



Cornell University Graduate and Professional Student Assembly

Draft GPCI-Graduate and Professional Community Initiative:

Housing

Introduction

Every graduate and professional student who sets foot on Cornell's campus needs a place to live. There are on- and off-campus housing options available to students, offering a diverse array of living arrangements to cater to individual student needs. A variety of factors influence students' selection of housing, including but not limited to cost, location, access to transportation, amenities, and family services. Additionally, the issue of housing has obvious connections with other GPCI topics such as sense of community, international students, family services, and transportation.

However, navigating the Cornell-affiliated properties as well as the complex Ithaca/Tompkins housing market can be a challenge for returning students, and nearly impossible for first-year students who often do not have the luxury of visiting Ithaca to explore housing options before August.

Cornell offers limited housing options for the graduate and professional community. The largest Cornell-owned property, Hasbrouck Apartments, contains 338 units with a primary focus on serving the needs of graduate and professional students, postdoctoral associates, and visiting scholars with partners and/or families, although single-occupant units do exist. Thurston Court is a smaller complex that hosts about 20 residents. Finally, the newly renovated Maplewood Apartments, with 870 beds, is a public-private partnership housing complex serving graduate and professional students. Altogether, these options cover the housing needs of roughly 15-20% of the graduate and professional student population, of which only 5% is Cornell-owned and thus considered "on-campus."

Thus, the vast majority of graduate and professional students rely on off-campus housing. Most live in the city or town of Ithaca, the village of Cayuga Heights, or the town of Lansing, although some venture farther away from campus to other parts of Tompkins County or even beyond. Units range from studio or 1-bedroom apartments to multi-bedroom units, townhouses, and stand-alone houses. Prices can vary widely depending on unit size, location, demand, and amenities. Apartments closer to campus, especially in Collegetown, can fetch rents approaching \$1500-2000 per month, while units in Fall Creek or neighboring towns can fall as low as \$500 per room per month. Rent hikes of 5-10% per year are common.

Typically, students looking for off-campus housing will peruse various listing sites such as Cornell's Off-Campus Housing listings, Craigslist, or similar, while some students rely on word-of-mouth. Resources offered by departments, fields, or colleges are sporadic and often informal. Many international students and first-year students default to on-campus housing options or Maplewood due to the relative ease of signing up without having to trek to Ithaca, vet the property and landlord, or decipher a lease.

Objective 1: Continue to improve the quality of life at on-campus housing

Rationale: University-run housing offers a reliable option for students who prioritize amenities such as a safe neighborhood, structured programming, ease of leasing without visiting, family-friendliness, and proximity to campus. In general, the Hasbrouck and Thurston Court on-campus complexes are effective at serving the specific needs of graduate and professional students who come to Cornell with a family or plan to start a family. However, certain issues still persist in these communities, which we would like to address here.

Actions:

- a. Continue to prioritize family-focused and family-friendly housing at Hasbrouck.
- b. Periodically discuss the state of the Hasbrouck and Thurston Court complexes with Cornell administrators, Hasbrouck and Thurston Court residents, and graduate community advisors (GCAs).
- c. Create an additional faculty fellow position at Hasbrouck.
 - I. Currently, Hasbrouck only has one fellow, while West Campus has one per house.
- d. Improve the bus service to Hasbrouck.
 - I. Add buses during underserved times, specifically during nights and weekends.
 - II. Additional routes to locations such as Wegmans or the Ithaca Mall would see high utilization.
- e. Restructure the parking permit system for Hasbrouck parking lots.
 - I. Allow residents with Hasbrouck parking permits to park at other lots on campus during the daytime.
 - II. Create a pre-planned guest parking pass system to allow guests to park at Hasbrouck on a short term (24-72 hour) basis.
 - III. Reduce the price of the yearly Hasbrouck parking permit, as the bus service is often insufficient for students with families.
- f. Make efforts to better incorporate Thurston Court residents into the Hasbrouck community.
 - I. Hold occasional events closer to Thurston Court.
- g. Streamline online resources that describe available on-campus housing options.
 - I. Redirect all links to a single site.
 - II. Remove language suggesting Maplewood is still closed for renovations.
- h. Improve apartment amenities at Hasbrouck.
 - I. Provide air conditioning units with no installation fee.
 - II. Remove data caps for Hasbrouck residents using the Cornell internet network.
 - i. All students across campus currently have a 200GB/month data restriction for work usage (on the Cornell network).
 - ii. Hasbrouck students use the same network at their on-campus housing units but must use adhere to the same data restriction.
 - iii. Students with families often reach maximum data usage due to personal use.
 - III. Designate a subset of units at Hasbrouck as pet-friendly.
 - IV. Install dishwashers in units.

