

A Viable Sustainable Growth Plan For The NCCC Main Campus At The Saranac Lake Location



Sound Adirondack Growth Alliance
April 18, 2007

Sound Adirondack Growth Alliance

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

Steering Committee:

Susan Cooper, Chair person
Mark Kurtz spokesperson
Mary Hotaling
Jack Drury
Tracy Santagate
Duane Gould
Jason Brill

Abstract

A Viable Sustainable Growth Plan For The NCCC Main Campus At The Saranac Lake Location

During the past few months the Essex and Franklin County residents have been informed of the NCCC Administration's desire to purchase the Alton B Jones Cell Science Center property in Lake Placid as a future location of all or part of the NCCC campus. The administration's assertions of "exploding enrollments" based on the last ten years and current campus buildings in such disrepair as to have "outlived their usefulness", were the impetus to obtain the services of the engineer firm of Bernier Carr. Their resulting presentation, reinforced the administration's wishes to relocate from the current Saranac Lake location to the Lake Placid site.

SAGA reviewed the various options the college put forth, sifted through scores of documents, compiled data dating from 1979 to the present, entered it into an excel program, and graphed the results. Based on the results of many volunteer hours, SAGA determined that the only course of action was to urge Franklin and Essex County Legislative Boards to take the LP option out of the equation, pass a resolution that denies permission to purchase the property in Lake Placid, and focus on addressing a viable, sustainable growth plan at the Saranac Lake location.

SAGA has demonstrated through data and graphs, when one looks at the whole picture, trends begin to show. Contrary to NCCC administration's assertions, enrollments and FTE's have not reached record highs but rather are roughly at the same levels as they were from 1984 to 1992. Retention rates, the difference in the student enrollments going from the fall into the spring semesters - how many students were lost or gained - have declined over the last few years. In addition, NYSED projections that by 2013 there will be a declining high school graduate and resulting dwindling pool of applicants state wide. This contradicts the administration's and Bernier Carr's optimistic assertion that NCCC can double their FTE's at the main campus.

SAGA's efforts demonstrate a need for NCCC to present complete information to the public in an open forum. We have also determined that in order to develop a viable, sustainable, growth plan for the NCCC main campus in Saranac lake, they must consider developing a short term and long term Capital Improvements/ Maintenance program, offer new courses that require little alteration or special construction for classrooms, and offer Associate Degree programs that complement the existing programs, regional culture and history, while providing a basis for life skills and future employment.

The implementation of these suggestions, as well as the value of fostering place attachment among students, will all ensure a viable sustainable growth plan at NCCC.

Position Paper 1 – NCCC Main Campus Expansion

Portions of this paper were published as a Guest Commentary in the Adirondack Daily Enterprise, April 12, 2007

In reference to the proposed move of the North Country Community College campus to Lake Placid, it seems that much information critical to making an informed decision is not being provided to members of the NCCC Board of Trustees, 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.

As concerned residents and taxpayers in the Tri-Lakes area and as members of the Sound Adirondack Growth Alliance (SAGA) Steering Committee, we 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 to 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.

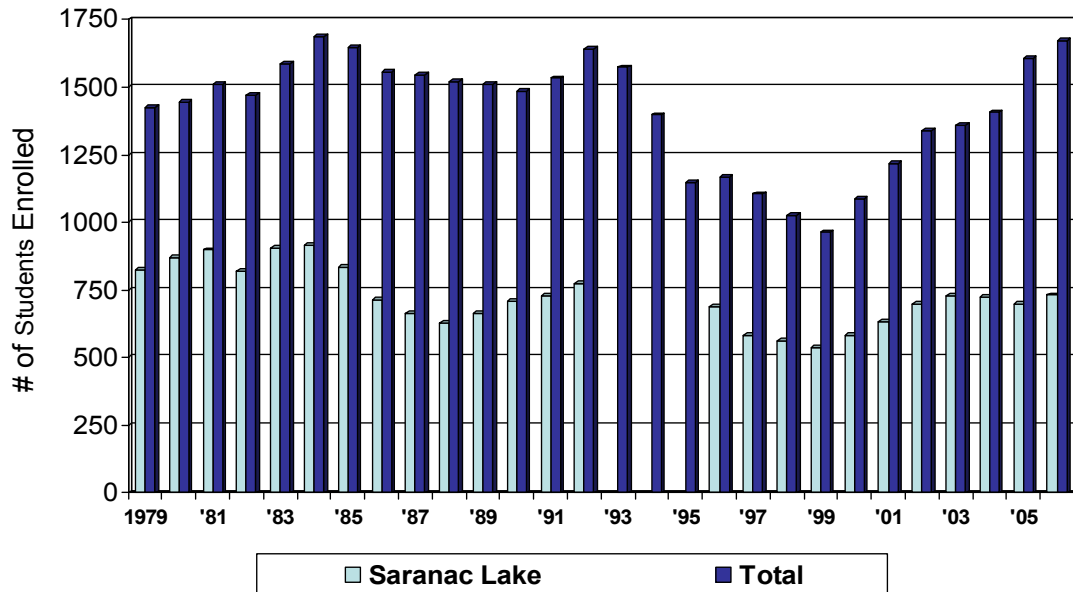
SAGA was able to research this information and gather it from existing material. We have photocopied several editions of the NCCC Institutional Fact Books, which cover all the statistics from 1979 to 1993 at which time the production of these fact books was discontinued. We have also studied New York 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 are 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?

