

City of Ithaca
FULL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FORM (FEAF) — Part III
Harold's Square Mixed-Use, The Commons — Date Created: 2/6/13
Updated by Staff: 4/4/13, 6/10/13 & 6/20/13

UNRESOLVED ITEMS AS OF 6/20/13 ARE UNDERLINED & IN BOLD

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant is proposing to develop a 137-foot tall, 11-story (including roof space), mixed-use building of approximately 151,000 GSF. The project will include one story (11,555 SF) of ground-floor retail, three stories (51,185 SF) of upper-story office, and six stories of residential space (up to 46 units). The residential tower has been redesigned from previous submissions. It is set back 62' from the building's four-story Commons façade, with two one-story step-backs. The building will have two main entrances, one on the Commons and one on Green Street, with an atrium linking the two streets. The applicant proposes an exterior bridge connecting the third floor to the Green Street parking garage. In addition to standard rooftop mechanical elements, the top of the tower will include a glassed-in multi-purpose room for use by the building's office and residential tenants, as well as a small fitness room and a west-facing terrace. The applicant is proposing to work with the City to reconfigure the service functions at the rear of the building, including trash/recycling storage and loading.

The project is in the CDB-60 and CDB-140 Zoning Districts and requires an area variance for rear yard setback. This is a Type I Action under both the City of Ithaca Environmental Quality Review Ordinance §176-4 B. (1)(h)[4], B. (1)(k), and B. (1)(n), and the State Environmental Quality Review Act, 617.4 (b)(9), and is subject to environmental review.

The project may require a State Building Code Variance.

IMPACT ON LAND

The project site is in the downtown core and has been extensively developed. The site currently contains the two-story building at 123-127 E. State Street, the one-story building at 133 E. State Street, and the one-story building at 135 E. State Street, all of which will be demolished to allow redevelopment of the site. The three-story Sage Building at the east of the site will be retained and incorporated into the project.

Construction duration is estimated at 18 months, beginning Spring 2014.

Foundation Work:

The current basement floor plan illustrates a full-depth basement under most of the proposed structure. The existing buildings on the site to be demolished also have full basements; therefore, the applicant expects the amount of excavation to be limited. At the north side of the site, abutting the Commons, the intent is to save as much of the existing basement retaining walls as possible, to act as embankment shoring. As needed, the soils will be benched back into the Ithaca Commons and its coinciding construction project. To maintain as much of the rear alley way as possible for construction access, sheet piling shall be provided along the south edge of the site. The existing basement walls of the neighboring buildings to the east and west shall be completely exposed during demolition and excavation. Sheet piling along the north side (Commons) is not anticipated, if the foundation activities occur simultaneous to the utilities project/prior to its completion.

Based upon expected loads and soil conditions of neighboring projects, it is currently assumed the new structure shall be completely supported **on a mat foundation** [INSERT DESCRIPTION OF A MAT FOUNDATION].

The entire basement slab shall be a soil-supported slab-on-grade. Most of the work will be done within the project footprint, and within the parameters described in the construction routing plans and narrative. A drill rig for the caissons will be located within the building footprint. Reinforcement cages will be assembled and concrete will be pumped into place from a concrete pump truck.

Through coordination with the City of Ithaca, in parallel with its utilities project, the foundation work is anticipated to coincide with this project.

Potential Construction Impacts – Foundation Work:

- Lack of access to rear alley. The proposed construction limit line extends to the parking garage, completely blocking the public way for the duration of the project.
- The project site is in close proximity to residential, office, and retail uses. Construction activities will create short-term, but nevertheless significant disturbances to all daytime users, particularly in combination with the concurrent Commons Repair and Upgrade Project.
- Encroachment on City properties/utilities

Mitigations Offered by Applicant:

Upon exposure of the neighboring basement foundation walls, their condition will be assessed and repairs will be coordinated, as required, with the building owners to maintain a safe construction environment. More information about the monitoring plan, including which building will be monitored, is required.

Mitigations Required by the Lead Agency:

- Limit noise-producing construction times to between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m., M-F
- Pedestrian access plan [NOT YET PROVIDED]

IMPACT ON WATER

No impacts anticipated.

IMPACT ON DRAINAGE

Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPP) is required.

No impacts anticipated.

IMPACT ON AIR

Construction impacts only.

