

Village of Cayuga Heights Planning Board
Meeting #112
Monday, May 22, 2023
Marcham Hall – 7:00 pm
Minutes

Present: Planning Board Members Chair F. Cowett, J. Leijonhufvud, E. Quaroni, R. Segelken
Code Enforcement Officer B. Cross, Attorney R. Marcus, Clerk J. Walker, Alternate Member
M. Johnston, Mayor L. Woodard
A. Ciaschi, Adam’s Corners Café, Corners Community Shopping Center
T. Ciaschi, Corners Community Shopping Center

Item 1 – Meeting called to order

- Chair F. Cowett opened the meeting at 7:00 pm.
- Chair F. Cowett stated that M. McMurry is absent and appointed Alternate M. Johnston a full voting member of the Board for this meeting.
- Chair F. Cowett further stated that R. Kaweck, Bousquet Holstein PLLC, is observing the meeting via Zoom.

Item 2 – April 24, 2023 Minutes

- The Board reviewed the minutes of the April 24, 2023 meeting.

Motion: R. Segelken

Second: J. Leijonhufvud

RESOLUTION No. 380
APPROVING MINUTES OF APRIL 24, 2023

RESOLVED, that the written, reviewed and revised minutes of the April 24, 2023 meeting are hereby approved.

Aye votes – Chair F. Cowett, M. Johnston, J. Leijonhufvud, E. Quaroni, R. Segelken
Opposed – None

Item 3 – Public Comment

No members of the public wished to speak.

Item 4 – Special Use Permit – Adam’s Corners Café, Corners Community Shopping Center

- Chair F. Cowett stated that § 305-35.H of the Village’s Zoning Law requires a special use permit from the Planning Board for a restaurant, deli, sandwich shop, or coffee shop in the Village’s Commercial Zone; A. Ciaschi acquired Hope’s Place, Corners Community Shopping Center in the Commercial Zone, approximately one year ago and renamed it Adam’s Corners Café; because there was no significant operational change in the business, a new special use permit was not required at that time; the Aikido Kokikai karate studio next door to the café became vacant and A. Ciaschi is proposing to expand his existing dining area into the adjacent space; the potential change in the intensity and character of use requires a review by the Planning Board as to whether a new special use permit is needed.
- Chair F. Cowett asked A. Ciaschi how many tables and seats will be located in the expanded dining area.
- A. Ciaschi replied that there will be five tables with four seats each for a total of 20 additional seats.
- Chair F. Cowett asked how many seats are located in the existing dining area.
- A. Ciaschi replied that the existing dining area has 12 seats.
- Chair F. Cowett asked how many staff he has working currently and whether he will be hiring additional staff.
- A. Ciaschi replied that he has two staff working in the front at the counter and will not be adding additional staff.
- Chair F. Cowett asked if there will be table service in the expanded dining area.
- A. Ciaschi replied that there will not be table service; customers typically order at the counter, receive their orders there, and then go sit down.
- Chair F. Cowett asked about deliveries and if they take place in the back of the café.
- A. Ciaschi replied that there is typically one delivery daily and deliveries take place in the back.
- R. Segelken asked if the adjacent space has a back room similar to the existing space.
- A. Ciaschi replied that the adjacent space does not have a similar back room; the area in the back of the former karate studio is occupied by a jewelry store.
- Chair F. Cowett asked about the café’s hours.
- A. Ciaschi replied that the café is open Monday through Friday from 8 am until 3 pm, and Saturday from 8 am until 12 noon.
- M. Johnston asked if there will be any change in signage with the expanded space.
- A. Ciaschi replied that he has no plans to change signage, but might at some point in the future.
- E. Quaroni stated that the former karate studio had a front door and asked if that door will be kept; she stated that for fire safety reasons it would be wise to keep the door.
- A. Ciaschi replied that the front door at the former karate studio will be kept.