NCCC Enrollment over Time

Sources: NCCC Handout: North Country CC Campus Breakdown of Enrollment Growth
North Country Community College Fact book, Dr. Robert M. Karp – 4th, 6th, 10th editions



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 (3 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. SAGA urges NCCC Administration to take the LP option out of the equation and focus on addressing a viable, sustainable growth plan at the SL location.

Mark Kurtz
Spokesperson

Sound Adirondack Growth Alliance

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

Sources:

NCCC Handout: North Country CC Campus Breakdown of Enrollment Growth
North Country Community College Fact Book 4th Edition
North Country Community College Fact Book 6th Edition
North Country Community College Fact Book 10th Edition
New York State Statistical Yearbooks for Totals 1993-2003
NYSED Office of Higher Education Research and information Systems for Totals 2004-2005

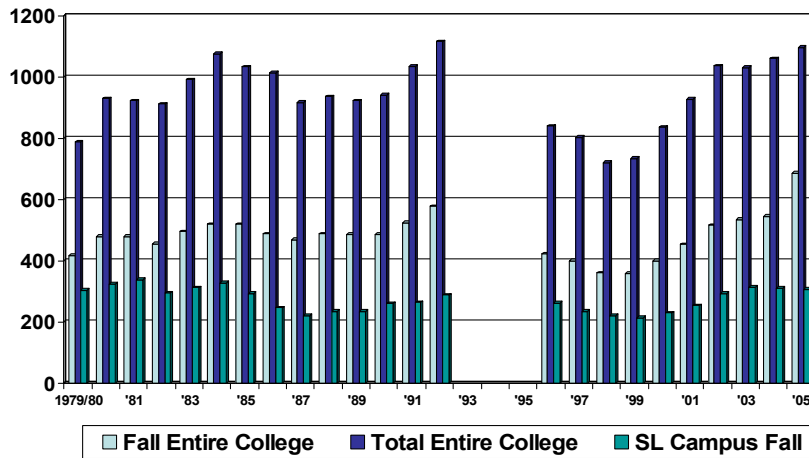
Position Paper 2 – Regarding FTE's

The FTE Switch

From the time NCCC's plan to move to Lake Placid became public in December 2006, its stated reason for the move has always been "exploding enrollments." College officials have consistently set forth enrollments as the driving force behind their quest to build a new campus in Lake Placid or to expand the Saranac Lake campus. On January 22, 2007, Ed Trathen e-mailed to the entire college community a document entitled "North Country CC Campus Breakdown Of Enrollment Growth." Subsequently, at an all-faculty meeting, Mr. Trathen instructed those in attendance to refer to this document when members of the public confronted them with questions regarding the college's need to expand. This document compares college enrollment in the form of headcounts for fall semesters of 1999 and 2006. It also shows headcounts at other regional colleges for the same semesters. The numbers seem compelling, showing a 44% increase at the Saranac Lake campus and a 74% increase college-wide over a seven-year period, a rate of growth nearly triple that of the next fastest growing institution in the area; but no numbers were provided that might give the college community or the public at large any real perspective, and there was no hint of the utter collapse of enrollments that began with the fall semester of 1993, nor that only very recently has the college begun to enjoy a the level of enrollment that had been common through the 1980s into the early 1990s. "Exploding enrollments", based on headcounts, was

nevertheless repeated like a mantra by both the college administration and the media. However, at the meeting of Wednesday, April 4, the reason for expanding or moving suddenly switched to a desire to increase Full-Time Equivalents (FTE) to 900 or better at the main campus alone. FTEs are based on a combination of headcounts and credit hours and are what the state uses to calculate its financial reimbursement to the college.

