

1. CONTINUATION OF HOUSING DISCUSSION BY VICE PRESIDENT RYAN LOMBARDI

Vice President for Student and Campus Life, Ryan Lombardi: "Good afternoon. Thank you for having me. I wanted to spend a few minutes updating you on where we're at with the housing master planning process that ties in nicely to what Dean Knuth was just talking about. We are trying to make sure we look at this holistically, whereas the study she's undertaking is focusing a bit specifically on the faculty relationship and the governance over the west campus house system.

"I am taking a much more broad look at all our residential program across campus. I'm looking at a couple different things here. We are taking a look from a programmatic perspective, but also taking a very hard look from a capital perspective and the actual facilities and where we're at with that.

"It's been quite a while since we've studied this. In fact, my predecessor launched a very similar study just prior to the economic recession that ended up, of course, not being able to go anywhere, because we all know what happened in the economic recession. And so we thought it was a good time to take another look.

"This was made very evident to me when I was being recruited to come to Cornell about eight months ago. My predecessor teed it up. President Garrett and Provost Kotlikoff asked me to take this on very early on. So you see a little bit about what we are hoping to do, which is look very, very broadly at this effort. We do have a working group that's been meeting for a couple of months now that is a broad and inclusive working group. We have faculty from the west campus house system engaged in that conversation, some students, some staff, and this is a group that's kind of moving it along.

"So I'm going to go through the slides pretty quickly here, because I want to get into any opportunities for questions or discussions. I know these were sent out this morning; didn't give you a lot of time, and I apologize for that.

"So we have been collecting a lot of feedback on campus, and some of this had been very informative to me as a fairly newcomer to Cornell. We have been taking tours, looking at facilities, but we have also engaged a whole lot of people on campus. We formed a Community Advisory Committee, as an example, where we have local -- members of the local Ithaca community giving feedback on housing and the impact that it might have on the community and things we need to do there. We're meeting with the Campus Planning Committee, which also has faculty involvement on it. So we're trying to make sure we are engaged very heavily there.

“The Meinig scholars, actually, the first-year students did a great research project for us that we just heard their presentations on a couple of weeks ago, to inform us. I would say the majority of our conversations at this point really have been with students, because that is our primary audience as we look at the residential facilities, but we're going to start to broaden that and you will hear a little bit more about that as I go through.

“And we have been touring campus. And that doesn't just mean walking around campus, which of course I have been doing, trying to get the lay of the land here, but really digging into these facilities and trying to understand the needs. You may or may not know this, but we have a very significant deferred maintenance log all across campus; but certainly within the residential housing stock, that is a very acute issue for us that I have inherited coming in here.

“So part of this conversation is trying to figure out how we create a road map to address that deferred maintenance problem. You will see that we have conducted some surveys, and I'm not going to spend a lot of time on these data, because you have the slides. You can kind of dig through them. I may mention a couple of highlights as we go through.

“We did a survey, a random sample of students that we surveyed. A couple of highlights, I mean, just to summarize, more students want to live on campus. The west campus system, as an example -- and I'll get to this when I get to themes -- is very well-received, but only about a quarter of our sophomore students can live in the newer west campus houses, which those students report a very positive experience. But when just a quarter of them have the opportunity, that creates some dissonance, as you might imagine, in the community.

“So they would like more -- food does matter in building community on campus, as you might imagine. So again, I'll just zip through these pretty quickly here. Proximity to campus certainly matters, food matters as you see here, in terms of building community. Proximity to campus really does drive satisfaction and contributes significantly to satisfaction.

“Cost, not surprisingly -- bless you -- is a very important dynamic as well. And you just generally see, again, the data that students would appreciate more options on campus, things like the house system, being able to have housing for more of their years on campus.

“For graduate and professional students, we're taking a close look at this too. So the study encompasses undergraduate and graduate and professional students. And we know we're under-serving that population as well.

“In fact, one of the most salient points for me in the data collection of graduate and professional students is that we're really at a competitive disadvantage with our peers from a housing perspective in terms of the options for on-campus housing for those students when they are considering which institution to attend.

“So when you think about you are trying to recruit these great, promising scholars to come and study with you, we don't want to be the disadvantage that hinders your ability to do that. And unfortunately, I think we're playing that role right now.

“The good news is we're working on that, and the Maplewood project will help significantly, but I don't think we'll be able to stop there, and we'll need to keep working very diligently. So proximity and cost, very important drivers for graduate and professional students, especially graduate students, as you might imagine, those who have very long tenures here at Cornell, probably not surprising data; and ability to commute and how that works through, very important.

“So we have been benchmarking as well. And when you see this list, you may have had some reactions to this. It's important for me to note that we are benchmarking a bit more broadly than what we'd consider our academic peers, because we are trying to find campuses that have perhaps similar contextual problems or challenges that we do in small communities like Ithaca, but also with larger student bodies than many of our peer institutions.

“So that's why you see some of the schools up here, but also schools who have had to navigate the deferred maintenance challenge and who have put a good bit of investment into rehabilitation and renewal, as opposed to just new construction and how they have tackled those issues.

“So some initial themes that I want to share with you about what we're getting, students are reporting very strongly that there's not very much continuity within the housing system. Their words are that they always feel like they have one foot out the door.

“So in other words, a first-year student comes in, lives on north campus. Within just a couple months of their arrival, they already have to start figuring out and making plans for where they're going to live in their second year. You can imagine they're still trying

to make friends, trying to get their academic footing, et cetera. That's not necessarily an ideal outcome.

