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To enhance and protect the unique character of our communities through sound planning and development.

Position Paper 1 – NCCC Main Campus Expansion

In reference to the proposed move of the North Country Community College campus to Lake Placid there is a great concern that much information that would be critical for making an informed decision on whether to expand the Saranac Lake campus or move it to Lake Placid is not being given to the members of the NCCC Board of Trustees, the Essex and Franklin County legislators and the public. Furthermore, there are many questions that need to be asked of those that are presenting the information regarding the move/expansion.

We (Sound Adirondack Growth Alliance) have been working to compile some information that will be critical in making an informed decision. Unfortunately, the administration of NCCC is only presenting half of the necessary information, the half that would give the impression that the only logical thing to do is build a brand new campus in Lake Placid and abandon the Saranac Lake campus.

Those supporting the move to Lake Placid have said that the college enrollment has grown by over 70% and that the Saranac Lake campus can not handle that growth, that it has outgrown its current campus and that there is no room to do a proper expansion. This is an inaccurate assessment. They have said there has been over 70% growth in the student enrollment since 1999. That fact in itself is true. When asked if the college has any student enrollment numbers for the past 15 to 20 years, the answer from the administration has always been, "no, it doesn't exist" or "it is impossible to gather that information" or "it is almost impossible to gather that information and would take too much time for staff to research it". The request has been made on several occasions and it has always been refused by the college administration. We were finally given enrollment figures by the college administration, but it wasn't given to us until April 4 (we requested it in January) and it only covers the past 10 years.

SAGA was able to research this information and gather it from existing material. We have photocopied several editions of the NCCC Institutional Fact Books (by

Dr. Robert M. Karp), which cover all the statistics from 1979 to 1993 at which time the production of these fact books was discontinued. We have also studied New York State Statistical Yearbooks and the New York State Department of education website. We now are able to fill some holes from 1996 to present, but the critical years are from the late 70s through the early 90s, years the college administration says they can not access.

The key statistic is the number of students enrolled at NCCC in any given year. We have statistics that shows the student enrollment broken down by campus for the years 1979 - 1992 and from 1996 - 2006. We also have the total enrollments from 1979 - 2006. The sources for this information is cited at the end of this commentary. The interesting thing is that there were about the same number of students enrolled at NCCC on the Saranac Lake campus from 1979 through 1992 as there are as of 2006. It is common knowledge that NCCC suffered a severe drop in enrollment starting in 1993 and reaching a 30 year low in 1999. The enrollment started an upward trend in 2000 and found itself back at similar numbers in the Fall of 2006 as it had from the late 1970s all through to the early 1990s. So, the increase in student enrollment at the 70+% rate that the college administration claims has only occurred in the past 6 years, starting in 1999 the year of the lowest enrollment in the past 27 years. The enrollment on the Saranac Lake campus, the one that is claimed to not be able to handle the "increased" enrollment is actually at the same enrollment as it was for the years 1979 - 1992 with several of those years (1979-85 and 1992) being well above the current enrollment. If the same number or less of students are at NCCC now as there were during that 14 year period, why is there such an urgent need to close the SL campus and build a brand new campus at another location?

Here are the Saranac Lake campus student fall enrollment totals:

1979...825

1980...868

1981...898

1982...820

1983...905

1884...916 - the highest SL campus student enrollment

1985...833

1986...714

1987...665

1988...626

1989...665

1990...710

1991...727

1992...774

1996...690

1997...581

1998...564

1999...537 – the lowest SL campus student enrollment in 27 years

2000...581

2001...631

2002...700

2003...729

2004...722

2005...699

2006...731

The college is also claiming that it needs to expand and/or move so as to be able to handle the continuing rise of student enrollment. However, according to all projections there is a decline in high school graduations in Essex and Franklin counties over the next 10 years. Where are these students going to come from? The college says they are going to do some aggressive marketing to get out-of-county students because they get tuition charge-backs from those counties. The Essex and Franklin County taxpayers are going to have a hard time accepting this huge expenditure so that the college can market to out-of-county students, which every college in the state is trying to do (the competition is huge). There seems to be a great interest in the potential out-of-county student to the detriment of the local "community" student of Franklin and Essex County. It is feared there is a loss of the sense that this is a COMMUNITY college whose whole purpose of existence is for Franklin and Essex Co. students.

When asked about student enrollment figures at the SL campus over the past 15 to 20 years it has been said by Ed Trathen (VP for Enrollment and Student Services/Assistant to the President) that the numbers would not be relevant because the inmate program was in existence and the inmate enrollment accounted for approximately half of the SL student enrollment numbers. It was also said by Mr Trathen that there is no breakdown that separates the inmate enrollment numbers from the SL on-campus numbers. In fact, those numbers were never combined with the SL campus enrollment. They were always recorded separately. Even if we were to combine them now, the largest fall inmate enrollment - 165 in 1991 - represents only 18% of the combined SL and inmate student enrollment, and that's from five correctional facilities, two of which are in the Malone area.

