Environmental Management Council
Advisory Board

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Jan. 12, 2026

To: Town of Dryden, Tompkins County Planning and Sustainability Department, and Proposed Developers of 172 Ed Hill Road, Tax Parcel #28.-1-28.2, known as Trillium Woods Farm

From: The Tompkins County Environmental Management Council

Re: Recommendations for modification of the proposed residential development at Trillium Woods Farm

Dryden Planning Board,

Tompkins County has a long history of striving to protect its unique natural resources. To that end, the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council maintains a Unique Natural Areas Inventory identifying 195 special sites within the county that contain special features, plant and animal communities, and other rare characteristics worthy of protection for species preservation, scientific value, and the public enjoyment of future generations. While identification as a Unique Natural Area (UNA) does not itself convey any legal protection, its designation provides a planning tool to ensure that great care is taken to protect these areas and avoid their disruption when analyzing proposed developments and before granting approval.

The proposed residential development at Trillium Woods Farm, a sketch map of which is reproduced on the attached figure (in the bottom map), would include development in two of the county's Unique Natural Areas: **UNA-74** (Ed Hill Road Trillium Woods) and **UNA-73** (Freeville Fir Tree Swamp). Below and in the attached map figure, we identify special features that must be protected from disturbance and recommend ways to balance residential development with the protection of these extraordinary resources.

Although the developers should be applauded for proposing to exclude some of the Freeville Fir Tree Swamp from development, a portion remains included. The attached figure shows the proposed development lots (bottom map) and the two UNA boundaries with natural features (top map). Between these two maps, one can see how the current proposed lot plan will overlap natural resources, wetlands (both State and Tompkins County designated), flood areas, and County UNAs.

UNA-73, the Freeville Fir Tree Swamp, is one of the most exceptional examples of this type of forest community in Tompkins County, being the only true fir tree swamp in the county. It is particularly notable for harboring a large population of balsam fir, a species typically found only much farther north and on mountain slopes. There is also a grove of extremely large hemlock here, part of an old-growth forest. Populations of the American globeflower (*Trollius laxus ssp. Laxus*), an extremely scarce species threatened locally, statewide, and globally, have been recorded here in the past. The area has been noted as a prime botanical area for over 100 years. Any compromise of its boundaries, particularly the flowing or seeping waters that provide wetland recharge areas to this site, could cause irreparable damage to this precious ecosystem.

Therefore, we recommend the Dryden Planning Board exclude the entire portion of **UNA-73** contained within the development parcel and request that it be donated as a non-developable permanent conservation easement. This donation should include lot 4, a portion of lot 2, and lot 19, in addition to the proposed lot 20 (see attachment for more details).

The current development proposal includes dividing **UNA-74** in the upper east corner of the parcel into five subsections for sale. Trillium Woods is a highly significant ecological community that is rare in the state, and a valuable, sensitive resource for current and future species preservation, scientific study, and aesthetic enjoyment. The feature that makes Trillium Woods so rare is that spring wildflowers are unusually abundant, with trillium, white baneberry, spring beauty, toothwort, trout lily, and bloodroot, among many others. It supports the densest population of white trillium in the county, and their spring display is exceptional. The herb layer is very lush and very diverse. Each spring, these woods provide a simply amazing display of color and density that thrills any observer lucky enough to see it (note: private land should only be accessed with the owner's permission).

We recommend that the Dryden Planning Board exclude all of **UNA-74** from development and request that it be donated as a non-developable permanent conservation easement to be managed by the Town of Dryden or its designee.