NCCC – FTE’s for Saranac Lake Campus/Entire College

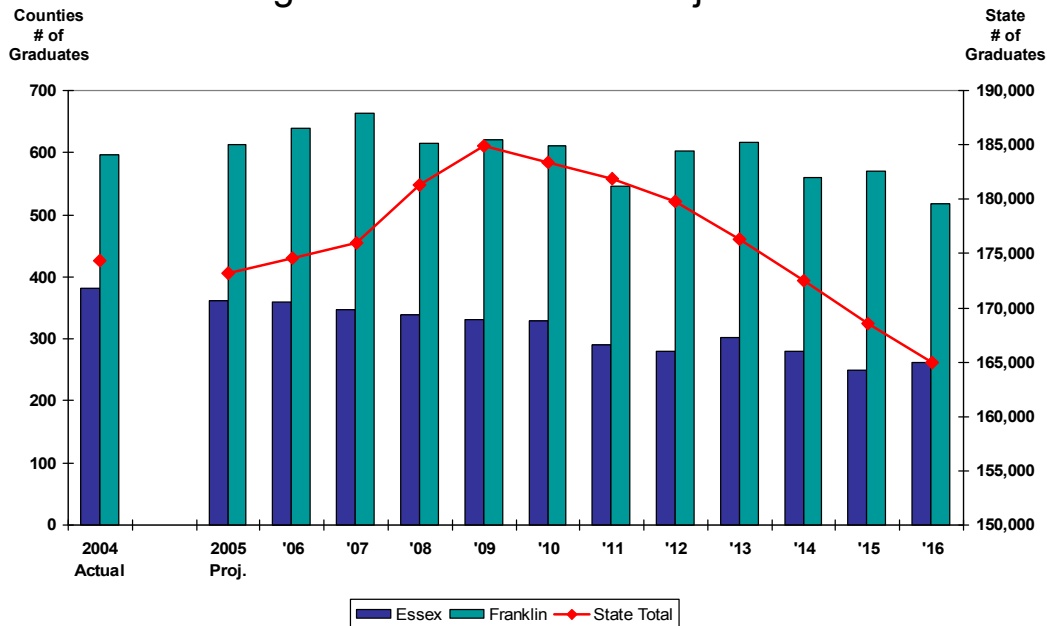


NOTE: Years 96/97 to 05/06 include summer FTE's
 Years 2000/2001 to 2005/2006 include winter FTE's...
 Sources: 1979/80 through 1992/93 - NCCC Fact book
 1996/97 through 2005/06 - NCCC Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs
 No data has been provided for academic years 1993/94 through 1995/96

The April 4, Bernier, Carr and Associates presentation included some rather aggressive projections regarding FTE trends at the main campus. The figures they provided show FTEs decreasing from 730 in the 2007-08 academic years to 700 in 2010-11, then jumping to 900 in 2011-12 with the completion of the new campus and reaching 1200 by 2013-14. A bit of history may help here. We do not have the FTE figures for the 2006-07 academic years; but the college has provided us with a trends summary for 1996-97 through 2005-06, and we have the NCCC Institutional Fact Books, which cover the statistics from 1979 to 1993. The highest FTE count for the entire college occurred in 1992-93, when the total was 1114.16 for combined fall and spring semesters. The FTE count from the main campus that year was 558.43. Only in the academic years 1980-81 through 1984-85 did the main campus FTE Count exceed 600, with 657.32 being achieved in 1984-85. Since 1999, the highest all-college FTE for which we have a number was 1095.8 in 2005-06, and that includes winter and summer sessions in addition to fall and spring semesters. The data provided by the college for fall 1996 through spring 2006 show FTEs for the main campus for fall semesters only; but we doubt that the full-year FTEs for the main campus reached 600 at any time during that period. The main campus barely broke 300 in the fall semesters of 2003, 2004, and 2005; and there was significant attrition going into the spring semesters for each of the following years, which would have held FTE totals down.

To propose that a new campus will, within three years of opening, generate more FTEs than the entire college has in its best years is, we believe, unrealistically optimistic. The number of high school graduates coming out of Essex County has already peaked, and Franklin County is peaking this year. After that, numbers from both counties decline for the foreseeable future.

Essex, Franklin County and NY State High School Graduate Projections



Source: NYSED

Statewide, the peak will be reached in 2009; and, seven years later, the number of people graduating from high schools in New York State will be fewer by 20,000. While the recruiting of older, "non-traditional" students may offset the effects of this trend somewhat, projections generated by the New York State Education Department, Office of Research and Information Systems, indicate that it will not be enough. Serving both Essex and Franklin Counties, North Country Community College straddles NYSED's Northern and Northeast Regions. FTEs in the Northeast Region are expected to peak in 2010 and then very gradually decline. FTEs in the Northern Region are also expected to peak in 2010, and will then decline more rapidly than in the Northeast Region, dropping 3% by 2013. This means that at precisely the time when every college in New York State will be scrambling to compete for a dwindling pool of applicants, the administrators of North Country Community College believe they can double the FTEs at the main campus. They are making an "If you build it they will come" gamble, and they are asking the citizens of Essex and Franklin Counties to come up with tens of millions of dollars to back their bet.

The April 4 presentation left us with more questions than answers. Here are some of them.

Malone and Ti

At the April 4 meeting, College attorney Jim Brooks claimed that new building at the Malone and Ticonderoga campuses has increased enrollments at those locations. Are we to believe that nothing else is or could be responsible? The college has a brand new and very handsome facility at Ticonderoga. In 2006, its first year of operation, it had a fall enrollment of 130 -- up significantly from the previous year. Nevertheless, the Ti campus had 136 students in 2000 when it was operating out of a storefront on Montcalm Street; and the 2006 figure falls far short of the Ticonderoga numbers from 1982-1992, and is

only little more than half the all-time high of 249 in 1988. In Malone, where the Ballard Mill campus has been in operation for several years, it was not until 2005 that numbers there came close, at 468, to the all-time high of 477 in 1992. On the whole, the decade 1982-1992 showed much healthier enrollments in Malone than the decade 1996-2006.

Hodson Hall

Bernier Carr maintains that Hodson Hall has "outlived its usefulness" and must be demolished. We believe that the demolition of structurally sound, historic buildings is an idea that has outlived its usefulness. Most colleges cherish their older buildings and maintain them lovingly. Hodson Hall was built as the original Saranac Lake General Hospital in 1912-1913, not 1890 as college administrators and their consultants claim. Yes, that still makes it an old building; but we wonder if the administrators and consultants are as accurate in predicting costs for a new campus and the FTEs it is supposed to attract as they are in dating the building that is currently the college's headquarters. And what will go in the location that is now the gateway to North Country Community College?

What are we paying for?