- i. Establish a timeline for renovation of Hasbrouck.
 - I. Current complex is over 25 years old and will eventually have to be renovated and/or replaced at significant capital cost.

Objective 2: Continue dialogue with Maplewood Apartments to improve quality of life

Rationale: With over 800 beds located within walking distance of campus, Maplewood is an important supplier of graduate and professional student housing. The public-private partnership with Greystar Real Estate (EdR prior to the 2018 merger) gives Cornell significant interest and influence in the success of the Maplewood complex, which was fully renovated and reopened in Fall 2018. As a whole, graduate and professional students are satisfied with Maplewood, as evidenced by high rates of lease renewal after the first year. However, there is room for improvement, with some issues exacerbated by delays in the approval and construction of the property.

Actions:

- a. Periodically discuss the state of the Maplewood complex with Cornell administrators, Maplewood residents, and Greystar representatives.
- b. Set aside a portion of available units each rental season for newly admitted graduate and professional students.
- c. Improve transportation amenities at Maplewood.
 - I. Add a bus route directly between Maplewood and the Ithaca Commons.
 - II. Add additional buses during evenings and weekends.
 - III. Designate a parking lot for guest parking.
 - i. Currently, there are only six guest parking spots for the entire complex.
- d. Improve the system for requesting and performing maintenance.
 - I. Optimize the user-facing interface of the online maintenance request portal.
 - i. Currently, many students submit requests manually to the administrative office due to difficulties navigating the portal.
 - II. Mandate a minimum of 24 hours advance notice prior to performing any maintenance.
 - i. Residents have reported instances where maintenance staff enters apartments without warning.
- e. Install sufficient waste disposal services.
 - I. Install composting receptacles.
 - II. Install additional recycling and waste receptacles.
 - i. Receptacles located on the far end of the complex discourage timely disposal of accumulated waste.
- f. Increase basic security measures in Maplewood units.
 - I. Install doorbells and/or intercoms.
 - II. Install privacy drapes or blinds inside front doors of townhouse units to block the view into the units from the street.

Objective 3: Improve support for graduate and professional students who choose to live off-campus

Rationale: Since Cornell relies on the greater Ithaca and Tompkins County housing market to provide residences for most graduate and professional students, Cornell must provide adequate resources to help students find a place to live. The Off-Campus Living office, under the Campus and Community Engagement umbrella, offers in-person consultation and online resources, albeit with limited staffing and budget. This office serves both undergraduate and graduate/professional cohorts.

Actions:

- a. Continue to offer consultation and resources through the Off-Campus Living office.
 - I. Hire additional staff to focus exclusively on graduate/professional student housing.
- b. Collate online on- and off-campus resources into a single, coherent Cornell-hosted website.
 - I. Consult graduate and professional students in the website development process.
 - II. Combine information found at living.cornell.edu and ccengagement.cornell.edu/off-campus-living.
 - III. Use search-engine optimization (SEO) to make this site the first listed for common searches as “grad housing Cornell” and “Ithaca grad student housing”.
 - IV. Convert housing pamphlets into ADA-compliant PDFs.
- c. Create a system for current students to vet off-campus listings on behalf of students who cannot visit Ithaca prior to move-in.
 - I. Leverage existing informal department-level systems for this purpose.
- d. Relocate the Off-Campus Living office to a more accessible location such as the newly vacated Sheldon Court space in Collegetown.
 - I. The 5th floor of Willard Straight Hall is not ADA-compliant.
- e. Incorporate presentations on off-campus resources into department and college orientations.

Objective 4: Help create a better community for graduate and professional students living off-campus

Rationale: The Cornell and Ithaca/Tompkins communities are intricately connected, and as such, Cornell should be committed to continually improving the communities in which graduate and professional students live. The Infrastructure, Properties, and Planning office works with community partners in planning and implementing housing projects in the community, such as the Maplewood and North Campus redevelopment projects. Additionally, the University’s Office of Community Relations deals with the intertwined nature of Cornell students and staff who work and study at the university and live in the community. The GPSA has also begun to work more closely with community partners to voice the graduate and professional student perspective in the community.

Actions:

- a. Solicit graduate and professional student involvement in community groups such as the Rental Housing Advisory Commission, the Collegetown Neighborhood Council, the Campus-Community Coalition, and similar neighborhood organizations.
- b. Continue to solicit feedback from graduate and professional students when evaluating on-campus housing projects.

- c. Invite graduate and professional students to attend town halls, planning meetings, and similar forums to provide a student perspective.
- d. Exert Cornell's influence on the community to counteract predatory landlord practices such as aggressive rent hikes, abusive contract terms, and poor responsiveness to maintenance requests.