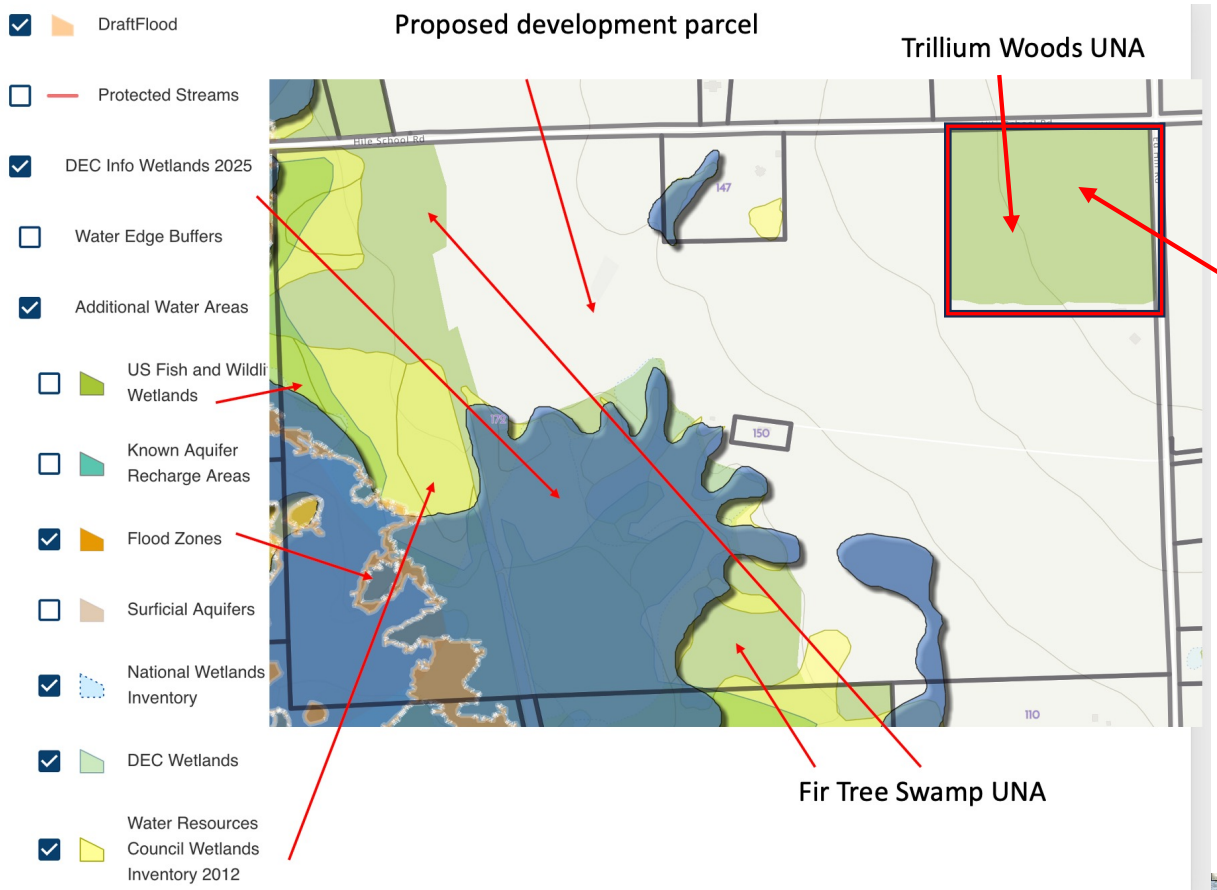
The Tompkins County Environmental Management Council strongly recommends these urgently needed modifications to the proposed development plan for the Trillium Woods Farm parcel discussed above and on the attached map.

Below you will find summaries of the important characteristics of each of these UNAs, extracted and simplified from the full Tompkins County Unique Natural Areas Inventory.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