IMPACT ON PLANTS & ANIMALS

No impacts anticipated.

IMPACT ON AESTHETIC RESOURCES

The project site is in the downtown core and has been extensively developed. The site currently contains the two-story former CVS/Race Office Building at 123-127 East State Street, the one-story 133 East State Street, and the one-story former Harold's Army and Navy Store at 135 East State Street, all of which will be demolished to allow redevelopment of the site. The three-story Sage Building at the east of the site will be retained and incorporated into the project.

Due to the proposed 11-story residential tower on the Green Street side of the building (six stories of residential, plus roof programming above four stories of retail and office), the building will be visible from many points in the city, including downtown, East, West, and South Hills. The building will also have a presence along the Green Street and Cayuga Street corridors. Because of its height and prominent location, the appearance of all building facades is significant, including the portion of the east façade that is on the Commons level.

Building materials and colors will be further developed during Site Plan Review to ensure they are in harmony with the new Commons finishes.

In a letter dated 3/26/13 from Ed Marx, Tompkins County Commissioner of Planning, to Lisa Nicholas, Senior Planner, the following initial comment was submitted regarding impact to aesthetic resources:

"It is encouraging to see the project intention to build in accordance with U.S. Green Building Council's LEED guidelines. To further advance energy savings, we suggest the consideration of a green roof for the portion which fronts the Commons. This would also provide a much more aesthetically pleasing view for the occupants of residential units. If a green roof is not required, then at minimum light colored reflective roofing materials should be required."

In a subsequent letter, dated 4/22/13, from Ed Marx, Tompkins County Commissioner of Planning, to Lisa Nicholas, Senior Planner, the following comment was submitted regarding aesthetic resources:

"We also recognize the visual modeling provided with this application as a first step to analyzing visual impacts, but recommend that the City require an industry standard visual impact assessment that superimposes the proposed structure on updated photographic imagery and includes analysis of the various shadow and visual impacts. This analysis should include views from the County Library and Green Street bus stops where the most significant change in the character of the built environment is likely to occur."

The applicant has provided a series of visualizations depicting the project from areas around the Commons to the satisfaction of the Lead Agency.

In order to evaluate potential impacts, the following information is needed:

- **Building materials samples and keyed/colored elevations.** (NOTE: A MATERIALS SHEET WAS RECEIVED WITH THE 3/5/13 SUBMISSION — ACTUAL SAMPLES ARE REQUESTED TO COMPLETE THE CEQR.)
- **From 3/19/13 Project Review Committee meeting — Show how the color of the proposed terra cotta finishes will be coordinated with Commons paving colors.**

The applicant is offering the following mitigations to any potential impacts on aesthetic resources:

- The massing of the new structure will allocate the retail/business portion of its program on the first four floors at a maximum height of 60 feet, as allowed by zoning code. The taller residential portion of the project will be positioned along the perimeter of south property line (parallel to East Green Street), approximately 62 feet away from the Ithaca Commons with two one-story step-backs.

The applicant states that organizing the building massing in this manner is intended to achieve the following:

- Mitigate the perception of the overall height of the building from the street, and maintain the existing street character and scale along the Ithaca Commons.
- Allow residential units to have maximum access to natural daylight and impressive views of the surrounding city and landscape.
- The tower portion of the project can establish a visual, iconic 'marker' of the Ithaca Commons district, as it can be viewed from a distance from different surrounding locations.

IMPACT ON HISTORIC RESOURCES

The proposed project is within the boundaries of the Downtown National Register Historic District and will be visible from within that district. None of the buildings is designated a local landmark. The Downtown National Register Historic District does *not* fall under the jurisdiction of the Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission (ILPC).

Structures to be demolished for the project are the two-story building at 123-127 E. State Street (formerly, Race Office Supply), and the two one-story buildings at 133 and 135 E. State Street (formerly, "Alphabet Soup" and "Night and Day," respectively) The three-story Sage Building at the east of the site will be retained and incorporated into the project.

The Sage Building (1884) was designed by William Henry Miller (1848-1922) and housed his professional office. Miller was Cornell University's first student of architecture under Charles Babcock in 1868. He designed over 70 structures in Ithaca, including the DeWitt Building, Uris Library, and Risley Hall. The Sage Building is in the Renaissance Revival style, with contrasting brick walls and stone trim, *terra cotta*, and projecting cornice. Redevelopment aims to preserve the exterior of the structure and connect its upper floors to a new elevator system, allowing those floors to be fully utilized and programmed.

