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Boris Tsang/Sun File Photo

The Ithaca Farmers Market plans to have segmented renovations that will occur over the next few years.

ITHACA FARMERS MARKET

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48 Years After its Opening, Ithaca Farmers Market Plans for Renovation

By Kayla Riggs

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For decades, people across Ithaca have enjoyed the clamor of the Ithaca Farmers Market, perusing the booths of local vendors that line the site’s open-air halls. But the pavilion’s dated design has caught up with the local favorite, with accessibility and insulation problems, which has led the market to plan major renovations — while trying to maintain its age-old rustic charm.

“It’s a process of thinking more deeply about what this Farmers Market means to us,” said Anton Burkett, executive director of the Ithaca Farmers Market.

First opening in 1973, the market was originally located near Ithaca Agway. Moving five times afterwards, the market settled into its current waterfront location in Steamboat Landing in 1988. Over a decade later, the pavilion was completed, modeled after a 13th century European cathedral. Since then, the site has remained relatively unchanged.

Regular market goers can confirm the market’s small and dirt-filled parking lot, its lack of cover from the cold, rigid, dust-covered floors and accessibility issues detract from an otherwise enjoyable experience.

“Someone pushing a stroller and someone wheeling their wheelchair can both attest to how tricky it can be to navigate the site today,” said Kathryn Chesebrough, a senior designer from [Whitham Planning Design Landscape Architecture](#), the group tasked with redesigning the market’s parking area, outdoor spaces, waterfront and landscaping.

nArchitects, a Brooklyn-based architecture firm, is working in tandem with Chesebrough and her team; focusing on the site’s pavilion. The company responded to a public request for proposal that was released by the market and was ultimately chosen for the job. Mimi Hoang, partner-in-charge for Ithaca’s Farmers Market project at nArchitects, said that the community aspect of the proposal “really resonated” with her and her team.

“We are absolutely invested in doing something really beautiful for the vendors and the community,” Hoang added.

Although no designs have been finalized, ideas that have been suggested so far include a revamped parking lot, improved picnic areas, air conditioning, a bus stop and an upgraded boat landing, according to Chesebrough and Hoang. Solar panels, recycled wood and other environmentally-conscious options for the market have also been discussed, Hoang said, keeping with Ithaca’s and Cornell’s commitment to sustainability.

“Design is balancing diverse needs,” Chesebrough said. “But we feel like we’re doing that really successfully so far and we’re really feeling good about the conversation remaining open with members of the community and vendors.”

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The two groups recently solicited community input via a short survey to gauge the public’s wants and needs for the upcoming project. According to Chesebrough, the survey received over 600 responses. One piece of feedback has been clear, she said: the community cares about the Ithaca Farmers Market.

“It’s very, very clear that everybody really cares,” Hoang said, agreeing with Chesebrough, “and is really invested and anxious and passionate about the whole thing. That matters to us.”

Many frequent patrons have voiced concerns about the market’s ability to stay open. Disruption to the site could prove particularly difficult for the market’s vendors, many of whom rely on the market for income.

Cheryl Barton, a local vendor of [Bellwether Hard Cider](#) and [Wine Cellars](#), noted that, while construction on the parking lot and waterfront may not be incredibly inconvenient, changes to the pavilion is “another story.”

“If it is the consensus of the membership to build a new pavilion,” Barton wrote in an email to the Sun, “I hope the community will bear with us and support the vendors during the construction because we will need it.”

The proposed winterized section of the market — an insulated segment of the site — could help reduce the impact on businesses in the long term. This development, which would likely only constitute one-third of the pavilion, would hopefully allow the market to be open year-round and provide vendors the opportunity to sell their products for a longer period of time, Burkett said.

Burkett added that the construction of the site will likely take place in three tiers: first the parking lot will be renovated, then the waterfront, and finally the pavilion. This segmented, multi-year plan could also help alleviate disruption as the site would never be entirely under construction.

Burkett said that between 2025 and 2026 is an “optimistic timeline” for the completion of the renovations, but adds that this largely depends on how quickly they can secure funds. Because the project is publicly funded, Burkett and his team are currently in the process of applying for further financial support in order to begin construction on the first tier.

Though several unknowns remain, many supporters of the market have voiced their excitement about the potential of the project, and some have even expressed ideas of their own for the improved site.

“I would love to see more art included in the plans and kid-friendly, fun sculptures,” Alice Muhlback, vendor of [Spirit and Kitsch](#), wrote in an email to The Sun. “I would like to make ideas with the Farmers Market kids.”

Burkett, too, is hopeful about the market’s upcoming improvements, voicing his enthusiasm for the project.

“It’s one of the best farmers markets in the country, in my opinion,” Burkett said. “We’re really lucky to have a farmers market like this in our community, but I’d really like to see us leverage it even more for the community’s good.”



ABOUT KAYLA RIGGS

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By Jack Waxman November 14, 2019

In my last column, I wrote about my adventures at Dilmun Hill Organic Farm, a student-run farm that practices sustainable agriculture on Cornell University’s campus. That afternoon, my friend (and a student farmer at Dilmun) Teddy Matel introduced me to the paw-paw, scooped me wild-bee honey and gifted me a batch of their produce. We left Dilmun on a mission: To make a delicious meal of out these ingredients — and, more broadly, out the terroir of New York.

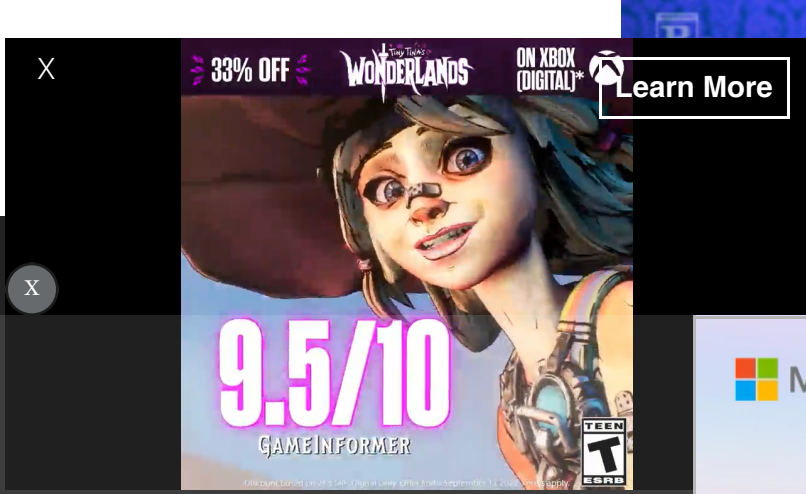


Experiencing Ithaca Farmers Market: The Ultimate Spring Season Guide

By Rae Specht April 17, 2019

The produce is some of the best in the region, but what truly makes Ithaca Farmers Market shine is the abundance of incredible food vendors, each which feature deliciously unconventional cuisines from around the globe. Nearly all of the stalls advertise tasty vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options to satisfy every preference and diet. The vast array of choices is a welcomed sensory overload, so upon arrival, make your rounds through the pavilion to take it all in, snatching some free samples of local cheeses, fruits, honey, cured meats and pestos along the way.

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