

Zoom ID # 4118425407

VILLAGE OF CAYUGA HEIGHT
JOINT MEETING OF THE BOARD OF
TRUSTEES AND PLANNING BOARD

November 12th 2025
7:00 p.m.

Present: Mayor Woodard; Trustees: Conway, Hubbell, Rennekamp, and Robinson; Planning Board Chair Cowett; Planning Board Members: McMurry, Quaroni, and Johnston; Fire Superintendent Tamborelle; Superintendent of Public Works Cross; Village Attorney Shah; Village Clerk Walker.

1. Call to Order: Mayor Woodard calls the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

•Mayor Woodard states that the purpose of tonight's joint meeting of the Village Board of Trustees and Village Planning Board is to discuss the Planned Development Zone project submitted by M. Mecenias on East Upland Rd.

2. Privilege of the Floor:

•Mayor Woodard states that we will open up the floor for residents to speak.

•Clerk Walker states that there are no members of the public who wish to speak.

•Mayor Woodard states that we will enter into the record the following emails.

Mayor: I had the opportunity to speak at the last public meeting related to the E. Upland Rd. Project.

I live at 398 E. Upland Rd. This is the second time I have listened to development plans for that land.

To clarify some things I spoke about:

1) The border between me and 400 E. Upland gets flooded (almost a river) when there is a significant rain storm because the drain under the road from the proposed development is larger than the drain pipe on this side of the road. The runoff overflows.

My concern was not for the village to fix this, or have the developer fix this, but to ask that any new drainage plans not make the situation worse. Any improvement would be welcomed but not expected.

2) My second biggest concern was the increase in traffic on E. Upland Rd. I know this is being addressed, but I'm sure some commercial activity will bring more traffic than some residential homes. We don't need more traffic on E. Upland Rd. !

3) I believe the developer knew when he bought the property that it was zoned residential, for the development of houses, etc. All I ask is that the Village think very carefully about changing that zoning. It is your prerogative to do so, with proper input and within proper procedures, but I ask that you not approve any changes. Let developers find a way to make it work by developing residential housing, or leave it as it is. Please preserve the zoning intentions in our Village.

4) At the end of the meeting, the developer mentioned to me that he brought forward this plan because the previous mayor had asked him, personally, for new, innovative ideas that could include some mixed-use to enhance

development.

I have no way of knowing if this is true, but I think the developer should have thought twice about spending a lot of money to bring forth innovative plans without first consulting with the new Village leadership. This is only my observation and opinion, as I have no way of knowing what might have been exchanged between the prior mayor and him after his other plan had not progressed. I think he still has 'approval' to do his original plan, with necessary modifications.

I do not want this email read at the next hearing, but you may share it with the Village committees or departments working on this matter.

Thank you for letting me clarify some points I made in my verbal remarks on January 27.

Sincerely,

*Curt Ashman
curtann@twcny.rr.com
398 East Upland Road
Ithaca, Ny 14850
607-257-6212*

Dear Village Board Members,

I am writing because I am unable to attend the Board meeting tonight. I live on Randolph Road and take the bus to my staff job at Cornell University. I was very annoyed when the Winthrop bus stop was removed, and was informed by a neighbor that he would raise the topic at tonight's meeting. Since I am not able to be there to support him, I wanted to voice my firm support for his request to have the bus stop returned. I understand that there is concern about the number and location of crosswalks, but I would urge you to have a widely discussed conversation about this, rather than submitting to the priorities of the Kendal community. The Winthrop stop is the only one that meets the needs of the large community that lives East of Triphammer. Please consider our needs and restart service to Winthrop Dr.

Sincerely,

*Jennifer Cisse
116 Randolph Rd
607-882-5626*

To the Village Board of Trustees

I have just one question for the board regarding this evening's agenda. Why is the board considering a planned development zone for an area that has only 2 acres to develop?

Further, those 2 acres have, for at least the last 60 years, been zoned as residential for the specific purpose of providing a buffer between the village's commercial zone and the already existing residential homes on the west side of East Upland Road.