- R. Segelken asked Code Enforcement Officer B. Cross if each storefront is able to have its own sign.
- Code Enforcement Officer B. Cross replied that a business in the Village's Commercial Zone is able to have only one sign regardless of how many storefronts.
- E. Quaroni asked Code Enforcement Officer B. Cross about occupancy limits and fire code.
- Code Enforcement Officer B. Cross replied that occupancy limits are determined by seat numbers and less than 50 seats avoids triggering stringent fire code regulations.
- E. Quaroni asked about parking requirements for a café in the Village's Commercial Zone.
- Chair F. Cowett replied that § 305-90.F.4.b of the Village's Zoning Law requires one parking space for every three seats in a café in the Commercial Zone.
- Code Enforcement Officer B. Cross stated that the parking spaces to be utilized by the expanded café is likely similar to the parking spaces that were utilized by the karate studio although the hours for the businesses may have been somewhat different.
- T. Ciaschi, Corners Community Shopping Center, stated that the Chemung Canal Trust bank seems to be using less spaces than before which facilitates Gimme Coffee patrons utilizing those spaces and relieving parking pressure in front of Gimme Coffee and the laundry.
- Chair F. Cowett stated that the café is located further to the south in the shopping center than Gimme Coffee; he has observed that spaces located in the shopping center closer to the café are being used by medical office building patients not parking in the area intended for the medical office building; he wondered if medical office building personnel are directing patients to park in that intended area where there is plenty of available parking.
- J. Leijonhufvud stated that medical office building patients are not directed to park in the intended parking area.
- R. Segelken stated that the shopping center provides a variety of community services; it is likely that some café customers also visit the shopping center to patronize other services and that shared parking between these services reduces parking demand.
- T. Ciaschi stated that he has observed that many café patrons are either medical office building patients and employees or employees of Sciarabba Walker who walk over from East Upland Road.
- Chair F. Cowett asked if the Heights Restaurant is still serving lunch; parking in that area of the shopping center used to be very crowded at lunchtime.
- A. Ciaschi stated that neither the Heights Restaurant nor Allechant is serving lunch.
- J. Leijonhufvud asked A. Ciaschi about special events at the café.
- A. Ciaschi replied that the café caters offsite events, but he has no plans to do events onsite; he is expanding the café not because he needs new customers, but to better accommodate the customers he currently has; it often becomes so crowded in the current space that he has to ask customers to sit on the benches outside.

- R. Segelken asked T. Ciaschi if people parking in the shopping center and then going to Cornell for the day is still a problem.
- T. Ciaschi replied that Cornell parking still occurs, but is less a problem than before; also, during construction of Sciarabba Walker’s new building on East Upland Road, he allowed some of their employees to park at the shopping center; construction is now nearly completed and so those employees will no longer be parking at the shopping center, freeing up those spaces.

Motion: J. Leijonhufvud

Second: M. Johnston

RESOLUTION No. 381

TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSED ADAM’S CORNERS CAFÉ AT CORNERS COMMUNITY SHOPPING CENTER FOR SPECIAL USE PERMIT REVIEW

RESOLVED, that the Planning Board accepts the proposed Adam’s Corners Café at Corners Community Shopping Center for Special Use Permit review.

Aye votes – Chair F. Cowett, M. Johnston, J. Leijonhufvud, E. Quaroni, R. Segelken

Opposed – None

- The Board discussed the project in relation to the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) and whether to categorize the project as a Type 1, Type 2, or Unlisted SEQRA action.
- Chair F. Cowett stated that A. Ciaschi has filled out and provided a copy of Part 1 of the SEQRA short form.

Motion: E. Quaroni

Second: R. Segelken

RESOLUTION No. 382

SEQRA REVIEW OF THE PROPOSED ADAM’S CORNERS CAFÉ AT CORNERS COMMUNITY SHOPPING CENTER

RESOLVED, that the Planning Board categorizes the project as an Unlisted SEQRA action and declares itself lead agency for SEQRA review of the proposed Adam’s Corners Café at Corners Community Shopping Center.

Aye votes – Chair F. Cowett, M. Johnston, J. Leijonhufvud, E. Quaroni, R. Segelken

Opposed – None

Motion: M. Johnston

Second: J. Leijonhufvud

RESOLUTION No. 383
TO HOLD A PUBLIC HEARING FOR THE PROPOSED ADAM'S CORNERS CAFÉ AT
CORNERS COMMUNITY SHOPPING CENTER

RESOLVED, that a public hearing will be held on June 26, 2023 at 7:10 p.m. regarding Special Use Permit review for the proposed Adam's Corners Café at Corners Community Shopping Center.

Aye votes – Chair F. Cowett, M. Johnston, J. Leijonhufvud, E. Quaroni, R. Segelken

Opposed – None

Item 5 – Comprehensive Plan Discussion

- The Board resumed its discussion as to whether the Village's Comprehensive Plan should be updated.
- Chair F. Cowett stated that the "Quality of Life" section is focused too much on looking back rather than looking forward; there is a wistful, nostalgic quality to the Village as it once was; more emphasis should be given to what the Village should be; the section focuses on preserving the residential character of the Village; while this is important, other issues should be given more attention; for example, since the Plan was adopted in 2014, sustainability and climate change have become more important concerns and, if the Plan is to be revised, the revision should take this into account.
- E. Quaroni stated that "Quality of Life" is a vague term; when she thinks of the Village's quality of life, she thinks about the Village being a quiet place with treelined streets and that it is fortunate to have its own fire and police departments.
- M. Johnston stated that the Comprehensive Plan is a living document and that it can have a narrative arc; it doesn't need to be stuck in its time; perhaps in a revision the current sections should be renamed and space should be given to Accomplishments and Opportunities.
- J. Leijonhufvud stated that the Plan should state up front that Cayuga Heights is a walking community; it is possible to live in the Village and only have one car since one can commute to Cornell by walking, biking, or riding a bus; she would like a revision of the Plan to emphasize walkability and bikeability.
- M. Johnston stated that there is a health benefit to walking and biking and physical activity in general that could be highlighted in a Plan revision.
- J. Leijonhufvud stated that consideration should be given to creating a bike boulevard; The Parkway would be a good candidate because it is relatively straight and flat.