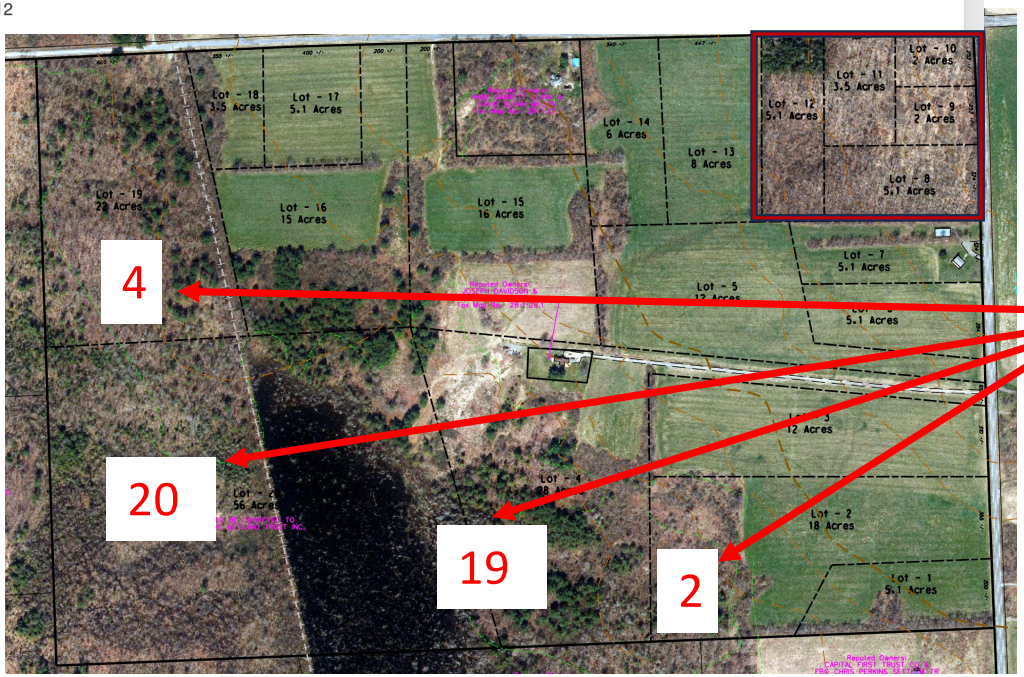
Respectfully,

Tompkins County Environmental Management Council



TC Environmental Management Council Recommendations

Make lots 8-12 into a donated non-development Trillium Woods conservation easement.



Make lots 4, 19, and a portion of lot 2, in additional to the already proposed lot 20) in the Fir Tree Swamp UNA as a conservation easement.

The following are summaries from the site descriptions contained in the Tompkins County Unique Natural Area Survey, with the key characteristics identified shown in red.

Ed Hill Road Trillium Woods
SITE CODE: UNA-74
LOCATION
Municipality: Town of Dryden

SITE AND VEGETATION DESCRIPTION
This rich site supports a moderately mature deciduous forest with 12- to 15-inch diameter trees. The number of tree species is high, with dominant species being basswood, white ash, black cherry, and sugar maple. Other common trees include bitternut hickory, pignut hickory, and beech.
The herb layer is very lush and very diverse. The spring display of trilliums is exceptional. Many other spring wildflowers and ferns are present.

REASONS FOR SELECTION
Excellent quality example of plant community, with high scenic/aesthetic value.

SPECIAL LAND-USE INFORMATION
Water Resources
Rare or scarce plants found in wetland areas.

CONSERVATION OF THE SITE
The site does not have an adequate protective buffer.

Evidence of Disturbance and Threats to Site: Some logging has occurred in the past.
Future development is considered a threat to the site.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE
Size (acres): 19.34
Topographic Features
Slightly sloping site near the crest of a hill.

Soils Present on the Site
Langford channery silt loam, 2 to 8 percent slopes, non-hydric potentially highly erodible, moderately well drained.
Erie channery silt loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes, erodible.
Somewhat poorly drained with hydric inclusions.

BIOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE
General Cover Types
State - At least one community designated as rare or scarce at the state level by The Nature Conservancy and the New York Natural Heritage
Program is found on this site.
Local - At least one community designated as rare or scarce at the local level by the Tompkins County EMC and the Cornell Botanic Gardens is found on this site.
Ecological Communities Inventoried on this Site:
Community Name Description Global/State/Local Rarity
Maple-basswood rich. A hardwood forest that typically occurs on fertile, moist, well-drained soils, associated with limestone or deep glacial gravels. Dominant trees are sugar maple, basswood, and white

ash. Common associates are bitternut hickory, tulip tree, musclewood, alternate-leaved dogwood, and witch hazel.
Spring wildflowers are unusually abundant. Characteristic species are trillium, white baneberry, spring beauty, toothwort, trout lily, and bloodroot.

