



VILLAGE OF AURORA

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Linda S. Schwab, Ph.D.
Village Historian
January 15, 2025

Mayor James Orman
Trustees Janet Murphy
Matthew Bianconi
John Miller
J.D. Balloni

Dear Mayor Orman and Village Trustees,

As Village Historian, I am responding to the “Letter Opposing Landmark Designation of Barler, Campbell and Boathouse Lawn” from Brody D. Smith of Bond, Schoeneck & King dated January 8, 2025. I will show that the historic documentation of the proposed Landmarks was thorough. Furthermore, the interpretation of the criteria follows recognized competent authority for historic preservation.

Background

Mr. Smith begins by stating, “Given the timing of the Panel’s village landmark recommendation, it is clear that the purpose of the recommendation is to further stymie the College’s efforts by interfering with the sale of College property.” It is by no means “clear,” and in fact is untrue, because the Scenic Landmark proposal for the Boathouse/Glen Park Lawn was submitted in **February 2024** to the (then) Community Preservation Panel (CPP), and discussed by the CPP. No objections were lodged by Wells College during this process. Note that this discussion began not only before announcement of College closure but at a time when Wells’ public statements cited a stable and even improving situation.

The only reason that this Scenic Landscape proposal, the same one considered on Jan. 8, 2025, was not approved at that time (Feb. 2024) was that the Zoning Law was undergoing revision. It

seemed better to the CPP and to the Village Board to defer final approval until the new Zoning Law was in effect. Whether this deferral was necessary is not the issue. The point is that there can be no intent to “stymie” a sale for which there was, at that time, no apparent intent or need for the College to sell. I will therefore consider the Landmark proposals chronologically, beginning with the Boathouse Lawn.

Considerations for Designation

Mr. Smith then quotes the following from the Village Zoning Law as follows:

Prior to designating the properties as individual landmarks, pursuant to Section 7.05 of the Village’s Zoning Law, the Panel must find that each of the properties:

- (1) Qualifies for inclusion on the New York State or National Registers of Historic Places;
- (2) Exemplifies or possesses special character, or historic or aesthetic interest of value as part of the political, economic, or social history of the Village of Aurora;
- (3) Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state, or national history;
- (4) Embodies the distinguishing characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or design style, or is a valuable example of the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship; or is representative of the work of a designer, architect or builder;
- (5) Represents an established and familiar visual feature of the community by virtue of its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the community [sic]; or
- (6) Has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

As indicated by “or,” only one of the above criteria needs to be fulfilled to make a property eligible for consideration as a Local Landmark. In the case of this Scenic Landmark proposal, the first three conditions are definitely met and the remainder may be.

Boathouse/Glen Park Lawn

Because the central campus is already designated part of the dual Aurora/Wells College National Historic District, (1) is fulfilled: a district’s Integrity depends upon the Setting as well as the buildings within it.¹ The “special character” (2) and historic significance (3) of the proposed Scenic Landmark were covered in my Documentation prepared for CPP in February 2024 (Appendix 1), which uses primary sources - maps and photographs - to show preservation of key features of Henry Wells’ campus design.² Further, Henry Wells was without doubt a

¹ Capitalized words indicate terms with special meaning in historic preservation: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/cultural-landscapes-national-register-significance-integrity.htm> and <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/upload/preservation-brief-36-cultural-landscapes.pdf>

² In addition on (4), Henry Wells was esteemed in his time as a horticulturalist, and is likely to have taken as much care with landscape design as with the architecture of his home Glen Park. Further work on this may be forthcoming.

figure of national significance well beyond his founding of Wells College (3). Therefore, the CPP did indeed receive, discuss, and consider “such historical and architectural information as is required by the Panel to make an informed recommendation concerning the application.”

Furthermore, in my letter to PACNY concerning “Seven to Save,” I considered “*Wells College as a Cultural Landscape*,” citing particularly “the relationship among College founder Henry Wells’ home ‘Glen Park,’ the site of Main Building, and the lawns leading down to and extending along the lake front” (Appendix 2). Among the types of “cultural landscapes,” under “Historic Designed Landscapes,” “campus” is specifically mentioned.³ Therefore, not only the buildings of a National Historic District but their setting in the landscape is acknowledged by expert and governing authority to be significant and worthy of preservation.