For all the talk and all the dollar figures that were presented on April 4, those listening learned little more than they knew when they walked in. They were told a new campus in Lake Placid would cost just over \$52 million, and in Saranac Lake it would cost just under \$62 million. This is up from the \$40 million that the county representatives heard when they were last entertained by college administrators in January. The audience this time was presented with costs of categories: for example, approximately \$5 million for upgrades, \$4 million for site work, \$9 million for contingency in Saranac Lake; slightly lower figures for the same in Lake Placid; and the heftiest category being new additions, costing \$32 million in Saranac Lake and \$28 million in Lake Placid. Nothing was said to indicate specifically what any of this money would build, with one exception: a 57,000 square-foot parking garage in Saranac Lake. And where on the campus would that go? The presenters didn't say, but we have a pretty good idea. One plan calls for the parking garage to go on the site that would be made available by the demolition of Hodson Hall.

What plan is that? Bernier Carr did not present a plan, and college administrators have implied for months that there is no plan, insisting that everything is in a very "preliminary" stage. Nevertheless, there is a plan -- in fact, there are at least three plans, preliminary though they may be -- dating back to May of 2006, if not earlier. We have obtained copies of two of the plans for Saranac Lake, entitled Option "A" (\$34.8 million) and Option "B" (\$39.5 million). These were produced in-house by the college's Director of Buildings and Grounds, who declined to provide us with copies. We observed a plan for the Lake Placid site in the Director's office, but he declined our request for a copy of that as well; and we have not yet been able to obtain one from other sources.

And the parking garage? In Option "A", it would cost roughly \$5.4 million and be located just west of the Sparks Athletic Complex under a new Field House, which would cost \$4.5 million. This option calls for \$4 million to renovate Hodson Hall. In Option "B", which was produced in August 2006, the garage would cost \$5.5 million and would not only take out Hodson Hall but much of the Pine Grove as well -- a beautiful space at the top of the hill, where open-air classes are often held during warm weather and which is much more attractive to students than any parking garage ever could be. There would still be a Field House. This one would be attached to the west side of Sparks and would cost \$4.8 million. Bear in mind, these are college generated figures from 2006. Bernier Carr's estimates for the same projects, had they chosen to divulge them, would be much higher judging from the Bernier Carr price tag for the

Saranac Lake campus of \$62 million, which exceeds Option "B" by 50% and Option "A" by 70%. If the college absolutely must have a parking garage, why could it not be built over or adjacent to the currently underutilized north parking lot?

And what about the theater? Did anyone mention a theater? No, but at the April 4 meeting, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Tom Finch, spoke of four program areas that the college would like to develop to attract students in the future. These were (paraphrasing): respiratory therapy; performing arts; environmental science; and holistic medicine. These are all laudable goals; but, as much as we appreciate and support the performing arts, they present a problem in this context. The problem is a theater: \$1.1 million in Option "A"; \$1.7 million in Option "B". Bernier Carr's price tag might be more like \$2.9 million. We encourage the college to offer unique programs that do not require expensive infrastructure. We also encourage the college to focus the taxpayer's resources on the improvement and expansion of classroom, laboratory, library, and student services facilities. We have serious doubts about the necessity of field houses, theaters, and parking garages -- not to mention nearly \$2 million in Option "A" (could be \$3.4 million in Bernier Carr's world) for 10,000 square feet of "building connections", including a link up the hill from Clermont Hall to the Library and then down the hill from the Library to the Connector.

Which is it?

In the capital improvements portion of their presentation, Bernier Carr stated that there was 119,226 square feet of space at the Saranac Lake campus. In the expansion portion of their presentation, they said there was 67,000 square feet when they were comparing the Saranac Lake campus to the 58,000 square feet available in the Lake Placid building. Does the higher figure include the dorms and other non instructional space? If not, what do those numbers mean? Is one incorrect? If so, which is it?

Speaking of dorms

In addition to its existing instructional and administrative facilities, the Saranac Lake campus currently has three dormitories -- a rarity for community colleges and an amenity of which NCCC is justifiably proud. Throughout this process, no one has said anything about dorms at the Lake Placid site; and we suspect that there are no plans to build any there. The housing situation in Lake Placid is no secret to anyone. It is not student friendly, to say the least. Are the NCCC administrators thinking of following the extraordinarily bad example set by Paul Smith's College in busing the students to Lake Placid? Or are they simply going to leave the students to their own devices? This issue alone gives the lie to the position that a move to Lake Placid would be "best for the students" and should be seen as serious enough, in and of itself, to nix the Lake Placid deal.

The two location non-solution

The suggestion has been made that the college buy the Upstate Biotech site in Lake Placid and set it up as a satellite campus. This may be appealing in terms of striking a compromise, but it is a very bad compromise. It would be inefficient, at best. At worst, it is a formula for abandoning the Saranac Lake campus piecemeal. It is not a solution; and we oppose it unequivocally.

Up to code?

Bernier Carr repeatedly stated that it would be necessary to bring the existing buildings at the Saranac Lake campus "up to code," adding to the expense of expansion at this location. However, they never

gave any examples. What specifically at NCCC's main campus is not up to code?

Who will maintain it?