- Chair F. Cowett asked Board members if, based on their reading of the Quality of Life section, they agreed that this section of the Comprehensive Plan should be updated and revised.
- Board members agreed that the Quality of Life section should be revised.
- J. Leijonhufvud stated that the “Community Character” section, the section of the Plan that follows Quality of Life, repeats many of the themes in that section; she thinks these sections could be combined.
- Chair F. Cowett stated that, on rereading the Community Character section, he was struck by the emphasis given in that section to the history of the Village; though it is important to understand the Village’s history and the Olmstedian vision of the Village as a residential park, which contributes greatly to its sense of place, times change and any changes the Village needs to make shouldn’t be hamstrung by its history.
- Attorney R. Marcus stated that architectural preservation has created pushback in the City of Ithaca due to impingement on private property rights; it has limited in some cases the replacement of existing windows with more energy efficient ones.
- M. Johnston stated that culturally significant residences can be acknowledged without impinging on private property rights.
- R. Segelken stated that a Plan revision could recommend guidelines for architectural preservation.
- Attorney R. Marcus stated that there is no architectural preservation regulation in the Village at present, whereas Cornell Heights in the City of Ithaca is highly regulated; he is more concerned with other issues potentially facing the Village such as, if there is a new owner of Corners Community Shopping Center, would the new owner seek to maximize the return on the shopping center’s square footage by redeveloping it aggressively.
- Board members stated the importance of the Community Corners area as a focal point in the Village and as a community gathering place.
- Clerk J. Walker stated that he explored the possibility of bringing a farmers market to Community Corners, but for various reasons this won’t happen.
- R. Segelken stated that the annual summer fair sponsored by Chemung Bank was a big success, but was suspended due to the pandemic; it will resume hopefully.
- E. Quaroni asked Mayor L. Woodard about the recent meeting at Marcham Hall concerning the future of Sunset Park.
- Mayor L. Woodard replied that it was a well-attended meeting in which Village residents expressed their thoughts about Sunset Park directly to Village officials; it was a valuable forum, so much so that she is considering proposing to the Trustees that there should be an annual meeting at which residents can speak directly to the Board; typically, the Board only hears from residents when there is something they are unhappy or care about.
- M. Johnston asked about the themes coming out of the Sunset Park meeting.

- Mayor L. Woodard replied that there was consensus that nobody wants the stone amphitheater that has been proposed, especially the immediate neighbors; residents attending the meeting generally like the park as it functions, but want it to be better maintained and cared for.
- M. Johnston asked about the wooden bollards and the budget for the park.
- Code Enforcement Officer B. Cross replied that the bollards are 25 years old; some are removable so that DPW has access for maintenance; unfortunately, some people have figured this out and remove the bollards so that they can drive cars across the lawn to the overlook and watch the sunset; there is currently no annual budget for the park; maintenance costs are part of the overall DPW budget.
- Mayor L. Woodard stated that trash receptacles at the park had been removed to prevent people from dumping their household trash; trash began to accumulate and was being cleaned up by a neighbor; a trash receptacle, modified to prevent dumping household trash, has now been put back.
- M. Johnston asked if consideration has been given to removing the stone walls and benches.
- Mayor L. Woodard replied that people like the stone walls and benches; they like what is there; they just want it to look nice.
- R. Segelken asked if the Village police patrol the park at night.
- Mayor L. Woodard replied that they do.
- M. Johnston asked Code Enforcement Officer B. Cross if there is anything in the pipeline concerning Village public services.
- Code Enforcement Officer B. Cross replied that the only thing in the pipeline is the possible reconfiguration of the Community Corners area intersections.
- E. Quaroni asked Mayor L. Woodard if the Village's tax base is stable.
- Mayor L. Woodard replied that the tax base is stable; the recent 10% increase in property tax assessment has put the Village on sound financial footing generally; one area of concern is water and sewer which is financed as fee for service; property taxes can't be used; the phase 3 overhaul of the Village's wastewater treatment plant didn't receive a grant as hoped for; the expense of the overhaul will therefore need to be covered by increasing sewer rates significantly, between 10 and 20 percent.
- The Board agreed to discuss at its next meeting the "Ecology and Scenic Assets" and "Housing" sections of the Comprehensive Plan.

Item 6– New Business

- The Board's next meeting is scheduled for Monday, June 26, 2023 at 7:00 pm.

Item 7 – Adjourn

- Meeting adjourned at 8:41 pm.