Nor was the Henry Wells era the only era of significance for the Boathouse/Glen Park Lawn. Based on maps and records,⁴ the section of the lakefront in the Scenic Landmark proposal is substantially as open as it was when observed by the Moravian missionaries Camerhof and Zeisberger on their journey to Onondaga in 1750; they described the long expanse of “farms” or “gardens” of the Cayuga along the lakeshore. This use was partially restored a decade or more ago by then-President Jon Gibraltar, whose oral permission is taken by the Gayogoho:no (Traditional Cayuga) as binding (See again Appendix 2).

A more recent era of significance is, of course, use by both the College and the Aurora community. The Boathouse and/or its surrounding grounds, far from being, as Mr. Smith calls it, “just a lawn,” has been the site not just of boating-related classes (as it was since the 1890s), but of many other events as well. For students and faculty, it was the site of many, many parties, bonfires, and music; academic events as diverse as senior thesis presentations (including a jousting demonstration, with horses), and class final projects; for graduates, the commencement and reunion parties, as well as important personal events such as weddings and family graduation parties. For the community, it was the site of decades of the summer swim program open to neighboring towns; summer theatrical and music performances; family events; and a farmers’ market. Almost ninety responses, covering over fifty years (1969 to the present) were received in less than twenty-four hours. This is not just “a familiar visual feature of the community” but a “unique location.” As described in the 2024 Documentation, it is indeed “without question the best known and most cherished lake view in the village.”

Barler and Campbell Halls

Mr. Smith seems to be resting his argument against the Local Landmark designation of Barler and Campbell Halls on a misreading and/or misapplication of National Historic Register criteria, or perhaps on simple miscalculation. While acknowledging that the buildings opened in

³ <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/upload/preservation-brief-36-cultural-landscapes.pdf>

⁴ Maps of 1795, 1805, 1853, and 1859 as well as those included in Appendix 1; passage of property from farmer John Morgan (a younger brother of E. B. Morgan) to John Morgan’s widow and her second husband Charles Young, and to the Avery family and Henry Wells.

fall 1974 (Appendix 3), Mr. Smith seems to feel that they are not over 50 years old, which they now are. (Indeed, if the date of accepted design and start of construction were considered, they are over 51 years old, as cited in Prof. Roberts' letter.)

The rest of the Mr. Smith's argument against designation of these buildings are that architect Walter Netsch was not of local or State significance and these are not his best work. In contrast, Walter Netsch was already an architect of national significance before his work at Wells; his striking design for the US Air Force Academy, including the famous Cadet Chapel, preceded his work at Wells. Smith goes so far as to call these buildings "unremarkable institutional structures designed to bear some similarity to the aesthetic style of Long Library." On the contrary, "SOM's [Skidmore, Owings and Merrill's] work at Wells College was cited by Netsch as his best," described by SOM today as "significant works of architecture within our practice, but more broadly, they are widely regarded within our profession as exemplars of the brutalist academic work in the profession as a whole." (See Appendix 4). Further documentation of architectural significance is forthcoming.

Had Mr. Smith been present for the discussion on on January 8th at the CPP meeting, he would have heard a careful and nuanced discussion of modern architecture styles by Panel members. In addition, he would have learned from the Chair's remarks that the documentation, discussion, and preliminary approval of Scenic Landmark status for the Boathouse/Glen Park lawn took place almost a year ago.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this detailed point-by-point response to a hasty letter from BSK that is based more on opinion than facts and lacking knowledge of current best practices in historic preservation.

Sincerely,



Linda S. Schwab, Ph.D.
Village Historian
Aurora NY

Cc: Members of the CPP:
James Burkett
Christopher MacCormick
Claire Morehouse
Jeffrey Blum
Julia Rossmann
John Wendler
Village Attorney Thomas Blair, Esq

Appendix 1

The Boathouse-Glen Park Lawn: A Scenic Landmark

Purpose: Requesting the Village Board to designate a Scenic Landmark to be called The Boathouse-Glen Park Lawn.” without question the best known and most cherished lake view in the village. It is shown outlined in **green** on Figure 1.

Basis in the Comprehensive Plan: The Comprehensive Plan repeatedly emphasizes the importance of Cayuga Lake. Aurora is “treasured for its relationship to the lake [and] its lake views.” Protecting this natural resource and preserving lake views are linked repeatedly throughout, leading to Goal 5, “Enhance and Expand Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces.” Designation of this Landmark is supported by its relationship to Glen Park and Main Building, contributing structures to the Wells College National Historic District.