Why would the board be considering changing the use of that land to the absolute detriment of the existing homeowners when the developer is free to develop the property he purchased under the residential zoning rules under which he purchased it? Then there would be no need for the board to be involved at all. Thank you for your consideration

Ilene Lambaise

Dear Mayor Woodard, Fred, and Brent,

I hope this message finds you well.

*It has come to my attention, and to that of many residents of East Upland Road and the surrounding neighbourhood, that the Village of Cayuga Heights and its Trustees are proceeding toward a decision in favour of the proposed **Upland Estates Project**, despite **substantial, well-documented objections** from the local community. These objections have consistently been centred on critical concerns related to **neighbourhood character, zoning compatibility, development scale, infrastructure capacity, environmental impact, and overall community welfare**.*

*Residents, including myself, have repeatedly urged the Village to protect the integrity of East Upland Road by ensuring that any new development aligns with the **established character and residential needs** of the area, rather than being driven primarily by **economic incentives or external market pressures**.*

*Despite these good-faith efforts, the Village appears poised to approve a plan that would situate a **high-traffic exit** directly in front of my residence at **404 East Upland Road**—a decision that will **irreparably affect our property value, privacy, and the safety of our family and children**. This placement represents not only a disregard for community feedback but a decision that, I believe, no member of the voting body would willingly accept were their own home placed in this position.*

*While the community has expressed its openness to a **modest, sustainable development**—for example, single-family homes within the median value range of existing neighbourhood properties—the current proposal represents a significant departure from that vision and threatens to undermine the cohesion and character of our neighbourhood.*

*Accordingly, through this correspondence, I am formally **registering my objection** to the proposed Upland Estates development as currently designed, and specifically to the planned location of its traffic exit adjacent to my property - a property that I have invested so much resources and effort to upgrade based on the permits that the city issues and after consulting also the Village and working closely with those working at the Village of Cayuga*

Heights. As I am currently outside the country and unable to attend the upcoming meeting—either in person or online—I respectfully request that this written objection be entered into the official record. What comes to my mind and also what my fellow neighbours should look at and consider, however, is that if anyone on the Board of Trustees, working at the village, or our elected leaders at the Village, were to allow or propose anything of this sort, which will impact their quality of life and safety of their children - if they are the resident of 404 East Upland Road

*Furthermore, please be advised that I will be **exploring all legal and administrative remedies available**, including but not limited to formal appeals, petitions, and potential legal and media-related actions that are applicable, to ensure that the rights and interests of long-term residents and taxpayers are fully respected. I have copied my neighbours and other concerned residents of East Upland Road and the adjoining community to keep them informed of this matter of significant and lasting consequence.*

*Thank you for providing the opportunity to express my concerns. I urge the Village to **reconsider** this decision in light of its **duty of care, community representation, and long-term stewardship** of the Village's character and liveability.*

Respectfully,

Dawit Solomon

Resident, 404 East Upland Road

Property Owner and Taxpayer, Village of Cayuga Heights and City of Ithaca

On Wednesday, August 20, 2025 at 11:10:58 PM GMT+3, Dawit Solomon <dawit278@yahoo.com> wrote:

Dear Brent and Fred,

I hope this message finds you well.

My name is Dawit Solomon, and I reside at 404 East Upland Road with my wife and children. I am writing to formally express my concerns and those shared by many of my neighbours regarding the proposed Upland Estates Project in the Village of Cayuga Heights, including the modified plan that will be presented hopefully soon to the community.

The ongoing uncertainty surrounding this project — particularly the discussions about rezoning — has created significant anxiety among residents of East Upland Road. The repeated changes, lack of clarity, and on-again, off-again nature of the proposals are deeply unsettling for those of us who have long called this quiet, residential neighbourhood our home. Many residents, including long-time retirees, are increasingly worried about the impact such development will have on the character and liveability of our community.

While I support development that aligns with the character of our neighbourhood — specifically single-family homes consistent with current property values and density — I would like to formally express my objections to the current version of the Upland Estates Project. Due to work and travel commitments, I will be unable to attend the upcoming meeting in person, but I respectfully request that my concerns be considered as part of the public record.

