VILLAGE OF AURORA

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9/10/26

New York State Attorney General Letitia James

RE: Formal Advocacy for the Sale and Redevelopment of the Former Wells College Campus

Dear Attorney General James,

On behalf of the Village of Aurora Board of Trustees and the residents we serve, I am writing to strongly advocate for the prompt sale and successful redevelopment of the former Wells College campus. The future of this 127-acre property is vital to the economic health and long-term stability of the Village of Aurora and Cayuga County. Achieving a successful transfer and reactivation of the campus remains our highest priority.

As you are aware, significant uncertainty has arisen following the Wells College Board of Trustees' termination of the Purchase and Sale Agreement (PSA) with the Hiawatha Institute for Indigenous Knowledge (HIIK) on June 22, 2026. This termination is currently being challenged in court by HIIK, who remain fully committed to the purchase, leaving the matter unresolved. The Village and Cayuga County have developed a deeply positive, collaborative, and constructive relationship with HIIK. They have spent significant time here, engaging directly with our residents and community leaders to truly understand the needs and character of Aurora. Their willingness to invest substantial time and capital to deeply research the community and develop a thoughtful, viable plan reassures us of their seriousness and commitment. This represents the kind of active, long-term relationship we need with an investor, and it is exactly the partnership Aurora looks for as we seek to secure a viable, sustainable path forward for the property as a whole. Prolonged vacancy risks causing severe and lasting harm to our local economy, historic structures, and regional community.

Completing a successful sale to a qualified entity is essential for job creation in Cayuga County, strengthening economic development throughout the Finger Lakes region, preserving dozens of historic National Register buildings on campus, and maintaining an active, productive presence that honors the educational legacy held in trust for the people of New York.

To facilitate a smooth transition, the Village actively supports redevelopment strategies that protect and enhance vital community assets—strategies which have also been put forth by HIIK—including:

- **Housing Solutions:** Converting underutilized dormitories into much-needed residential housing.

- **Essential Services:** Ensuring the continued operation of the Community Medical Center, which provides primary care in a Medically Underserved Area, and the Peachtown Elementary School, both of which are critical tenants serving our families.
- **Public Access:** Reopening the Schwartz Athletic Center, the Long Library, and the lakefront boathouse for community use.

Demonstrating our commitment to a successful outcome, the Village of Aurora is proactively updating its local zoning code to incorporate a flexible Planned Development District (PDD). This modern regulatory framework was specifically designed to provide adaptive reuse options, streamlined approvals, and maximum flexibility to make the Wells College campus highly attractive to any qualified prospective buyer aligned with Aurora's community vision.

We respectfully request that your office exercise its authority and oversight under New York State law to facilitate an expeditious resolution that allows the property sale to move forward without unnecessary delay.

The Village of Aurora remains dedicated to working with the State, Cayuga County, and future buyers to restore vibrancy to the Wells College campus and safeguard the economic future of our region.

Sincerely,

Janet Murphy

Janet Murphy
Mayor, Village of Aurora

cc:
Kathy Hochul, Governor of New York State
Ed Thompson, Assistant Attorney General, Syracuse Regional Office
Timothy P. Mulvey, Assistant Attorney General, Syracuse Regional Office
Rachel May, New York State Senator, 48th District
Jeff Gallahan, New York State Assemblyman, District 131
Dr. Betty A. Rosa, New York State Commissioner of Education
Adrian I. Hale, Regent for the 7th Judicial District
Daniel Mackay, Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation, NYS OPRHP
Tracy DiGenova, CNY Regional Representative for Governor Hochul
Aileen McNabb-Coleman, Cayuga County Constituent Services for Senator May
Congressman John Mannion
Senator Chuck Schumer