Procedure for Designation: The current Zoning Law charges the Community Preservation Panel with the responsibility to “to preserve the desirable character of the Village with regard to its community environment, built and natural” and empowers it “to conduct a survey of all places, sites, buildings, structures and other objects within the Village of Aurora for the purpose of determining which, in the opinion of the Community Preservation Panel, should be designated as Village Landmarks, in accordance with the procedure specified in Section 705.” This proposed Landmark qualifies as a place or site.

The Draft Zoning Law expands upon this responsibility and the required procedure in Article VII, Sections 705 and 706, as follows: “The [Community Preservation] Panel is responsible for recommending to the Village Board of Trustees the designation of identified structures or resources as individual landmarks, scenic landmarks, or historic districts within the Village.” It further specifies in regard to Scenic Landmarks that the “Panel may recommend for designation a landscape feature or group of features. Recommendations for designation must be accompanied by such historical and architectural information as is required by the Panel to make an informed recommendation concerning the application.”

Historical Information: The Atlas maps of 1875 and 1904 (Figure 2) show how little this lawn changed over time. Henry Wells designed the landscape around his home and college to feature a broad sweep of lawn and trees west down to and along the lake. The addition of the Boathouse some twenty years after Wells’ death gave his lakeside landscaping a focal point (Figure 3). The view from Main St. down to the lake and the Boathouse appears in countless photographs (selections in Figure 4). The relationship of the proposed Scenic Landmark to historic buildings on the east side of Main St. is indicated by a yellow dotted line on Figure 1.

Tax Numbers: The Landmark area (**green**) includes portions of 193.05-1-1 (**blue** outline on tax map) and 193.05-1-6.11 (to the west, along the lake shore), drawn so as to include the Boathouse

access and the small grove of peach trees added to annually in a Wells College-Gayogohono (Cayuga) commemoration of the Sullivan Campaign of 1779.

Figure 1:

The Boathouse-Glen Park Lawn Scenic Landmark (outlined in green)

