



VILLAGE OF AURORA

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VIA ELECTRONIC (Ed.Thompson@ag.ny.gov) AND REGULAR MAIL

AAG Edward Thompson
NYS Attorney General's Syracuse Regional Office
300 South State Street, Suite 300
Syracuse, New York 13202

Re: Village of Aurora/Wells College

Dear Assistant Attorney General Thompson:

Happy New Year.

I am writing to follow up on my letter of December 4, 2024, in order to provide additional updates regarding the closure of Wells College as it pertains to matters involving the Village of Aurora (the "Village"), and also to implore the Attorney General's office to begin weekly status update calls (as appropriate) with the Village regarding the same.

Since my last letter to you, the Village has signed a Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") with Wells College and Ledyard Company LLC regarding the ownership and control of two antique Stagecoaches donated to Wells College by Henry Wells. Please see the attached copy of this MOU.

We have also updated our Village's short and intermediate-term budget projections to take into account new unfunded mandates to include the ownership and operation of a very antiquated (as you will see from the attached photographs) Water Treatment Plant. The Water Treatment Plant is, sadly, in need of significant injections of capital to keep up with Department of Health and sanitary code regulations and to ensure its continued safe operation. Budget estimates necessary to accomplish this are also attached hereto. As you can see, this is a long-term, concerning situation for many hundreds of nearby residents, not to mention many thousands of visitors who flock to our Village each year.

It is our hope that the Attorney General's Office's advocacy for certain asset dispositions requested by the Aurora Village Board of Trustees will allow for a certain degree of stabilization of finances and a sense of community here in Aurora.

Specifically, the Village of Aurora Board of Trustees, during the Fall of 2024, unanimously voted to approach Wells College and any New York State agencies with jurisdiction to secure two important pieces of real property within the Village of Aurora:

1. Water Treatment Plant, Operator's residence and Water Tower parcel. The Village, at the behest of Wells College, has entered into a License Agreement for the operation of the Water Treatment Plant to ensure the continuity of service and safeguard the life/safety concerns related to the provision of potable water to our residents and businesses. A copy of the License Agreement signed by both the Village and Wells College is attached. Importantly, the Village has also drafted and provided a Purchase and Sale Agreement ("PSA") for the Water Plant, its many improvements, and related real estate, so that the Village can assume ownership of the same as soon as possible. The importance of Village ownership cannot be overstated as many grants and funding streams hang in the balance and can only be directed to the owner of the property/plant. This PSA was provided to Wells' legal counsel in September and has not been signed by Wells as of the date of this communication. The Village learned just this month that Wells does not find portions of this PSA to be acceptable and that Wells College seeks a disposition of these assets which exclude the Water Plant Operator's residence and the real estate underlying the system's primary water tank, both of which are of great ongoing value to the Village and its taxpayers.
2. Dock and Waterfront Open Space. The Village of Aurora has also approached Wells College to secure the conveyance of important community spaces on Cayuga Lake, on the west side of Route 90 (across from the Wells campus). Approximately 4.7 acres owned by Wells College, north of and including the Wells College dock, are sought by the Village as open/community space. Village programs and activities, such as Aurora's summer swim program, Farmers' Market, musical events and other public benefit activities have occurred at this property for decades, benefiting residents in and around Aurora, as well as tourists. With the uncertainty of the future of the historic Wells campus, this represents a unique and compelling opportunity to secure this property for the public benefit in perpetuity. There is some 100 miles of shoreline around Cayuga Lake and 1,000 feet would serve an important public purpose and grant Village residents their only public access to Cayuga Lake. For these reasons, the Village has also provided a proposed PSA for this area but, as of the date of this communication, has received only an email from Wells College's attorneys indicating that Wells finds portions of the proposed PSA unacceptable, with no indication that Wells has interest in conveying this important parcel to Aurora.

Our entire Village Board of Trustees, together with our community members, wish for you to know that Wells College and the Village of Aurora are inextricably intertwined with one another. The long-standing historic district designation on the National Historic Register is the *Wells College/Village of Aurora* Historic District. Wells College operated and maintained the water plant that has served

the Village of Aurora for 90+ years. Aurora has been populated ostensibly by college professors, students and staff, as well as marriages between Wells graduates and “townies” since Wells’ inception in 1868. Fifteen (15) of the Twenty (20) current members of our various Village boards (Board of Trustees, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals and Community Preservation Panel) either went to Wells or married someone who went to Wells. At least a quarter of our volunteer firefighters in Aurora were Wells students. In cooperation with Wells, the Village operated a summer swim program at the college dock for decades, sponsored a youth program at the Wells Athletic field, offered swim lessons at the Wells pool, had free access to the Wells gym, and established a farmer’s market that operated from May-October. Additionally, several village festivals were held on the boathouse lawn and on the Wells campus throughout the years. Wells closing was not just the Village losing an employer, we lost our lifeblood and an irreplaceable part of our history.

It is with this background our Village implores you, the Attorney General of the State of New York, to please help us keep Aurora solvent and vital for our residents, businesses, and tourists. Financially, the Village will need a stabilizing budget and/or grant streams as there is no funding in its current budget to operate and maintain the community’s water plant.

With only 167 households in the Village, it is imperative that we take steps now to stabilize the Village’s financial future through the above-requested transactions, together with other important strategic planning initiatives. Our annual Village budget is only \$1,121,110.00, so there are only very limited ways we can try to create some sort of stabilizing impact for our taxpayers and community.

Your understanding of the above-stated needs and the Village’s deteriorating financial situation is critical in ensuring the survival of the Village of Aurora. Henry Wells, founder of Wells Fargo and American Express, did not just stumble upon the Village of Aurora as the setting for his historic women’s college, he chose Aurora for his college due to its beauty, history, and opportunities. Despite the recent uptick in college closures in the Northeast, we believe this particular college closure presents a very unique situation requiring immediate and focused New York State attention and cooperation due to the fact that the Village and Wells are so inextricably intertwined.

We greatly appreciate your time and consideration of these critical matters and hope that weekly, or even bi-weekly, conferences may be of interest to your office, and the other various involved State agencies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Orman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Orman".

James Orman, Mayor
Village of Aurora