

City of Cortland Environmental Advisory Committee
Findings Statement re:
SUNY Cortland Student Life Center
Final Environmental Impact Statement

July 2, 2012

The Student Life Center (SLC) proposed by SUNY/Cortland will undoubtedly have a major adverse impact on the visual environment of the adjacent neighborhood and has the potential of adversely impacting the aquifer—either directly or indirectly. The potential for additional adverse impacts in the areas of noise, odor, traffic and parking is also a cause for concern. Issues associated with these concerns have been identified and argued within the SEQR process and outside it. The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) appears to address the concerns that have been raised, albeit not necessarily to the satisfaction of all interested parties in all areas of concern.

The FEIS does reflect plans and proposed mitigating measures that if followed to the letter would appear to address concerns regarding the aquifer and other water-related issues. The most contentious issue seems to be the location and design of the building. As an involved agency, the City of Cortland Environmental Advisory Committee regrets that despite vocal opposition from the community, SUNY Cortland and the State University Construction Fund (SUCF) remain steadfast in their preferences regarding both these project elements. It is difficult to assess the accuracy or evaluate the importance of additional information regarding the potential adverse impacts associated with alternative sites considered and subsequently rejected by the project sponsor (SUNY) and lead agency (SUCF) when the agents in control of the SEQR process have displayed such a profound prejudice favoring their chosen option.

Unfortunately, the SEQR process is not designed to deny projects based solely on environmental impacts, the interests of one particular group or neighborhood or even the community at large. Moreover, SUNY is, by law, specifically exempt from certain local regulations. Nor does the City or the community at large have any legal standing that would permit them to question SUNY's capital improvement plans or decisions. Given these limitations and constraints, the EAC's findings with respect to the SUNY Cortland SLC FEIS are as follows:

1. The project as proposed will undoubtedly have significant environmental impacts, as identified in the FEIS and discussed during the SEQR process.
2. It is critical that the mitigation measures proposed to address issues related to the aquifer—either directly or indirectly—be implemented *to the letter*.
3. Construction activities must be prohibited—not limited—between the hours of 5:00 PM Friday and 8:00 AM Monday, regardless of schedule constraints.
4. Oversight and monitoring procedures must be taken seriously. Notice must be provided and problems addressed and resolved promptly as they occur in consultation with local government (City and County) authorities.
5. The negative impacts on homeowners in the adjacent neighborhood are significant and unavoidable—even though the proposed mitigation measures may reduce them. Therefore, SUNY should agree to compensate adversely impacted homeowners by one means or another. A firm commitment by SUNY to explore ways and means of doing so in consultation with city officials and individual homeowners must be made at the request of any affected homeowner in the adjacent neighborhood.
6. Persons who object to the proposed project should make their feelings known to the Governor's office, their state legislative representatives and SUNY Trustees.