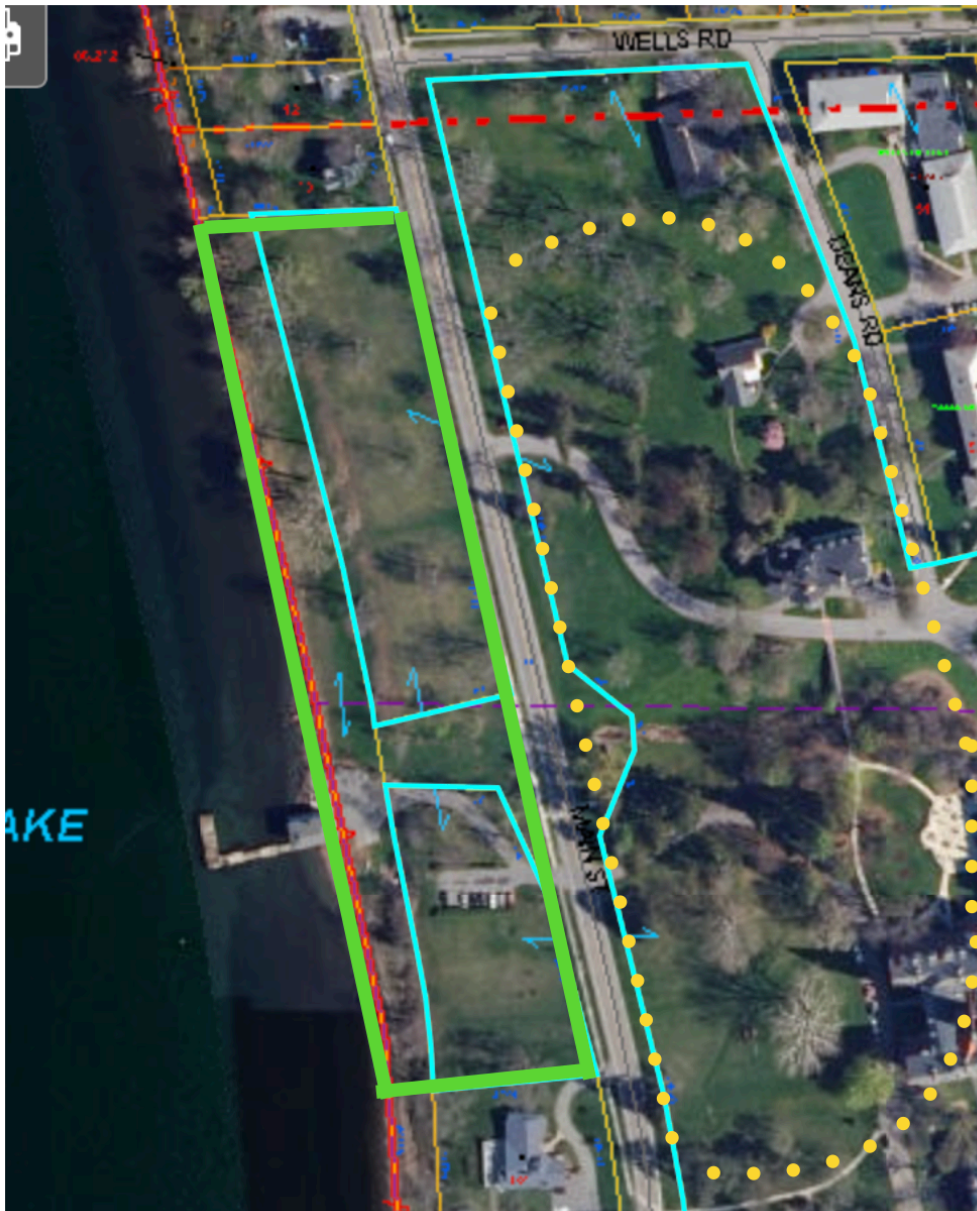
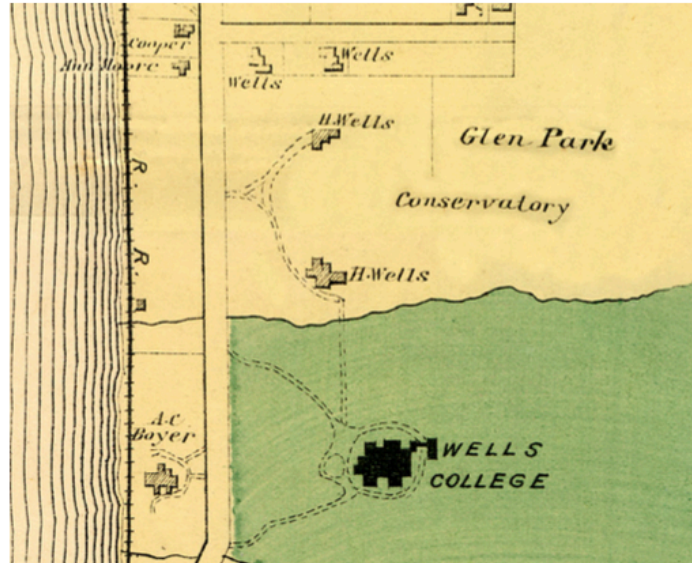
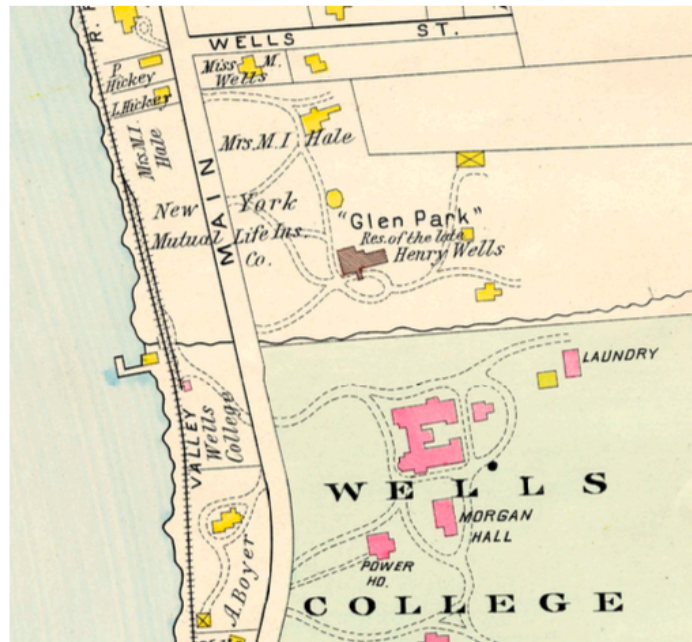


