

September 19, 2017

Mayor Svante Myrick and Common Council members
City of Ithaca
108 East Green Street
Ithaca, NY 14850

RE: Individual Landmark Designations for the Chacona Block (411-415 College Avenue) and the Larkin Building (403 College Avenue)

Dear Mayor Myrick and Common Council members:

The built environment matters to us all. It is in this spirit that Historic Ithaca wholeheartedly supports the individual landmark designations of both the Chacona Block (411-415 College Avenue) and the Larkin Building (403 College Avenue) in Collegetown. Both of these buildings stand as excellent examples of commercial buildings erected near the entrance to Cornell University in the early twentieth century as Collegetown developed into its own urban neighborhood with services directed to the Cornell University student population.

The buildings meet the criteria for historic significance required for designations as set forth in Ithaca's Municipal Code. Failure to designate these buildings would be inconsistent with the ILPC's conclusions because:

- Detailed and carefully researched reports by Historic Ithaca and letters in support of these designations were made to the ILPC at their July 2017 and August 2017 meetings. We encourage the Mayor and Common Council members to review the documents to understand the evidence for these designations.
- Members of the ILPC have extensive backgrounds in architecture, history and/or planning and the city relies on their expertise and knowledge of both Ithaca's Municipal Code and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards to assess the merits of individual landmark designations.

The **2009 Collegetown Urban Plan and Conceptual Guidelines** (endorsed by Common Council on August 5, 2009) makes clear in Part One, page 52 that historic resources within Collegetown should be identified and designated. It states:

Historically significant resources within the entire Collegetown Planning Area which merit designation as local historic landmarks, but which currently have no such protection, should be identified by the Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission and designated by Common Council. Ideally, this process would take place concurrently with consideration and adoption of the proposed form-based Collegetown zoning amendments.

On page 32, the text is even more direct about the virtues of this particular streetscape and the document includes a large photograph of this block. Please note the precise wording and directive:

The east side of the 400 block of College Avenue is a major urban planning success, notable not only within its Collegetown context, but within the context of the City as a whole, and no incentive (such as substantially increasing the maximum permitted

building height) should be enacted that would provide an economic incentive to demolish any of the buildings, old or new, that together create this exceptional urban ensemble.

In Part One, page 31, the 400 block on the east side of College Avenue is called an “exemplary row” and the text states: “*The aesthetic harmony of this façade row is even more striking because two component structures are roughly a century old while the other three were built more recently. Each of these buildings has a well-designed façade in its own right but here – unlike other areas of Collegetown – the interplay of old and new creates a unified streetscape whose aesthetic power is much greater than the sum of its (already attractive) parts.*”

Shortly after this document was prepared, a number of properties including the Larkin Building and Chacona Block were identified by Mary Raddant Tomlan and John Schroeder in a survey of Collegetown historic resources in June of 2009.

Affirming the designations of the ILPC is consistent with statements outlined in the **2015 Plan Ithaca** document. On page 17, this document notes that “Ithaca is fortunate to have a rich heritage of historic buildings, an active arts community, and a diverse and significant cultural history. Stewardship must remain a priority in order to preserve our valuable cultural and historic resources.” The preservation and enhancement of neighborhood character is articulated as one of the land use goals on page 33, and in the section discussing Collegetown on page 43, a photograph of the 400 block of College Avenue is included. Historic Preservation is also listed in section 5.2 as an important component of livability with its own list of goals and recommendations.

The most recent August, 2017, draft of the City of Ithaca’s **Collegetown Design Guidelines** recognizes the significance of the 400 block of College Avenue and includes a photograph of it on its cover page. This block is part of the Collegetown Core Character Area and serves as the key gateway to Cornell University. A photograph of it appears again on page 60 and it is singled out with the statement: “The 400 Block of College Avenue is a Collegetown design exemplar.”

What better way to recognize these two buildings and their contributions to their Collegetown neighborhood, the history of Cornell University, and the ongoing role they play in maintaining a vital streetscape than to individually designate them? Dramatic changes have occurred in Collegetown over the last 20 years with the construction of multiple new apartment and mixed use buildings. The City of Ithaca would be wise to recognize and approve the ILPC’s designation of the last remaining vestiges of a rich built heritage on a block that happily mixes the new with the old.

Sincerely,

Sara A. Johnson
Interim Executive Director