Up until the Bernier Carr presentation on April 4, there were only two cost figures that had been presented by the college regarding the move/expansion. A figure of "approximately" \$40 million was used to describe the expansion and/or move with an \$8 million dollar difference between the cost of expanding the SL campus and building a new campus in LP with the higher cost being the expansion of SL. No breakdown was ever released to explain the \$40 million dollar figure. The figures presented by Bernier Carr are \$62 million to expand the SL campus and \$52 million to build a new campus in LP. There was much information that was

unavailable (including the cost of buying the property in LP) by Bernier Carr. B/C noted that the tight time frame they had to work within to prepare their presentation didn't allow them enough time to gather much information. The Essex and Franklin County legislatures were supposed to make a decision with limited information and in a very short time (2 weeks) which they were told about for the first time at the April 4 presentation. It turns out that an April 18 deadline existed because that was when the option that NCCC bought on the LP property would run out. This presentation was made at the beginning of the April break and some legislators were planning to be out of town during that time. Now the college has obtained tentative agreement for an extension on that option, but no one has said for how long.

There has been an argument made by the college administration that the buildings are too old. Actually, a vast majority of the building on the SL campus are newer than the existing building at the proposed Lake Placid site and the one older building, the current administration building (Hodson Hall), is a building of historic significance in Saranac Lake. Most colleges value their older buildings, restoring them and making them a centerpiece to be proud of.

It has been pointed out that current course offerings at NCCC are primarily Monday through Thursday and concentrated to the hours between 8AM and 4PM. The SL campus is clearly being underutilized by concentrating these classes as they are in the current schedule. There are alternatives to address the perceived overcrowding at the Saranac Lake campus. One way the college was able to accommodate more students twenty years ago was to hold more evening classes than are currently available and provide a full five day schedule rather than what is now essentially a four day schedule. This is common practice in most other colleges.

A couple of questions that have not been answered by the college administration:

Why has the college refused to release the student enrollment figures of the past 25 years, claiming that any numbers prior to 1996 (2 years prior to the all time lowest student enrollment of the past 27 years) are impossible to get?

Why is the downward trend of student population projections being ignored?

Why is the college expecting an action from the county legislators with so many pieces of vital information missing?... and in an impossibly short time frame?

Why did the college administration and board of trustees not reveal the deadline date for a piece of property on which they had purchased an option until 2 weeks before that deadline?

There are many other issues and questions above and beyond what is being presented here but this is some basic factual information that the college administration has not presented, basic information that is needed to make a properly informed decision regarding the future of NCCC.

There are serious concerns regarding how this expansion/move proposal has been handled: limited information, some information being presented in such a way as to be misleading, short time frames. We are now at an expenditure of \$50-60 million. There has been no opportunity for the public to weigh in, although NCCC attorney Jim Brooks did say that anyone wanting to comment could submit something in writing.

It is very obvious that the college administration and certain members of the board of trustees are interested in ONLY building a new campus in Lake Placid. Any presentation has been entirely oriented toward a new LP campus. The Bernier Carr presentation was obviously slanted toward building new in LP (choreographed right down to the choice of slide that was left up during the question and answer period after the B/C presentation that had a big bright check mark next to the LP choice) Not at any time has there been so much as a peep, much less consideration from the college administration and board of trustees for what happens to Saranac Lake, the home of NCCC for FORTY YEARS. With the information that SAGA has presented in this commentary it begs the question: Maybe there isn't a need to expand to quite the extent that the college administration would like us to think. Are all the things on the administration's wish list really necessary... to the tune of over 50 million tax payer dollars? Is the current campus being used to its fullest? Can capital improvements and a more limited expansion be made, at a much lower cost, that will address the needs of this community and keep the campus in Saranac Lake? It's hard to tell and the way the college administration is orchestrating this whole thing we may not ever have the opportunity to find out. It seems this college is already on the way out the door, leaving SL behind to deal with whatever scraps are left when the NCCC campus in Saranac Lake closes. The cultural, social and economic losses will be devastating to Saranac Lake... and to the future students and taxpayers in Essex and Franklin Counties.

The Sound Adirondack Growth Alliance feels strongly that an upgrade at the very minimum and perhaps an extensive expansion is needed at the Saranac Lake campus, the home of NCCC for 40 years. The proposal by the college administration to move the campus out of Saranac Lake has a hefty price tag attached to it. We feel that a perceived overcrowding of the SL campus may be real but exaggerated by the college administration and not worthy of the extreme cost of a \$52 million move to Lake Placid. A much more realistic expansion of the Saranac Lake campus to address the actual needs of the community and stay

within the budget of the Essex and Franklin County residents is what must be seriously considered by the college administration, the Board of Trustees and the Essex and Franklin County legislators.

The future of NCCC and Saranac Lake is very important to all of us involved in working for the future of this community and community college.

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This commentary was prepared with extensive input from the SAGA Steering Committee