

# Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency

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*Administration provided by Ithaca Area Economic Development*

**Minutes of Public Hearing  
602 W. Buffalo Street (The Citizen)  
July 11, 2023 @ 11:00 am  
Ithaca Area Economic Development Office  
119 E. Seneca Street, Suite 200, Ithaca, NY 14850  
and  
Via Zoom and Livestreamed on YouTube**

Present: Heather McDaniel (for Tompkins County IDA; TCIDA), Rich John (TCIDA Board), Julia Bucher – remote (Visum Development Group), Kurt Anderson (IAED), Kellea Bauda (IAED), Theresa Alt and Mike Sigler (speakers)

1. Heather McDaniel called the public hearing to order at 11:02 am.
2. Heather McDaniel gave an overview of the project and the proposed initiative.
3. Public comment was heard from the following:

**Peter Wissoker – 705 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca (Submitted via email)**

1. Given that the “Project Agreement, the Lease Agreement, the Leaseback Agreement, the Tax Agreement and related documents are being negotiated and will be presented to the Agency for execution upon approval of this resolution (page 3 of the authorizing resolution), how can you give even initial approval ahead of time without knowing what the agreement will look like? Please don’t.
2. Please stop providing tax breaks to market-rate apartments. In this case you are talking about foregoing nearly \$1 million in taxes in the first two years and nearly \$1.8 million in the first four. It seems well within the realm of possibility that over those four years someone else might come along to build on the same spot (perhaps even the current property owner) without asking the IDA to support the project. Let’s take that risk.
3. If you go ahead and fund the project, I’d ask the following:
  - Once it is completed, all jobs associated with the project should pay a living wage: The agency should require that all workers who are attached to the project through Visium, the LLC, or the services either hires to do work such as janitorial services, security, etc., should be guaranteed a living wage.
  - Prevailing wage/apprenticeship should be attended to: The agency should require that the developer use a contractor who pays the prevailing wage as well as contractors who have an apprenticeship program. The developer should work with the contractor to meet these conditions.
  - Sale Contingency, Pt. 1—Terminate the tax breaks if “The Citizen” is sold: Please write the agreement with the applicant in a way that ensures that the tax breaks are not conveyed with the sale of the project, even if the owner or the new buyer asks you to do so.
  - Sale Contingency, Pt. 2—TCIDA/taxing entities should profit from the project’s sale: If the applicant resells “The Citizen” the state, city, county, and schools should be repaid for any taxes they have foregone plus interest.

- Ensure that the contractor purchases supplies locally: Where the contractor for this project is based remains unknown. Please build in language that forces the contractor to attempt to secure materials for the project using local suppliers within the county first. This means local firms (not national firms like Home Depot) should be given a chance to speak with their suppliers and the opportunity to bid on supplying the job. It is likely necessary to see what kind of price-matching scheme would make this possible without making the cost of the building prohibitively high, but the effort should be made.

### **Theresa Alt – 206 Eddy Street, Ithaca**

The Citizen on the site of the former Joe's Restaurant at 602 West Buffalo Street is not the kind of housing that the City of Ithaca needs. From Heather McDaniel's memo about financial need of the project, I teased out what the rents are likely to be. A very small one-bedroom apartment of about 600 square feet would probably rent for about \$1,758/month. It would take an annual income of \$70,320 to afford that. What kinds of jobs are there in the City of Ithaca? Well, a beginning secretary, Administrative Assistant II at Cornell might make \$20/hour or about \$40,000 a year. I looked at the City of Ithaca's CSEA Administrative Unit pay scales. Only a few of the most-skilled, top-paid positions in the unit could afford one of those one-bedroom apartments.

The Citizen is market-rate housing, the kind we don't need more and more of. That \$5,500 per unit fee to the Tompkins County Community Housing Development Fund won't be paid for several years. It will be quite a few years before the Fund can be used to attract State or Federal money to build affordable units and those units can actually be built. If any land is left.

I noticed in the community benefits overview that over the next ten years, the amount of abated taxes will somewhat exceed the amount of actually paid new taxes.

We don't need more gentrification in the West End. What we need is housing that the people who work in the city can afford. I'm talking about all those clerical workers and retail clerks and waitpersons and hotel cleaners. When people are forced to drive to work, that's very bad for the planet.

### **Mike Sigler – 218 Peruville Road, Freeville**

I am here as a private citizen to ask a favor of Visum, one of the larger developers in Ithaca. I'm driving around, looking at the buildings coming up, and there seems to be a sameness. From everything I see in Ithaca, it really has become a bit of a canyon. When you have a bunch of developers and they're all developing at the same time, every building is a box-like structure and very similar. Can't we get something that looks a little different? Given where this site is – Joe's Restaurant had been around for decades – it would be nice if there was some way to recognize that. When you look at the final product at Ironworks, there's no doubt the developers really retained something. That building has character, it looks different than everything else out there. I'm hoping that developers will do that in Ithaca. For a city that prides itself on its quirkiness, I think you lose some of that. That is the responsibility of the Common Council and County planning department, but I don't see that getting done. This is why I'm asking a favor of the developer: to look at the other buildings built nearby and say: "we don't really want to look the same." Like I said, it's a favor, not a requirement. Thank you.

4. The hearing was adjourned at 11:15 am.