In a letter dated April 22, 2013 from James Warren of the NY State Division of Historic Preservation to Lynn Truame, City of Ithaca Historic Preservation Planner, the following comments were provided:

"Were this under our review as a regulatory matter it would be deemed to have an adverse impact on historic resources simply for the demolition of properties contributing to the National Register of Historic Places listed Ithaca Downtown Historic District. Manipulation of the design of the replacement building is a matter of mitigation for that loss."

“The proposed building presents a face to the commons that attempts to reflect the rhythm and articulation of the late 19th century streetscape surviving remarkably well on the opposite (north) side of the commons. The massing and texture evoke the historic commercial row but the success of that effort is undercut by a limited palate of materials and colors. This can be easily addressed and the input of the historic preservation community in Ithaca will be valuable in refining the facade.”

“The latest revision does expand the residential floors to make greater use of the allowable setback envelope, but that gain is offset by only a 12" lowering of the overall height (top of roof). Further expansion of the lower floors should allow a greater reduction in height – one story, at least -- without a loss of square footage. / The south side of the 100, 200 and 300 blocks of East State Street have suffered a considerable loss of historic fabric from fires of the late 1960's, the demolition of Rothschild's and construction of Centre Ithaca and a new Rothschild's department store.”

“The City of Ithaca should consider the cumulative effects of ongoing physical development on the historic character of the remaining historic streetscape. I question whether the fiscal health of The Commons will be well ' served by new, competing retail space when commercial vacancies have been a persistent issue on The Commons. Historic Preservation is an economic problem as well as a brick-and-mortar issue.”

The Lead Agency is concerned that as a National Register District, the Downtown Historic District, is not protected under the City's Landmarks Preservation Ordinance. Recognizing both the important place-defining role of the District, as well as the increasing level of development interest in the Commons, the Lead Agency, in reviewing this project, strives to balance preservation of the district as a whole with allowing for a development that will bring more vitality to the Commons and provide benefits to all city residents.

To protect the Commons' historic fabric, the Lead Agency has determined it is a priority to preserve buildings that have the most integrity and the least amount of substantial alteration. Historically incompatible ground-floor alteration is common, therefore, the few original 1-story, and some 2-story buildings, carry a lower priority for preservation than taller buildings that, in general, have a lesser percentage of exterior alteration.

Prioritizing preservation in this way follows the rationale below:

- The City goal for any redevelopment of the Commons is to increase density — to provide more housing, office, and retail space. Sites containing 1-2 story buildings in the downtown core are, by definition, low-density and potentially underutilized.
- Prioritizing overall integrity, rather than a particular style or period, allows the district to reflect the varied styles of its entire period of significance spanning 136 years, from 1818 to 1954. The few 2-story buildings that retain a high level of integrity, such as 121 W. State Street (Rumble Street Music), would remain highly desirable for protection.
- Development resulting from the replacement of some 1- and 2-story buildings, particularly on the primarily three- to five-story Commons, would have the potential to regularize the roof/cornice line — creating an aesthetically unifying effect.

While following this rationale, the Lead Agency recognizes that the loss of the buildings at 123 and 135 is not without some impact. Despite ground-floor alterations that negatively affect integrity, both have unique elements that add to the historic fabric of the Commons. 125 has a distinctive green tile (false) roof, as well as decorative molding along the cornice line and scored panels above the second floor windows, while 135 has a false second story, with limestone sills and lintels at wood-shuttered windows.