In 1999 the Saranac Lake campus at NCCC had a maintenance crew of 10 people; but the maintenance department has been at the receiving end of a peculiar, counterintuitive trend at the college. While enrollments have been increasing since 1999 and, with them, wear and tear on the campus facilities, the number of maintenance personnel has been decreasing. Now there is a crew of five. Two of those work evenings as cleaners, and one is on indeterminate leave; so that leaves two to do the actual skilled tasks and grunt work of keeping the campus running. Traditionally, there has been one management position in the maintenance department; but, in an ironic twist to this story, a second position was recently added. So now, with enrollment "exploding" and the administration lobbying for an expanded campus in Saranac Lake or a new campus in Lake Placid, the very department charged with campus maintenance has had its labor force cut in half while its management has been doubled. If the administration is asking the taxpayers to make a multimillion dollar investment in the college, aren't the taxpayers entitled to have that investment protected by a fully staffed maintenance department?

Where's the difference?

The public has now repeatedly been told by college administrators and consultants that it would cost millions of dollars more to do what needs to be done in Saranac Lake than to build a new campus in Lake Placid. Where is the difference? It seems that a major part of this is the parking garage, which, in both Option "A" and Option "B", comes in at around \$5.5 million. Using the Bernier Carr inflation factor would bring the price to somewhere between \$8.25 million and \$9.35 million. Can the college's architects not find a more creative and economical way to deal with the parking situation at the Saranac Lake campus? And, once again, is a Field House essential? Can the college not offer excellent educational opportunities without one? Finally, while the Saranac Lake site is technically more demanding, it is also a much more exciting site, topographically, than that in Lake Placid; and the views are just as good. We challenge the architects to work with the Saranac Lake site in ways that turn its difficulties into advantages. □

Position Paper 3 – Regarding Retention

Retention, retention, retention

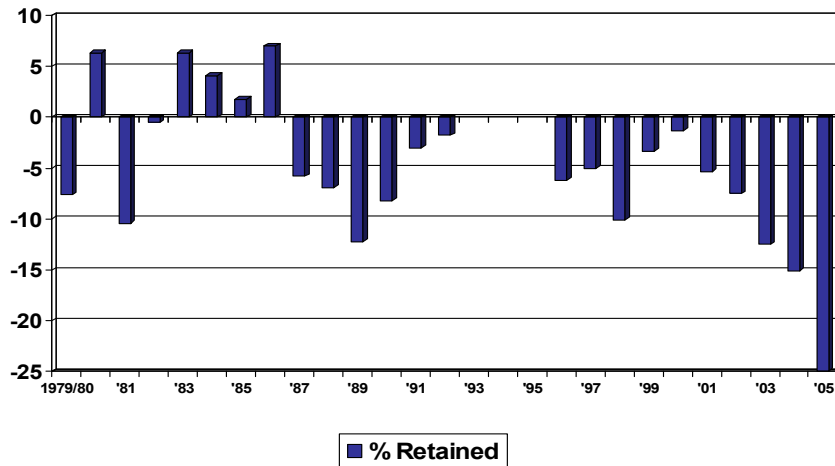
One anomalous trend that we noticed while examining NCCC statistics was that of rapidly declining retention rates over the last few years. Retention marks the difference in the student enrollments going from the fall into the spring semesters -- how many students were lost or gained. If the institution loses more than it gains, the rates go negative, FTEs drop; and state reimbursements are reduced. These rates naturally rise and fall, but colleges try to keep them at least in the very low negatives, if not in the positives.

This has pretty much been the case at NCCC until very recently. Peculiarly, when enrollments began to "explode" after the low point of 1999, retention rates began to suffer

proportionally, getting worse with each successive academic year, beginning 2000-01. By 2003-04, the rate was worse than it had been in any succeeding year for which we have data; and by 2005-06, it had dropped to a very troubling negative 25%. This is a problem that will not be solved by a new campus at a trendier address.

NCCC – Retention From Fall to Spring

Data is based on unduplicated headcounts for entire college



Sources: 1979/80 through 1992/93 - NCCC Fact book
1996/97 through 2005/06 - NCCC Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs
No data has been provided for academic years 1993/94 through 1995/96

Students do not generally leave between semesters because of disenchantment with the physical plant. Most leave because they can't make the grade. Assuming that the quality and rigor of instruction has remained fairly constant over the last five years, we see two probable reasons for the retention drop-off. First, the enrollment department may be employing a recruiting strategy of setting out a very wide net, pulling in lots of marginally qualified candidates knowing many of them may fail, but counting on fall enrollments being so high that they will offset any loss in the spring. Second, within the shrinking pool of high school graduates, the number of college qualified candidates is shrinking even faster.

A final observation: the plummeting retention rates in recent years give the administration's claim of record enrollments a hollow ring. The enrollment figures that have been advertised are based on fall semester head counts. The fall 2006 "record enrollment" of 1671 is slightly shy of the actual record of 1687 set in 1984. We have not been provided the head count for spring 2007, but we do have the numbers for 2005-06. That fall total of 1605 is still very good, but the 25% loss between semesters puts the spring total at 1206, which is short by 553 students of the spring record 1759 set in 1985. In fact, the lowest spring total between 1980 and 1993 was 1317 -- 111 students more than

the spring 2006 headcount. Perhaps enrollments lately have been exploding the way a balloon does.