“And that continues each year. They have to think that far ahead. And without the capacity for them to be able to stay planted in one particular community, they always feel like they have one foot out the door. There's not continuity. They do like the variety that we have between our co-ops, our west campus, the gothics, the newer west campus, north campus, the program houses. They do like that variety. As you would imagine, with our students, that's a positive thing they do. Very much provide a lot of positive endorsement of the west campus house system and say that's a good thing. We don't have enough of it, so that's resonating very clearly.

“Equity is an issue for our students. So one thing you may or may not know is we actually have very few different housing rates. So a student who lives in a west campus house, which is a relatively new facility, with high-quality amenities, faculty involved in it, et cetera, pays the same as a student who lives in a building that hasn't been touched in 60 years, may not have central air conditioning, et cetera.

“So we did that to socialize in regards. We didn't want to see a socioeconomic stratification of where our students were living. So I think that was a good reason that we did that, but the students are acutely aware of that equity and the fact that some are paying more and some are not getting as much bang for their buck, so to speak, in their words.

“And in general, just that students would like more. They wish we had more options for on-campus housing. We are trying to understand how these decisions we make on campus have driven the off-campus market. We hear quite a lot about the prices of the apartments and the houses in Collegetown. They are astronomical, and in some cases the quality is very low.

“And quite frankly, my opinion is the landlords have been able to do that because they don't have a lot of competition. And so if we were to think about what we're able to do on campus, we'd want to understand how that impacts the off-campus market.

“So I zipped through those quickly, because I wanted to have a couple minutes to get some feedback. I hope we do have a few minutes; any thoughts or reactions or advice you would give to me, and I'll get into next steps.

“So we are in this kind of gathering information, continuing focus groups. We are approaching summer, which means you and many of the students are not going to be

available, so we're going to kick this off again early in the fall, before wrapping up, but I would welcome comments or suggestions or questions at this point."

Professor Assie-Lumumba: "Two questions. One is the issue of developmental and educational nature. Putting together all first-year students, as opposed to mixing them with upper classes, it has significant implication in terms of development, interpersonal communication. Without doing a specific study, I could fill it, on-campus. So I hope that some kind of thought will go into it, as you explore the new possibilities.

"The second is, how do we factor in new development? When I came first, long time ago, as a Fulbright, I was staying near Ecology House, which is on north campus. And over the years, student have really galvanized around the idea of environment and sustainability. And I'm wondering if there could be some kind of development in the area of program houses, to capture some of the new development, new features, new areas of interest of the student body."

Vice President Lombardi: "So on the first part of your question or statement, yes, we are looking at that in north campus and examining whether or not that is the right principles for us to adopt in that, if we should make any adjustments to that, and having those conversations.

"And then the second -- to address the second piece, the fact we are considering whether or not we need additional growth and what that growth would look like, what types of new development, of course, all this gets overlaid with financial constraints and what that means and how we would do that both with our rehabilitation need and this deferred maintenance issue. But also, if we do want to grow our capacity because we are not serving that -- as many of our students as I would like to serve on campus. So that's absolutely something we are considering. Thank you."

Professor Bensel: "In your data, did you break out sororities and fraternities for off-campus housing from other students? It strikes me that when you talk about continuity and about community, that's what the fraternities and sororities are offering, so to create something more of that in campus housing is, from my point of view, to improve educational experience -- I'm not real confident that sororities and fraternities are doing it.

"I know people will want to do this anyway, but if they're joining fraternities and sororities because you're searching for this continuity of place and so forth, then we could be competitive."

Vice President Lombardi: "Yeah, it's interesting, because I do sense this is qualitative, and our data does have some of that information. We haven't gotten to that level of analysis yet. We also have some good demographic information I'm really interested in understanding in terms of where students are choosing to live.

"But some qualitative feedback I've gotten is in some cases, students are choosing to enter into fraternity or sorority not because of broader ideals that are represented there, but because there's a place to live. And I don't think -- I don't have a particular whatever to take up with Greek life, but I would argue that's probably not the right reason for a student to choose whether or not they want to be a member of those organizations, just because there's a bed there. And the strongest advocates for Greek life, I think, would agree with that. So thank you."

Professor Thorne: "Naive question. What is constraining Cornell from really competing with the private landlords and building out and providing a lot more housing for our undergraduates?"

Vice President: "Money. I mean, I'm eight months in, so I'm trying get a landscape of the budget, but I believe it's really dollars."

"Professor Thorne: "Is this a revenue-producing part of Cornell's --"

"Vice President Lombardi: "It is. It is a cost recovery, anyway. So we are able, if we build something, to usually pay for that, because we charge essentially rent on those rooms. The institution, because of some of the other priorities and decisions it's made, doesn't have a high appetite for debt right now, so even though we could pay on that debt based on the revenues we would gain, overall, institutionally, we are not in a position to take on a lot of debt.

"So that is something we are looking at and something we need to factor in to this financial analysis about how we tackle whether we are making a recommendation at some point to reconsider debt or whether or not we have to think about other creative ways, fund-raising and other ways to try and accommodate this.

"Oh, yes. Thank you. So just again, timeline perspective, so we've done some of this initial analysis. Some are -- when we don't have students and faculty really engaged, we really will dig into the finances of this and try to unpack that a little more.

"In the fall, as soon as you get back, as soon as students get back, we really want to start testing out some of these conversations about what do we do, this north campus

question, for example, and having broad, inclusive conversations about what should that look like. The program houses, how do we right-size those, what does that look like.

“Then we are shooting for a mid-fall -- there's no concrete deadline -- mid-fall to package this up, and then create this road map we can follow. I think we'll then have to be disciplined to follow this path of how we want residence life on this campus to look for the next couple of decades.

“So that's where we're at from a timing perspective, and that is it. Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate it.”

Speaker Lewenstein: “Next on the agenda is report on Cornell in China from Laura Spitz, Vice Provost for International Affairs.