Figure 2:
Historic Maps



1875 Aurora Map



1904 Aurora Map

Figure 3:
Survey of Henry Wells' property, 1897

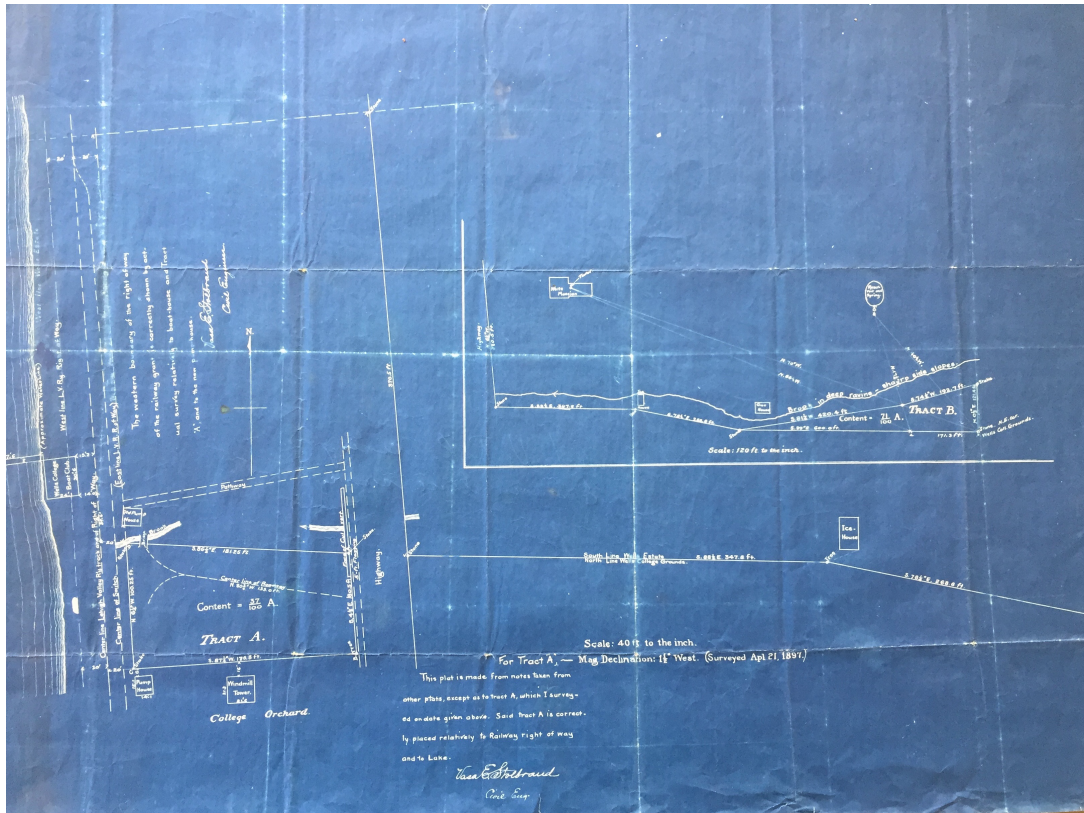


Figure 4a:
Glen Park (lawn on left) from the tower of Old Main, 1868



Figure 4b:

Glen Park with more of lakeside lawn, probably same date



Figure 4c:

Lawn from Hale House (site of present Community Medical Center), ca. 1910



Appendix 2

Excerpt from Historian's Letter of support to PACNY, October 25, 2024,
"Seven to Save"

Wells College as a Cultural Landscape

The Wells College campus, particularly the portion included in the Historic District, fits well the definition of a "cultural landscape," as given in Preservation Brief #36: as "institutional grounds," it shows the features of an "historic designed landscape." This is perhaps most evident in the relationship among College founder Henry Wells' home "Glen Park," the site of Main Building, and the lawns leading down to and extending along the lake front. Early blueprints, maps, and plans elucidate both these relationships and those in campus growth in the later 19th century and approximately the first half of the 20th century.

Still more remarkably, unlike any city campus and few if any rural ones, this cultural landscape is visible in its entirety not only from Main Street in Aurora, but also from the "public way" of Cayuga Lake. Residents, visitors, and even passersby can enjoy the regionally rare opportunity of an expansive unobstructed view of Cayuga Lake, as well as access for light recreational use.

Furthermore, over the last decade or so, a part of this vista has been set aside (through oral agreement) as a small peach orchard, planted and maintained by the traditional Cayuga (Gayogoho:no) people. This planting memorializes both the destruction of Chonodote, "Peachtown," by the Sullivan Campaign of 1779 in the American Revolution (another priority area for "Seven to Save" 2024-2025) and the lives of the Chiefs and Clan Mothers who planted the first peach trees and are now gone. As such, though not a cemetery, this area fits several of the criteria describing "Hallowed Ground," including annual caretaking ceremonies with traditional prayers.

Appendix 3

Formal Opening of Barler and Campbell Halls, Oct. 10, 1974, from the Syracuse Post Standard of October 2, 1974

Wells to Celebrate Dedication With Arts

AURORA — A 10-day celebration of the arts will begin Thursday on the Wells College campus.

