

Our Fair Share: Addressing Homelessness

Cornell is a major contributor to the Ithaca and Tompkins community. However, Cornell is a serious under contributor for its size. Cornell University is tax exempt, and owns property in excess value of \$2 billion. If it weren't for Cornell's tax exemption, the local government would be able to double its revenues.¹ Considering that Cornell has an endowment of \$7.2 billion, the fact that the university's land is extremely valuable comes at no surprise.² Cornell also hosts some of the richest and most well-off families in the country. The average student's family has an income of \$151,000, and 64% of students come from families in the top 20% of income earners.³

While Cornell enjoys lower costs because of its tax exempt status -- costs that would otherwise be passed onto families of students -- Tompkins County has a homeless population of over 160 people.⁴ Nels Bohn, Director of Community Development, Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency, argues that Cornell Students are partly to blame for the lack of affordable housing: "Thanks to a constant stream of renters supplied by Ithaca College and Cornell University students, landlords in Ithaca find themselves with very few vacancies... increasing the supply of housing aimed at only one price range or targeted to a single age niche will not result in the benefits of increased competition for the entire market."⁵ The lack of affordable housing, partially caused by Cornell students, has gotten so bad that entire encampments of people without homes have arisen, and the encampment area in Ithaca is referred to as *The Jungle*.⁶

The lack of affordable housing is devastating the local community, and organizations like Second Wind Cottages have started providing housing solutions for people facing homelessness.⁷ Bohn's account is supported by testimony from The Jungle, where Carmen Guidi, board member of Second Wind Cottages, states that many residents have income, but that "[the homeless population] cannot afford to live indoors."⁸

Cornell is an under contributor to the town's tax revenues, and the beneficiaries of that under contribution are economically advantaged students from across the world. Students pass in and out of Ithaca, while the residents of the city have to battle the consequences of our education. We believe that it is time that the university and its students step up to fight the problems that we

¹<https://ithacavoices.com/2019/04/how-much-should-they-pay-city-reopens-discussion-on-cornells-local-contribution/>

² <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2020/10/endowment-holds-steady-fy-2020-despite-pandemic>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/college-mobility/cornell-university>

⁴ <https://wskg.org/news/ithaca-homeless-people-get-more-time-to-move-out-of-way-for-state-dredging/>

⁵https://www.ithaca.com/news/why-is-ithaca-one-of-the-least-affordable-us-cities/article_e67f68f4-cb0e-11e3-9571-001a4bcf887a.html

⁶https://www.ithaca.com/news/ithaca/in-the-middle-of-it-all/article_939d67ca-d102-11ea-8fb5-ebb259467d08.html

⁷ [Secondwindcottages.org](https://secondwindcottages.org)

⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_-1SjKK31A&t=407s

are actively contributing to. The first step is to address the lack of affordable housing, and the impacts of homelessness:

- **Amending the Student Assembly Charter to empower the Student Assembly Infrastructure Fund (SAIF) to make contributions to student organizations that are funding and building infrastructure projects in the interest of the Cornell and Ithaca community.**
- **Cornell's student groups, from design organizations to service-based clubs, can then partner with the local government and nonprofits to contribute where our university has not. One intended partner is Cornell University Sustainable Design (CUSD).**
- **Because there are organizations with proven-models for fighting homelessness in Ithaca, some that even have Cornell students on their boards, we can save money on administrative costs and collaborate directly to build infrastructure like tiny homes.**
- **With a contribution from the SAIF to student organizations, we can then raise further funds to provide Ithaca's homeless population with mutual aid like food, water, clothing, shelter, and other necessities.**