Mitigations Proposed by the Applicant:

In a letter to Lisa Nicholas, Senior Planner, from Craig Jensen, Project Architect, dated May 31, 2013, the applicant states the project team has incorporated the following considerations to sustain the distinctive quality of the historic district of the Ithaca Commons:

- *The north façade of the new building will uphold the 60 ft. height standard established for buildings on the Commons.*
- *The north façade will be visually segmented into three- and four-story portions to provide vertical variety and interest along the Commons.*
- *To lessen its perceived overall width, the building's north façade is articulated every 30 ft. (reflecting building widths typically seen on the Commons).*
- *Retail occupancy will be located at the Commons level and large areas of glass storefront will be provided along the pedestrian streetscape in keeping with the historic, commercial nature of the district.*
- *The proportions of window openings on the upper floors of the north elevation echo the proportions of other building openings nearby.*
- *Horizontal, opaque zones or "banding" on the new façade preserve the existing visual banding currently prominent on adjacent and neighboring structures.*
- *Articulated cornices on the new elevation are provided as a gesture to those traditional elements characteristically found on other Commons buildings.*
- *Under consideration is the use of varied-colored terra cotta rain-screen cladding on the north façade; terra cotta is, of course, a traditional cladding material that will well complement the existing surrounding materials palette of existing structures.*
- *To lessen the likelihood of its visual presence on the Commons, the residential tower portion of the project is set back 60 ft. from the northern edge of the project boundary.*

In regards to the Sage Building:

With regards to the Sage Block, L Enterprises, LLC has committed to following the standards and guidelines established by the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* for rehabilitation of historic buildings. While it has undergone a variety of alterations over time, the Sage Block's distinctive, decorative terra cotta relief, cornice, and stone banding have endured and will continue to contribute to the character of the surrounding environment. As part of the development, the Sage Building will be rehabilitated with a number of improvements, some of which include:

- *Maintaining the existing terra cotta cornice at the northwest corner of the building.*
- *Cleaning, repointing, and repairing the existing exterior masonry walls.*
- *Repair and/or replacement of the existing roof.*

- *New fenestration at existing masonry openings on the north and west sides of the building. When practical, existing windows will be repaired, but if they are deteriorated to the point of requiring replacement, they will be replaced to match design, color, texture, and perhaps material construction.*
- *Replacement window design will reflect a characteristic William H. Miller divided-light pattern at the upper window areas, similar to what currently exists on the Sage Block building.*
- *The incorporation of the west fenestration into the new project atrium space.*
- *The existing interior character will be restored and maintained wherever possible, with additional modifications developed per the needs and requirements of potential tenants.*

Further Mitigations Required by the Lead Agency:

- The applicant will continue to refine the design and materials of the Commons-facing façade during Site Plan Review to increase its compatibility with the historic fabric of the Commons.
- Plans for the exterior renovation of the Sage Building will require review and approval by the ILPC. Of particular interest are the preservation of the entire cornice and evaluation of the existing fenestration by a qualified professional with significant experience in restoring wood windows.
- **J. Schroeder requested preservation and re-use of exterior building elements — Clarify**

IMPACT ON OPEN SPACE AREA

No impact anticipated.

IMPACT ON TRANSPORTATION

The project is in the downtown core, proximate to TCAT bus service, three public parking garages, and pedestrian amenities. Except for deliveries and loading/unloading — building visitors, residents, and workers will arrive on foot.

Construction Impacts/Staging Plan [TO BE REVIEWED BY CITY TRANSPORTATION ENGINEER]

Applicant needs to provide documentation of conversations regarding Commons construction coordination with T. Logue, T. West, T. Parsons, etc.

Construction Impacts:

The construction phase is projected to last 18 months. Potential construction-related traffic impacts include impacts related to construction materials delivery and staging, contractor parking, and pedestrian circulation.

Construction access will be both from the south (Commons) and north (alley) side of the project. The applicant anticipates 95% of construction access will be from the rear of the site, as the most reasonable access with the least disturbance to public and businesses on the Commons. Commons-side access will be needed approximately 5% of the time, first at the start of the project for placement and removal of the tower crane, and then at the end of the project for façade work.

The applicant intends to barricade the sidewalk on the Commons side of the project and the public way on the alley side of the project — to the limits of, and under, the City garage — for the duration of the project. Barricade construction will consist of fencing, scaffolding, and jersey barriers.

Since the building is constructed as a zero lot line, there is little opportunity to stage material on-site until the superstructure is in place. Upon the erection of the building, material can be stored in the building. On-site staging will be limited to the daily delivery of materials to be put in place. It is the intent of the developer to secure a lot during construction on Route 13 for off-site construction materials.

Throughout the course of the project, there will be upwards of 150 people employed. The applicant intends to accommodate contractor parking needs through a combination of permit parking at existing downtown parking garages and a material staging lot on Route 13, with a shuttle. Once the building is enclosed, night-shift workers will use the Green Street garage.