Below are the key concerns I would like to raise:

- 1. Neighbourhood Character and Zoning Changes: The proposed development, particularly if zoning modifications are implemented, would significantly alter the character of East Upland Road. The transition from a low-density, single-family residential area to one with higher density and more commercial-like structures would directly affect the privacy, aesthetics, and tranquillity of our neighbourhood. The placement of high-density housing or rental units in close proximity to long-standing single-family homes will diminish the unique identity of the area.*
- 2. Compatibility and Scale: The scale and nature of the proposed project are incompatible with adjacent development. Unlike the recently built single-family home in the area — which blends harmoniously with existing residences and adds value to neighbouring properties — the current proposal would introduce an influx of residents, significantly increasing traffic, noise, and demand for parking on a street not designed to accommodate such usage.*
- 3. Infrastructure and Environmental Concerns: East Upland Road is already facing infrastructure challenges, such as low water pressure. A project of this magnitude would put additional strain on these systems. Additionally, the proximity of the proposed site to local wetlands raises concerns about environmental sustainability, stormwater runoff, and long-term ecological impacts.*
- 4. Community Impact and Inclusivity: Development decisions should be guided among others by the needs of the existing community, not just economic incentives or external demand. A project that prioritizes rental units or aims to create a commercial hub in this residential enclave would risk alienating long-term residents and could lead to displacement or community flight. Any redevelopment should be carefully integrated into a comprehensive and inclusive long-term vision that respects and preserves the diverse, well-established community that already exists here.*

In conclusion, I urge the Village to protect the integrity of East Upland Road by ensuring that any development aligns with the character and needs of the current residents. A modest development of single-family homes — priced within the median range of existing properties and bringing families to East Upland is largely desired and would be a sustainable and community-focused solution that enhances, rather than disrupts, the neighbourhood.

In order to make sure my concerns reach the East Upland Community, the Village Officials, I have copied my neighbour, Mayor Linda Woodard, and the Trustees.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these concerns. I trust that you will consider them seriously and advocate for a path forward that prioritizes the well-being of current residents in planning decisions.

*Sincerely,
Dawit Solomon
404 East Upland Road
Cayuga Heights, NY*

- Planning Board Chair Cowett states that the next step for this project is to conduct the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR).
- Planning Board Chair Cowett states that the applicant has provided the SEQR short form part one, but we will also need to discuss part two, which is similar to the questions in the Planning Development Zone Article section 305-44.
- Planning Board Chair Cowett states that once we have a better understanding of these questions, we will schedule a Public Hearing at a future date.
- Planning Board Chair Cowett states that tonight we will ask members of both boards to consider the following: Will the proposed action result in a change in the use or intensity of use of land? And will the proposed action impair the character or quality of the existing community?
- Mayor Woodard states that she is very concerned about removing the mature pine trees located at the site.
- Jacob Von Mechow of Whitham Design states that we do expect to remove a few trees for the driveway and potentially one of the corners where the townhouses would be built.
- Jacob Von Mechow of Whitham Design states that we could save more trees if the Village would allow us a thirty-foot setback, which would shift the back property line and seek a ten-foot setback instead of the current fifteen-foot setback.
- Mayor Woodard states that she is also concerned about the number of driveways into the development and the ability for fire trucks to have access.
- Mayor Woodard states that a circular driveway could solve this issue.
- Jacob Von Mechow of Whitham Design states that it would affect parking, but since we are rewriting zoning for this project, we could propose a reduction of parking.
- Village Engineer Cross states that the details of all these changes would be part of the site plan review phase by the Village Planning Board.
- Planning Board Chair Cowett states that the Village Board of Trustees needs to determine if the change in the

land use for this project adds to the benefit and quality of the community. Because if it is a negative benefit to the community, the Board needs to take that into account when approving this PDZ project.

- Planning Board member Johnston states that he would like to share some thoughts on this project. This is a moderately intensive change to the land use. He doesn't think that the design idea is nearly as complex as what was brought up for the golf course at one point in time and what we've seen built in other communities around us, like Lansing and Dryden. In fact, he thinks the structures, as they've been put on paper, don't look all that different from the Sciarabba-Walker building across the street, to the CMC building.

- Planning Board member Johnston states that the land itself is challenging. There's a good portion of it that is wet land, and then there's actually some wetlands. Thankfully, the project is not affecting that portion.

