." The plan further stated that "[...] parcels at block corners are especially important to visual character. When possible, buildings should be located on these sites." The proposed parking scheme appears to run counter to several aspects of *West End Urban Design Plan*, which could result in an adverse impact to the West End.
- If parking were allowed on the corner of Fulton and Esty, we believe the amount of pavement could be significantly reduced without reducing the number of parking spaces and allow for the establishment of added green space. The four spaces closest to Fulton Street and the access drive to those spaces could be eliminated and the four spaces accommodated elsewhere on the redesigned lot.

The Lead Agency finds the proposed parking area *institutionalizes* an undesirable use and has a negative visual and noise impact on the neighborhood.

The applicant has stated that the project incorporates alternative solutions as outlined in the *West End Urban Design Plan* — such as using plantings if a street wall is not possible — and has provided the following response to concerns about incompatibilities with the plan:

The principal aims of the study include:

1. Redevelopment that results in a visually appealing, urban mixed-use district, including retail, office, and residential uses. The project team argues that that this goal has been achieved as proposed.
2. Protection of the traditional residential neighborhoods east of Meadow Street. The project team proposes that this goal has been achieved with the fence at the rear lot line of 621 Cascadilla Street (see mitigations below).
3. Easing the impacts of the anticipated transition west of Meadow Street from single-family houses to denser mixed-uses, which may include residential uses without diminishing the overall potential for redevelopment. The project team proposes that this goal has been achieved with the fence at the rear lot line of 621 Cascadilla Street and with the landscaping (see mitigations below) that connects the lots along Cascadilla Street the applicant also notes that the goal states that the overall potential for redevelopment should not be sacrificed in favor of optimizing the relationship between adjacent neighborhoods.
4. Creation of an attractive and safe pedestrian environment co-existing with high-volume traffic. The project team proposes that this goal has been achieved as proposed with the landscaping plans submitted, as well as the building design.

Mitigations Proposed by Applicant:

The applicant proposes that the holistic landscaping plan along Cascadilla Street that connects the three lots in the project and goes well above the quality expected of projects in the City. Use of tightly packed, native, drought tolerant planting, interesting paving, and bike racks on City property alongside a building that effectively engages with the streetscape should make for a very lively addition to the West End. Existing trees will be incorporated into the plan, and the existing loading area width will be reduced. Similarly attractive landscaping will be added to the City right-of-way on Esty St. at the southern edge of the Fulton St. lot as well.

The applicant proposes that the Cascadilla lot is currently empty and in need of improvement and intends to install an aesthetically pleasing fence that (he argues) exceeds the requirement to screen the proposed parking area from the adjacent residential zone.

The applicant is proposing to use pervious paving in the Cascadilla lot to serve as an exemplar of sustainable stormwater management.

The applicant has initiated a conversation with TCAT to plan for the installation of a TCAT bus stop on the Meadow St. side of the corner. Preliminary discussions with TCAT have been measured but favorable to the property owner's contributions, (see included letter from Doug Swarts of TCAT dated June 12, 2013). Installation of the stop would depend on TCAT route changes that would serve the new development and the northern West End, which it currently does not (see included illustration). The applicant feels that this proposal meshes well with the Board's interest in encouraging transit- and pedestrian-oriented development in the West End, and that the Purity Project can spark the evolution of bus routes to an underserved area.

The applicant has reconfigured the Fulton Street parking lot, increased landscaped area, and simplified the entrance on Fulton Street. The majority of landscaping appears to be off the property in the State's right-of-way, which is not under City jurisdiction and would require NYS DOT approval.

Mitigations Requested by Lead Agency:

The Lead Agency has requested the applicant either: (1) investigate redesigning the on-site and Esty Street parking areas for better spatial efficiency, resulting in more parking spaces in one or both of these parking areas and, thus, remove the 14-space Cascadilla Street lot; or (2) investigate locating parking at the future Enterprise Rent-A-Car site. The applicant has done this as requested and has not been able to eliminate the 14-space lot.

The site plan of the Esty Street Lot, AS110, dated 3/1/13, shows 29 parking spaces, while subsequent plans, dated 4/3/13 and 5/2/13, show 40 spaces. The Lead Agency questions why the additional 11 spaces cannot accommodate/replace those on the proposed Cascadilla Street lot. The applicant should erect prominent "Employee Parking Only" signage to reduce turn-over traffic, thereby minimizing the negative impact to the neighborhood, as well as pedestrians, in the Cascadilla Street parking area.

**PUBLIC CONTROVERSY**

None, at this time.

**Prepared by:** Lisa Nicholas, Senior Planner

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