Position Paper 4 – Regarding Hodson Hall



Despite the recently repeated claim that it was built in the 1890s, Hodson Hall, the former General Hospital of Saranac Lake was actually opened on March 11, 1913. The original center section and south wing were a gift to the community from Redfield and Emily Dutton Proctor, members of the prominent family of Vermont, who also owned camps on the east shore of Lake Placid. The architects were Harry Leslie Walker and

Beverly S. King of New York City. Born in Chicago, Walker had worked in the office of Frank Lloyd Wright as a young man; between 1913 and 1942, he "changed the face of central Bronxville," New York, including designing the "graceful collegiate-Gothic style" elementary and high schools there.

http://www.villageofbronxville.com/sube2_arch4.htm .

In Saranac Lake, Walker and King designed Hodson Hall, a welcoming Colonial Revival building that the community could be proud of. "The growth of the hospital was beyond any expectation," wrote Janet P. Decker, "and in 1923 two wings were added. A 10-room maternity wing was chiefly a gift of Mrs. Bellamy Stover in memory of her son, Joseph Longworth Nichols. The North Wing consisting of four private rooms and a four-bed ward was made possible by the generous contributions of the townspeople and visitors."

Even through its years of hard use as a college building, Hodson Hall remains an icon in the community of Saranac Lake. Though it commanded "a splendid outlook over valley and mountain" on the once treeless hillside where some early Ice Palaces of the Saranac Lake Winter Carnival had been built, its scale is compatible with the neighborhood of single-family homes that has grown up around it."

The current Radiologic Technology program offered at NCCC, and currently housed in Hodson Hall, is a continuation of the program offered by the Saranac Lake Study and Craft Guild to recovering Tuberculosis patients in Saranac Lake.

Bernier Carr maintains that Hodson Hall has "outlived its usefulness" and must be demolished. In contemporary thinking the demolition of structurally sound, historic buildings is an idea that has outlived its usefulness. Most colleges cherish their older buildings and maintain them lovingly. Hodson Hall is beautiful, graceful, and welcoming. To build with this quality of construction at today's prices would be cost prohibitive. The idea to demolish this link to Saranac Lake's history and NCCC educational roots is without imagination.

Position Paper 5 – Regarding SEQR

The decision of the North Country Community College board of trustees to purchase land in Lake Placid (NCCC says it has already purchased an option) and to move all or part of the college to a new campus raises serious questions about noncompliance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR). The fact that SEQR has not even been mentioned in any of the public meetings and is not mentioned in any documents made available to the public should give Essex County and Franklin County good reason to pause and ask serious questions before making any decision to commit public funds to this project. It appears, from the little that is known about the board's actions to date, that it has violated SEQR. In demanding an immediate answer from the two sponsoring counties about the expansion/move plan, the board apparently expects that the counties will also simply ignore this important state law. The counties, for many good reasons, should not do so.

NCCC is a public “agency” which is subject to the State Environmental Quality Review Act. [Environmental Conservation Law, secs. 8-0101 – 8-0117] Therefore, some of the “actions” the NCCC board takes must be done in accordance with the specific procedures set out in the SEQR law and SEQR regulations issued by the Department of Environmental Conservation.

In the SEQR declaration of purposes and policies, the Legislature stated:

It is the intent of the legislature that the protection and enhancement of the environment, human and community resources shall be given appropriate weight with social and economic considerations in public policy. Social, economic, and environmental factors shall be considered together in reaching decisions on proposed activities.

SEQR requires public agencies at all levels to “use all practicable means” to accomplish the policies set out in SEQR and to “act and choose alternatives” which will “minimize or avoid adverse environmental effects. . . .” Note that the term “environment” is defined in SEQR very broadly and means:

The physical conditions which will be affected by a proposed action, including land, air, water, . . . flora, fauna, noise, . . . existing patterns of population concentration, distribution, or growth and existing community or neighborhood character.

SEQR governs certain types of “actions” taken by public agencies. An “action” under SEQR includes “projects or activities directly undertaken” by any agency and also any “policy” adopted by an agency, including any decision which commits the agency “to a definite course of future decisions” [ECL 8-0105] The purchase of new property for all or part of the NCCC college campus is most certainly an “action” which is subject to SEQR.

SEQR regulations explicitly prohibit an agency from taking any “action” before it has assessed the environmental consequences of the action. First, the agency must determine whether the proposed action might have even one significant effect on the “environment” (a “positive declaration”). If so, an Environmental Impact Statement must be prepared. If, on the other hand, the agency decides there will be no significant impact on the environment (a “negative declaration”), it must prepare and file in its records a formal “negative declaration” of significance. Since NCCC is an entity governed by a board of trustees, the decision on issuing or adopting a “positive declaration” or a “negative declaration”, including the rationale as stated in the Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) must be discussed and decided at a public meeting. However, no board meeting seems to have discussed this important decision.

SEQR rules explicitly prohibit any “action” before either a “negative declaration” is adopted or an EIS has been prepared after a “positive declaration.” But, we are told, NCCC has already purchased an option on the Lake Placid property!!

SEQR requires every “involved agency” to follow the SEQR processes before taking an “action”. The two counties are “involved agencies” because they must approve the purchase; the vote to do so would be an “action” by each of the counties. Therefore, Essex County and Franklin County must each follow SEQR. Since NCCC has not followed the SEQR process, each county should immediately fill out an EAF and adopt a determination of significance. (The urgency suggests they hold emergency meetings on this topic.)