- Planning Board member Johnston states that this project is centrally located, it's in a part of the Village that has fantastic proximity to services, residential, and commercial properties surrounding. It allows for, or could allow for, a pedestrian-forward experience, and allows for money to be spent in the community and local businesses.

- Planning Board member Johnston states that he believes conscientious siting could be achieved with minimal disturbance to the trees, which is a major concern, and perhaps with the masking of the buildings, which would be spoken to through a PDZ document, design guidance, and even formal conditions. What can be compromised on the southern part of the site, and how that land is used or celebrated by the Village, perhaps, in some sort of park capacity.

- Planning Board member Johnston states that the groundwater runoff cannot be worsened, as you all know, and that's something that we take seriously, because that is an issue throughout the Village. So overall, I think that if the Village wants to work conscientiously with the applicant on this idea, it can strategically achieve several of the goals in the comprehensive plan that we have, and honestly, without too much complexity if the right compromises are made between the Village and the applicant.

- Village Trustee Conway states that he agrees with Planning Board Member Johnston. Think that this iteration of the development has some good things going for it. Whereas some past larger developments would have represented a significant change to the neighborhood to the detriment of existing homeowners and traffic patterns, and concerns for ecological impact. He is happy to see the scaled-back version of this plan as discussed, which is 10 units on 2 acres. Not so different than what 5 lots with accessory units on approximately 2 acres could be, in a more traditional residential zoning that we currently have.

- Village Trustee Conway states that with only 10 units, he doesn't anticipate any traffic pattern problems. The current layout of the homes is very close to the road in a way that is not in line with the houses around them, and could create a potential eyesore for existing residents accustomed to seeing nature across the street.

- Village Trustee Conway states that he is quite concerned about further development on the property around the wetland, just from an ecological standpoint. He would like to see memorializing that space in some context and making that a public space.

- Village Trustee Conway states that he feels better about the stormwater issues.

- Mayor Woodard states that one of the considerations with a PDZ is the provision of space for recreation and other public uses. She feels strongly that the Board should make it a condition that part of the wetland area become a park with walking paths for the entire community to use.
- Planning Board member Johnston states that there's a value proposition in it to the ownership group, where it's been proven in cities and towns throughout the country that being proximate to open space, right, to recreational land, actually plays into the value of your property. Whether it's from a leasing, a sale, or the long-term value of the property itself.
- Village Trustee Hubbell states that, as an architect himself, attention to detail is the most important thing. The architecture that you create will make all the difference, whether this is an amenity to the community or an eyesore.
- Village Trustee Hubbell states that he remains unpersuaded about the merits of this project by virtue of the fact that it imposes itself on the neighbors. This mass of buildings represents a complex, and he does not know how they will fit into the neighborhood. He believes that this project can be a challenge, but is optimistic if the remaining property were to become a Village amenity in the form of a park.
- Mayor Woodard states that one thing she would like more information about is storage for these townhouses.
- Planning Board Chair Cowett states that the applicant needs to have a good idea of where the Village is going to look favorably upon pursuing a PDZ before going further into details like storage and other specific amenities.
- Village Trustee Rennekamp states that she was not able to attend the walk-through on Saturday, but she did speak to several people, and one of her biggest concerns has been the trees on the property and preserving them. The other issue is the driveway, and we like that we are looking at that. She is a little concerned about losing 4-8 parking spaces and is not sure how appealing a three-bedroom unit might be if people can only have one parking space, which might lead to overflow at the community shops.
- Village Trustee Rennekamp states that she is not as concerned about traffic, since this is so close to the corners community shops and traffic is in and out all the time already. This would be about the same if the parcel were developed as single-family homes, even though it is a little more concentrated. She is cautiously optimistic that this can work out and be a good move for the Village.
- Planning Board Chair Cowett states that one of the things we juggle in the planning board is the desire of the applicant to build versus the available space. Clearly, because of the wetland delineation and the wetland buffer, there is a limited amount of space. Concerns that have been expressed suggest that a loss of parking spaces is a concern. There is no law that says the project has to be ten units.
- Planning Board member McMurry states that when she thinks about a PDZ, it is a request to change the underlying zoning; there has to be a benefit to the Village that justifies that request. It is very easy to get zoomed in and literally look at items like the trees, but it is our job as a planning board to zoom out and look at this project in the context of the Village and the area around the project.
- Planning Board member McMurry states that there is a benefit to the Village with this project in terms of diversifying our housing stock. We are largely single-family residential. This project is appropriate for people who are empty nesters, who want to downscale, and we do not have a lot of opportunities for that kind of housing.

