

Cayuga Village Townhomes

Project Description

The Cayuga Village Townhomes project proposed by the NRP Group and Better Housing for Tompkins County will consist of approximately 60 units clustered on about 1/3 of the 25.52 acre site on Harris B. Dates Drive. The community will be designed in accordance with Pedestrian Neighborhood Zone standards developed as part of the U.S. EPA Climate Showcase Communities grant awarded to Tompkins County and EcoVillage at Ithaca's Center for Sustainability Education. Among the features that the developers have committed to providing are:

- The units will include a mix of one-bedroom one-bath, two-bedroom one-bath, three-bedroom two-bath, and four-bedroom two-bath homes in order to accommodate a diversity of household types. All units will be townhomes and will be either two-story or one-story wood frame construction. All of the units will include universal design features that make them 100% "visitable" and at least 15% of the units will include features to make them handicapped accessible and suitable for aging in place.
- Units will be at least 50% more efficient than current code and will seek to achieve 80% greater efficiency. Among other features units will be sited to maximize passive solar gain with rooflines oriented to accommodate rooftop solar collectors. Efforts will be made to incorporate photovoltaic units on all homes.
- Buildings will employ water-saving fixtures and appliances that reduce household water use by at least 50% from code.
- The project will utilize green infrastructure such as rain barrels, pervious services, and water gardens to reduce stormwater runoff that needs to be managed by traditional stormwater facilities by at least 50%.
- The community will have a 1+/- acre community garden and several smaller resident gardens for use by residents.
- A central focus will be the Community Common House that will include a host of amenities to encourage social interaction in the community, including:
 - Community room with kitchen
 - Library and small conference room
 - Re-use room to promote exchange of items between residents
 - Computer room for homework, tutoring and adult education
 - Maintenance room for sharing of small repair tools
 - Community Manager's office
 - Common washing machines and dryers for use by residents who choose not to have machines in their individual residences.

- Passive recreation trails will be developed and maintained (by the Resident Association) in the undeveloped wooded portion of the property. This property, consisting of more than 50% of the site, will be permanently maintained as a natural area.
- Several active recreation areas including play areas and a small pet exercise area (dog park) will be provided on site.
- The community will have an extensive internal network of sidewalks and walking trails and the developer will work with partners to establish external pedestrian connections to public transit, Cayuga Medical Center and the Black Diamond Trail.
- In accordance with the Pedestrian Neighborhood Zone provisions the vehicular parking will be provided at the periphery of the neighborhood maintaining a quiet, safe residential environment.

In addition to the above the undeveloped portion of the property will be permanently protected by either a deed restriction or conservation easement enforceable by Tompkins County.

Initially the units will all be rental units providing for a mixed income community with rents affordable to households with incomes ranging from 30% to 90% of area median income. The project will be financed using Federal Tax Credits which requires that they be maintained as rental units for the 15 year regulatory period. All properties will be offered for sale to qualified tenants in year 16 at a price that provides credit to the occupant proportional to the number of years the tenant has occupied and paid rent on the unit. This is expected to generally result in mortgage payments as low or lower than their monthly rents.

Ownership and Development

Cayuga Townhomes will be co-developed by BHTC and The NRP Group LLC and will be owned by a to-be-formed single asset entity. As described in the proposal “the Managing Member of this LLC will be a to-be-formed for-profit corporation that will be owned at least 51% by an affiliate of BHTC, with the balance to be owned by NRP. BHTC will provide management of the Development. NRP Contractors LLC will be the general contractor for the Development. NRP Contractors LLC will work with BHTC to identify local qualified subcontractors and suppliers available to assist on the Development.” Regarding a question raised by some legislators as to whether the property could be leased rather than sold to the developers, the developer responded that since the properties are designed to eventually be sold to the occupants it will be important for the property to be owned rather than leased in order for the occupants to obtain financing for purchase of their homes. Given the community’s desire to see the housing units convert to homeownership the funders and investors will require that the deal be structured in a way that accommodate that transition after 15 years.

Smart Growth

This project supports the smart growth strategy of the County and local municipalities in several ways. The project is on the edge of the area identified in the Route 96 Corridor study as part of the Cayuga Medical Center node. After consultation with the City and Town of Ithaca the County's Development Focus Area Strategy was modified to eliminate a node at this location and instead draw an urban area boundary. This was done to make sure that the strategy supported current thinking from the development of the City and Town comprehensive plan updates. The parcel is on the edge of the proposed urban boundary and is an appropriate site for clustering of development to create an edge between the more intense development represented by Cayuga Medical Center and other recently approved projects to the south and lower density suburban development to the north. The site is proximate to the fifth largest employer in the county at CMC and is within the ½ mile planning radius from hourly transit service from CMC to downtown Ithaca. It is also within public water and sewer service areas. A comprehensive county-wide analysis conducted as part of the Development Focus Area Strategy found that a very limited number of sites in the county satisfy all of these criteria.

Property Taxes

The issue of the amount of property taxes paid will be determined by the County Assessment Department. The assessment will be based on the income method used for commercial properties. Since the project will have limited rents this is likely to result in an assessment that is lower than what might be paid by a strictly market-rate project. Upon sale those assessments would likely be impacted by any cap on the value of the unit. There is also provision in State law that allows local municipalities to enter into a PILOT agreement for affordable housing projects. To date there has been no indication of any intent of the developer to approach the Town of Ithaca in this regard.