There should be no doubt – given the potential consequences to the Village of Saranac Lake and to the NCCC neighborhood resulting from a move to Placid – that each county should adopt a positive declaration of significance. One county should then declare itself to be the “lead agency” in the SEQR process and should direct NCCC to prepare a full and comprehensive EIS. A proper EIS will be far more comprehensive, analytic and objective than the “facilities” report prepared which seems to be more an advocacy piece for a decision already taken by a majority of the board of trustees.

As the SEQR “lead agency” in this “action”, either Essex or Franklin County would have control over the SEQR/EIS process. This is very important. SEQR regulations allow and encourage a very public deliberative process, including:

- a public “scoping” session at which the “involved agencies” (those agencies whose approvals are needed for the purchase and move), “interested agencies” (any other public agencies such as the tri-lakes towns and villages), private organizations and members of the public can meet and identify the issues which the EIS should address;
- a written directive from the lead agency to NCCC with a list of all the issues the EIS must address;
- an opportunity for all involved and interested agencies and individuals to read over and comment on the Draft EIS;
- a public hearing on the Draft EIS;
- a public decision by the “lead agency” at a public meeting regarding the adequacy of the Draft EIS (if inadequate, it must be revised);
- preparation by the lead agency of the Final EIS;
- publication of the Final EIS and SEQR “findings” by the lead agency;
- a final decision by NCCC, SUNY, and the two counties on the proposal to purchase land in Placid and move the college or remain in Saranac Lake and expand in place.

Public hearings are not required by SEQR, but they are encouraged. Because of this, it is important that the “lead agency” be an agency which is committed to a public process, something NCCC has shown it is not.

The fact that SEQR seems to have been ignored in this rush to move NCCC –quite aside from the arrogance displayed by the board of trustees - should be of great concern to the counties and to all citizens. Without question, the counties should follow the SEQR law.

Position Paper 6 – Conclusion

SAGA and the community as a whole are very concerned about the manner in which the NCCC Administration has approached the proposed Lake Placid site. As Saga has shown, by providing just the last ten years of data regarding enrollment and FTE's...by reviewing the Bernier Carr's evaluation of the current state of the SL campus buildings, one perceives a compelling reason to support the administrations argument of "exploding enrollments" and buildings that have "outlived their usefulness".

Yet, as SAGA has demonstrated through graphs and data, when one looks at the whole picture, trends begin to show. Along with the demonstrated downward enrollment trends, there is the trend showing the NCCC administration as poor caretakers and stewards of the campus facilities and thus, the taxpayers invested monies.

Relocating will not resolve either issue.

The fact that they have not provided an opportunity for open dialogue...no public meeting offered (except the offer to accept written questions) is alarming and does not go very far with the peoples trust.

To suggest that moving the campus from Saranac Lake to Lake Placid is an easy six to eight mile move, is a rather myopic view. Eight miles makes a world of difference in social, practical, and economic change in the community it leaves. Building the infrastructure to support a college takes years to establish. Housing and transportation will likely be the most significant in the beginning, but the business structure, tax base and social fabric would decidedly suffer over the years. If there is not an overwhelming reason to move, plopping the school elsewhere because the land is available certainly

doesn't consider long-term ramifications. The lack of a plan for a move of this magnitude is foolish.

It appears that the college wishes to employ the perceived fame afforded Lake Placid by virtue of its national status as a sports community to increase enrollment. Is it not the responsibility of the college to provide affordable education for both Essex and Franklin counties? Must the college compete on a statewide level for students to enhance their viability? Can this activity be built into the budget without significant help from the state government?

The NCCC Board of Trustees feels that a substantial increase in student enrollment is necessary to maintain a bright future; the money might be better spent maintaining and increasing the size and quality of the existing infrastructure. Attaching a fancy address to the school will not increase a quality, affordable education. Invest in the buildings, yes. But most important is the curriculum, faculty and opportunity afforded the students. Preparing students who will go on to four year schools, better quality and higher paying jobs, and a sense that their education at NCCC provided them with that significant first step in their higher education.

Some Positive Suggestions

So what would SAGA suggest? Based on the input of many community residents SAGA has made a few suggestions

New Construction/Renovations

Bernier Carr's presentation made one thing very clear: There is a substantial need to establish a Capital Improvement/Maintenance schedule that would address both short-term repairs and upgrades as well as long-term additions and changes. How many of these issues (plumbing, electrical, etc.) could have been resolved with a rigorous capital improvement/maintenance schedule?

If more space is needed, the sandpit property in Saranac Lake could be purchased to provide additional space. The sandpit can be connected by the new pathway that will be under construction for the Saranac Lake to Lake Placid bike pathway. Construct a new administration building, with Distance Learning Space upstairs. Ensure state-of-the-art wiring, internet hook-up...etc.

When the new Administration building is complete, move the current Administration office to the new facility, move all offices there. Vacate Hodson Hall and begin renovations to that building. Once Hodson Hall is complete, relocate all health and wellness courses to that facility.

Follow this course of progressive renovation/additions in a well planned schedule that allows instruction to continue uninterrupted. Planning should include a budget that is compatible with resident taxpayers in both counties

Build along the south facing slope between Sparks Athletic Complex and the Connector; a tiered structure that conforms to the topography or is cantilevered over it a la Falling

Water (Frank Lloyd Wright). It could also be built on piers. Either way (piers or cantilevered), an administration-envisioned road from Santanoni Ave. to the Sparks parking lot could pass under the building. We wonder if it is absolutely necessary to have such a road. If there is not an unarguably compelling reason for it, it should be omitted from any expansion plan.