The celebration will mark the opening of the creative and performing arts center on the campus adjacent to the Louis J. Long Library.

The formal dedication of the two new buildings will be Oct. 10. Architect **Walter Netsch**, Wells President John D. Wilson, Board of Trustees Chairman Ralph Poole, capital campaign chairwoman Ruth Pelfer Smith and music Prof. Katherine Scott Oarr will speak.

The celebration will begin with the premiere recital in

the Augustus Condon Barler Hall of Music at 8 p.m. Thursday. Harpsicordist Judith Norrell will offer a program of Byrd, Rameau, Scarlatti and J.S. Bach.

A multimedia student "happening," combining art, dance and music, will be at 8 p.m. Friday in the art building.

"Hello, Dolly" will be shown at 6:30 p.m. Saturday in Cleveland Auditorium, followed by a performance of the Drama Society's "Cabaret" at 11 p.m. at the Aurora Inn.

At 7 p.m. Sunday in the chapel, LeGrace Benson, assistant professor of art, will discuss art and politics.

Toshiko Takaezu, a potter

teaching at Princeton, will conduct a workshop at 2:30 p.m. Monday in the art building and will lecture at 8 p.m.

Poet Richard Hugo will read from his own works at 8 p.m. Tuesday in Barler Hall.

"Is There Life on Earth?" will be the question posed by exobiologist Carl Sagan at 8 p.m. Oct. 9 in Cleveland Auditorium. At 10 a.m. Oct. 10, he will speak on "Is There Life on Mars?"

A faculty-student concert is scheduled for 8:30 p.m. Oct. 11 in Barler Hall.

At 2 p.m. Oct. 12, D. W. Griffith's "Intolerance" will be shown in Cleveland Auditorium, followed by "The Red Shoes" at 8 p.m.

The celebration will conclude with an open house for the public and Wells Community 1 to 5 p.m. Oct. 13 in the art building.

Work in progress, as well as exhibitions of work by faculty and some alumnae, will be featured, along with informal recitals by students in the music building.

There also will be seven art exhibitions during the celebration. These include "The War Years" by Boris Artyzbasheff in the art exhibition room of MacMillan Hall; student photography and Roman coins in the library; student art and the Wells collection in Morgan Hall; student-faculty-alumnae art in the art building and the music program collection in Barler Hall.

All events, except the formal dedication ceremony, are open to the public.

Vitamin C Use Limit Urged

ITHACA — Pointing to the results of a recently completed study on guinea pigs fed massive vitamin C (ascorbic acid) diets, a Cornell University nutritionist feels that people who take large doses of the vitamin may be conditioning their bodies to require significantly higher intakes in order to meet minimal daily requirements. Studying young male guinea pigs fed large ascorbic acid doses for 275 days, Prof. Jerry Rivers of the State College of Human Ecology at Cornell found that the diet led to accelerated vitamin C breakdown which continued long after the high-C

diet was halted and was not reversible by subnormal intakes of the vitamin.

The possible ramifications of this study tend to suggest that regular ingestion of massive doses of vitamin C in humans may cause systematic conditioning in which the body accelerates breakdown of the vitamin and continues to do so long after the high intakes are ceased.

Although Prof. Rivers feels that vitamin C may be helpful in treating respiratory infections, she suggests that 150 milligrams a day should be sufficient.

Appendix 4:
Letter from SOM

SKIDMORE, OWINGS & MERRILL LLP
7 WORLD TRADE CENTER
250 GREENWICH STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10007

SOM

4 December 2024

Town of Aurora
575 Oakwood Avenue
East Aurora, New York, 14052

Dear Village Clerk Ann Balloni,

We at SOM understand that there is a discussion happening tonight in Aurora about the Campbell Art and Barlor Music Building designations as Local Landmarks in village law. We consider these buildings significant works of architecture within our practice, but more broadly, they are widely regarded within our profession as exemplars of the brutalist academic work in the profession as a whole. Like the Louis Jefferson Long Library, they were designed by our pioneering architect Walter Netsch in collaboration with Structural Engineer Stanton Korista, SOM's work at Wells College was cited by Netsch as his best, and we agree! SOM wholeheartedly supports the landmark designation for these important structures and will be providing supplementary materials about the importance of the design from our archive in support of the public hearing on this matter, if accepted at tonight's meeting.

Thank you,

Colin Koop, AIA

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See also "SOM photos" submitted to the Clerk by email on January 8, 2025