All construction materials will arrive on site via tractor trailer. The applicant will submit a traffic control and truck routing plan for review and approval. The applicant anticipates 95% of project deliveries will come through the alley side, and will be unloaded by tower crane or manual labor onto the construction elevator, to be located on southwest corner of building.

The applicant intends to employ a public safety officer for the project, who will work with project management to ensure traffic barricades, fencing, site access, and traffic control are maintained. This person will be the contact person for all City departments, where public safety is concerned.

Construction Impacts:

- Lack of access to rear alley for the duration for the project. The proposed construction limit line extends to the parking garage, completely blocking the public way.
- Traffic congestion/street closure, due to deliveries.

Mitigations Required by the Lead Agency:

- **APPLICANT MUST SUBMIT A PEDESTRIAN ACCESS PLAN TO BE APPROVED BY CITY TRANSPORTATION ENGINEER AND PLANNING BOARD.**

In a letter dated 4/22/13 from Ed Marx, Tompkins County Commissioner of Planning, to Lisa Nicholas, Senior Planner, the following initial comment was submitted regarding transportation:

“A full analysis of the impacts of this project should include an assessment of the traffic impacts of the project to ensure that they are in line with the thresholds established by the traffic analysis that was conducted in anticipation of the Cayuga Green project. If not, an updated traffic impact assessment should be required.”

The applicant submitted a trip generation analysis and response to the above comments in a report by Fagan Engineers, dated 4/30/13, that is under review by the City Transportation Engineer.

IMPACT ON ENERGY

In a letter dated 3/26/13 from Ed Marx, Tompkins County Commissioner of Planning, to Lisa Nicholas, Senior Planner, the following initial comment was submitted regarding energy:

“It is encouraging to see the project intention to build in accordance with U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED guidelines. To further advance energy savings, we suggest the consideration of a green roof for the portion which fronts the Commons. This would also provide a much more aesthetically pleasing view for the occupants of residential units. If a green roof is not required, then at minimum light colored reflective roofing materials should be required.”

No impact anticipated.

IMPACT ON NOISE & ODORS

Construction Impacts:

The construction phase is projected to last 18 months, beginning Spring 2014, partially concurrent with the Commons Repair and Upgrade Project. The applicant anticipates 25 days for pile drilling. Noise, dust, and truck/contractor traffic can be expected during the construction phase of this project. As an urban infill site, it is in close proximity to uses that will be impacted by construction noise — particularly during building erection and site development. These include existing retail, restaurant, office, and residential uses.

Mitigation measures, such as noise barriers and restricting the days and hours of noise-generating construction, should be considered. Noise-producing phases of construction should be limited to Monday through Friday between 7:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.

To the greatest extent possible, construction should be coordinated with the Commons Repair and Upgrade Project.

Mitigations Required by the Lead Agency:

Noise-producing construction activities should be limited to Monday-Friday between 7:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC HEALTH

Project development will require demolition of three existing buildings, as well as redevelopment of the historic Sage Building. Construction impacts to public health related to demolition of older buildings include potential handling of toxic materials, such as asbestos and lead.

The applicant has submitted an *Asbestos Containing Building Materials, Pre-Demolition/Pre-Renovation Survey*, dated January 2013, and prepared by Fagan Engineers. The survey identified six asbestos-containing areas that will require involvement of certified professionals for removal and disposal.

IMPACT ON GROWTH & CHARACTER OF COMMUNITY OR NEIGHBORHOOD

The project site is in the downtown core and has been extensively developed. The project site is surrounded by multi-story, predominately mixed-use structures. The proposed project addresses City goals of providing more housing and office space in the downtown area, proximate to bus service and employment.

The project requires variances for rear yard setback and loading. The project may also need a State Building Code Variance for fire separation distance.

Coordination of utilities and the final hardscape for the Commons project will have to be coordinated with the final design of Harold's Square. This work needs to begin immediately, as the definition of the Harold's Square façade takes place. Contact information of City representatives, as well as communications from design teams, needs to be defined to get the design interface coordinated.

The applicant has updated the shadow study at the County's request.

PUBLIC CONTROVERSY

None known, at this time.

Prepared by: Lisa Nicholas, Senior Planner