- Planning Board member McMurry states that we are fortunate that this site has beautiful, tall trees that the applicant planted, which actually screen the project fairly well. For this type and scale of development, this is an added benefit for this project.
- Planning Board member McMurry states that Planning Board member Johnston touched on the fact that another advantage to this project is the location to the core of the commercial side of the Village, more pedestrian and transit friendly, and reduces parking needs with public transportation right there. She feels this is an added benefit to the Village, and it would be appropriate to amend zoning for this project.
- Planning Board member Quaroni states that this is a transition zone from residential to commercial. There are apartments already around this area, and there is a shortage of housing in this area. There might even be a demand for residents to move from their big houses to a smaller home and be able to stay in the Village.
- Planning Board member Quaroni states that she does not like the way the plan is laid out. She feels the buildings should be split up and not all joined together, but is in favor of keeping the screening with the trees
- Trustee Robinson states that this project has been scaled back enough that density is not so much in question. He agrees with Trustee Conway on that subject. The trees are important to the neighborhood. He is not concerned with any increased traffic because it would be similar to any development of single-family homes with accessory dwellings.
- Trustee Robinson states that the development of townhouses would be in the character of the neighborhood because it is in a transition zone with walkable access to the commercial zone. He is interested in seeing more details and looks forward to seeing this project move forward if the constraints are met.
- Planning Board member Johnston states that he can see that there might be some available land in the southwest corner to provide some kind of community shed or a cupola as an additional benefit for the property owners.
- Trustee Hubbell states that he feels that more needs to come from the residents affected by this project. The letters are important to consider.
- Planning Board member Johnston states that we might consider a traffic study to get a better understanding of the impact of this project.
- Village Engineer Cross states that he spoke to most of the residents on E. Upland, and one specifically from I. Lambiase on the potential use of the remaining acreage and future development of the south hillside.
- Village Attorney Syed states that the Village Board of Trustee ultimately have that determination.
- Village Planning Board Chair Cowett states that what I. Lambiase was talking about a subdivision where you cannot take into account wetlands and steep slopes in terms of your total acreage. This does not apply to this project.
- Village Planning Board Member McMurry states that it is actually an argument for this to be a good site for a PDZ because of the complexity of the site, and it is hard to do a standard development given the wetlands.

- Village Planning Board Chair Cowett states that we would need a survey that showed the steep slopes greater than twenty-five percent, as well as the area of the applicable wetlands, to get a sense of what the actual buildable acreage is.
- Mayor Woodard states that another aspect that the Board needs to weigh on is the height of the buildings. The Current zoning would have to be relaxed to allow for the thirty-foot building height in this proposal.
- Jacob Von Mechow of Whitham Design states that the top of the peak is thirty feet, which we are proposing in the PDZ language to be higher than thirty feet. We are asking for more so the architects have as much flexibility as possible before designing starts. Through the site plan review, we will finalize this height.
- Mayor Woodard states that she will insist that the height of the buildings will not be visible from the road or to other neighbors.
- Village Engineer states that he would need an actual number for height
- .•Village Fire Superintendent Tamborelle states that if the height goes over thirty feet, then the fire department would need twenty-six feet of width with fifteen to thirty feet from the building to use the ladder truck.
- Jacob Von Mechow of Whitham Design states that they were trying to follow the current existing language, which is the measurement to the midpoint of a peaked roof. If we change this to the stated fire code, will that satisfy the Board?
- Village Planning Board Chair Cowett states that it sounds like thirty feet will be the correct number.
- Village Planning Board Chair Cowett states that the next time we meet, we will conduct SEQR.
- Mayor Woodard states that at the November Board of Trustees Meeting, we will schedule a Public Hearing for a joint meeting with the Village Planning Board to conduct SEQR for the E. Upland sometime in December.
- Mayor Woodard adjourns the meeting at 8:10 p.m.