The north facing slope between Clermont Hall and the Library could lend itself to the same type of construction strategy as the south slope, if the south slope alone does not allow enough space for the needed expansion.

These hillside venues would provide for very interesting building designs and would open to excellent views. The topography of the Saranac Lake site can provide more of an Adirondack immersion for the student than the site in Lake Placid. Also, the south slope in particular would lend itself to exploiting the solar energy potential of the site.

As we stated in Position Paper #2, a parking garage – if one must be built – could be constructed over the east end of the underutilized north parking lot.

If the college cannot possibly prosper without a Field House, we suggest another possibility of the Village Sand Pit property: use that location for the field house. We understand the logic of wanting the Field House close to the existing Sparks Athletic Complex, but the cost of construction would be much less at the sand pit. Whether the cost of purchasing the land from the Village of Saranac Lake would offset that savings is an open question. We do not believe the land should be gifted to the college. At any rate, the Field House at the sand pit site would free more land on the south slope for construction of instructional and student services space.

New Satellite Campus

Open a satellite campus in Tupper Lake that could draw from St. Lawrence and Hamilton Counties while addressing both the prohibitive aspect of travel to the Saranac Lake campus and the social need that has become apparent in Tupper Lake.

Course Offerings

Instead of Performing Arts (use the Pendragon Theater and LPCA) new courses should be added that require little alteration or special construction for classrooms. New courses might include a certificate course for Solar installation, Sports Medicine-would tie in well with both the health courses and the Wilderness Rec, as well as leading to future employment in the Olympic Village. Offer Associate Degree programs that complement the existing programs, regional culture and history, while providing a basis for life skills and future employment. Suggestions include:

- Architectural Engineering Technology
- Carpentry & Building Trades
- Criminal Investigation
- Engineering Technology with a certificate in Solar panel installation
- Forensic Photography
- Interior Design

Legal Studies

Natural Resources Conservation: Law Enforcement

Sports and Tourism Studies

Sports, Nutrition and Fitness Management

Web Design

Website & E-Business Development

Recognize the declining rates of High School graduates, and the inclining rates of retired residents living within both counties and offer courses that would appeal to a non-traditional student base. This would maintain steady FTE's.

Community Involvement

NCCC offers SL kids enriching opportunities: a chance to learn to swim, tumble, play many different sports, and to take their required driving courses. Many residents appreciate the programs NCCC offers our community very much, and many need these programs. An expansion of these programs (music? gymnastics? ballet?) would further augment their lives.

Place Attachment

Place Attachment exists when two criteria are fulfilled:

1. *Place dependency*, which is the “function of how the setting compares with alternatives (course offerings/programs) in the achievement of goals (education)”. Hailu et al., 2004, p. 583)).
2. *Place identity* “which captures the emotional bond between an individual and a site(SL Campus as well as SL community)”. Hailu et al., 2004, p. 583)).

The NCCC Administration's current focus on the move to Lake Placid, ignores the relationship between the students, the program offerings, and their ties to the existing Saranac Lake location and the “distinctive community” with which it resides. By recognizing the value of Place Attachment, enrollment as well as retention from the Fall to Spring semesters can be Stabilized.

SAGA is a strong supporter of NCCC. We recognize its demonstrated positive impact in the lives of many students during the past forty years. Our position reflects a desire to propel the college in a direction that allows it to maintain credibility within the community it serves.

Position Paper 7 Correction: pages 12 & 13

Upon reviewing the Time-Warner video of Bernier, Carr Associates presentation of April 4, we conclude that a correction is necessary for the “*What are we paying for?*” section of our Position Paper. On page 12, we made statements to the effect that Bernier, Carr did not say specifically what would be built. In fact, Bernier, Carr *did* provide the following list of new construction items.

	<u>Saranac Lake</u>	<u>North Elba</u>
Existing to Remain	67,758 SF	58,145 SF
New Classroom	31,295	20,089
New Learning Resource	19,436	17,181
New Student Union	16,431	18,494(1)
New Add Administration	9,128	17,408
New Performing Arts	16,093	16,093
New Add Physical Education	13,420	36,881
New Daycare	2,530	2,530
New Maintenance	0	2,500
New Central Storage	4,490	0
New Field House	35,000	35,000
New Parking Facility	56,700	0
Total	272,281	224,322

Unlike college-produced Options A & B, this list still does not indicate how much each of these components would cost, where they would be located on the sites, or how they would be integrated with exiting structures at the Saranac Lake site.

Also on page 12, we stated that a theater had not been mentioned. However, this presumably is covered by “New performing Arts,” line 6 in the list. Interestingly, the theater component in Option A is 6,000 SF and 9,375 SF in Option B, while Bernier, Carr call for 16,093 SF in their Performing Arts line. We deduce that the cost would go up proportionately.

The top line of the list, “Existing to Remain,” partially answers the questions we asked in “Which is it?” on page 13 of our Position Paper.

We apologize for any misimpression that may have been created for the reader by the unintentional omission of the information provided in the above list.

