

Dispute Over Taxes and Building At Cornell University Is Resolved

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A five-month dispute that had blocked virtually all construction at Cornell University has ended with the Mayor of Ithaca, N.Y., relenting on demands that the university pay the city more money in lieu of taxes.

Last month, construction workers demonstrated outside Ithaca City Hall to protest the Mayor's stand, saying it was costing them jobs.

The Mayor, Benjamin Nichols, said in an interview this week that the demonstration had nothing to do with his decision last week to issue work permits for two construction projects at Cornell.

Rather, he said, he decided to approve the permits with the understanding that discussions with Cornell about zoning and contributions to the city would now proceed at a "much more accelerated pace." He said he was hopeful that a long-term agreement would be reached by the end of the summer.

Cornell and Ithaca, he added, "had to go through this period of tension in order to reach a period of fruitful discussions about the future."

Mayor Nichols would not say whether Cornell had made any promises. University officials said they could not discuss the issue this week because they were busy preparing for this weekend's campus visit by the President of Taiwan.

Starting last winter, Mayor Nichols refused to issue construction permits to Cornell, complaining that the university did not pay its fair share for city services. As recently as a month ago, the Mayor said the "whole climate of negotiations" would change between the city and the school if Cornell increased its approximate annual contribution to the city to \$2.5 million, from \$300,000.

While Mayor Nichols conceded that Cornell had no legal obligation to increase its contribution because it is exempt from taxes, he argued that under Ithaca's zoning laws, Cornell is more than 15,000 spaces shy of the required amount of parking. If Cornell built the additional parking, an action that he admitted was unlikely, Mayor Nichols said the permits would be issued.

The Mayor said he now agrees with Cornell that "the current zoning law was not written with the university in mind."

Union officials said the Mayor's change of heart may have come too late for their members. "I'm glad it's turned around," John Gillis, a manager at Carpenters Local 603, said on Tuesday. "But it took so long that it may be too late to help everyone get to work before the end of the year."

He said that students would return to campus in mid-August and that Cornell officials had not determined whether the delayed projects could be completed in time for the fall semester.

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