Plant Species
Local - At least one plant species designated as rare or scarce at the local level by the Tompkins County EMC and the Cornell Botanic Gardens is found on this site.
Significant Plant Species Inventoried on this Site:
Viola canadensis, Canada violet, Scarce

Freeville Fir Tree Swamp
SITE CODE: UNA-73
LOCATION
Municipality: Town of Dryden, Village of Freeville
SITE AND VEGETATION DESCRIPTION

The wettest areas of the swamp are dominated by white pine, balsam fir, hemlock, with fir (estimated 200-300 trees) dominant in some areas. **This is the only true fir tree swamp in the county.**

The eastern swamp forest is dominated by hemlock, black ash, yellow birch, and red maple with balsam fir and musclewood in the understory. **There is a grove of extremely large hemlock here.**

REASONS FOR SELECTION
There are rare and/or scarce animals, and rare and/or scarce plants. It contains a diverse fauna and flora and has scenic/aesthetic value. Included is an area of geologic importance.
This is an outstanding quality example of this swamp forest plant community.
It contains a large state-designated wetland.
It is a well-known historic botanical/zoological site with rare and/or scarce community types.
It contains an Old-growth forest.

SPECIAL LAND-USE INFORMATION
The Tompkins County Greenway Coalition has identified a biological corridor which includes this site.
A mature forest stand with trees over 150 years old is found on this site.

Water Resources
Wetlands identified on the National Wetlands Inventory are found on this site. All or some of this site lies within Flood Zone A (100-year flood) as identified by FEMA. All or some of a Class 1 NYS Freshwater Wetland lies on this site. Class 1 is the most valuable class assigned.
Populations of the extremely scarce, threatened, and state-identified American globeflower (Trollius laxus ssp. laxus) have been found here in the past. This area has been noted as a prime botanical area for over 100 years.

CONSERVATION OF THE SITE
Conservation/Management Needs
Wetlands and rare plant and community populations need to have an adequate protective buffer.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE

Topographic Features

The swamp occupies a nearly flat basin of a former glacial lake. It is located in a north - south valley. Fine-textured organic soils overlay a calcareous lake bed. Surficial deposits are lacustrine silt and clay, probably glacial outwash from the Valley Heads moraine.

Soils Present on the Site

Madalin mucky silty clay loam
Muck and Peat

Hydric (Wet) Erodibility Drainage

Hydric
Poorly drained and very poorly drained
Highly erodible

Rarity:

Global - At least one community designated as rare or scarce at the global level by The Nature Conservancy is found on this site.
State - At least one community designated as rare or scarce at the state level by The Nature Conservancy and the New York Natural Heritage
Program is found on this site.
Local - At least one community designated as rare or scarce at the local level by the Tompkins County EMC is found on this site.

Ecological Communities Inventoried on this Site:

Community Name Description Global/State/Local Rarity

Rich hemlock-hardwood peat swamp

Rarity:

Global - At least one plant species designated as rare or scarce at the global level by The Nature Conservancy is found on this site.
State - At least one plant species designated as rare or scarce at the state level by The Nature Conservancy and the New York Natural Heritage
Program is found on this site.
Local - At least one plant species designated as rare or scarce at the local level by the Tompkins County EMC and the Cornell Plantations is found on this site.

Legal Status:

Federal - At least one plant species designated as threatened or endangered by the U.S. Department of the Interior is found on this site.
State - At least one plant species designated in New York State as endangered, threatened, rare, or exploitably vulnerable is found here.

Animal Description: The site has a rich bird fauna present. There is a good breeding population of wood ducks.