

July 25, 2023

The Honorable Kathy Hochul  
Governor of New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

**Re: Open Letter to the Governor Concerning the Relocation of the APA**

Dear Governor Hochul,

The undersigned former Board members and former employees of the Adirondack Park Agency are writing to express our opposition to the proposed relocation of the Agency's headquarters to a new location in the Village of Saranac Lake. Our reasons for taking this position are detailed below.

The Park Agency is a regional agency which regulates land use and development throughout the Adirondack Park. It makes little sense to us for the Agency to choose a new location in one community without any outreach to other potentially interested communities and a careful consideration of alternatives.

There appears to have been no evaluation of other alternatives to the Village of Saranac Lake including and especially locations in such nearby Adirondack communities as Tupper Lake and Gabriels which both have existing State buildings in need of improvements which would be suitable for an Agency headquarters. It does not serve the public well to propose only one location beyond the State Office Campus in Ray Brook with no consideration of alternatives.

Choosing Saranac Lake as the "preferred location" for a new headquarters without a detailed and fully transparent alternatives analysis has an appearance of impropriety. Saranac Lake is where the Agency's Executive Director was raised, where her highly respected family runs a longstanding anchor Main Street business, and where she ably served as a Village Trustee. The Executive Director has stated that New York's \$29 Million investment will be "transformational." Advancing the proposal will require negotiations with the Village of Saranac Lake at the same time that the Village is considering building a new emergency services building on a site which will at least require a Freshwater Wetlands Act permit from the APA. To even a casual observer, the proposal therefore raises ethical concerns for the Agency, the Village and ultimately, the Hochul Administration.

Again, on the issue of transparency, no analysis has been made available to the public which focuses on the cost or feasibility of constructing a new Agency headquarters at the APA's current Ray Brook location. Portions of the Agency's current complex that were constructed within the past 20 years could potentially be used in the development of a new Agency headquarters. It is reasonable to assume that construction costs would be much lower if

relatively new elements of the Agency's current structure could be reused. Cost savings will be especially important at this time since the NY State Budget Office is projecting significant deficits in the current and future fiscal years.

The proposed Village of Saranac Lake location is heavily used for local parking throughout the day, especially during the summer months, its use by the Agency will therefore impact local citizens. It will also increase traffic on an important and busy school bus route leading to the nearby Petrova Elementary School.

Other major concerns include the age and condition of the Power & Light Building, its incorporated power generation infrastructure, and the condition of the Lake Flower Dam which is located at the side of the building. By moving the Agency to Saranac Lake, the State will be encumbered with a long-term lease with the Village for a 96 year old building in need of major renovations and it will assume responsibility and liability for dam maintenance. There are major concerns regarding the safety of the Power & Light structure as well as the dam which is attached just below the retaining wall of the building. The presence of and need for asbestos remediation also needs to be considered. There may also be issues related to adequate setbacks for the new structures proposed for the site by the Agency.

Further, there are questions regarding whether there can truly be adequate parking for State vehicles, private staff vehicles and visitor vehicles on this relatively small parcel in the Village. The current State campus location has more than adequate parking and there is never a question whether the public can be accommodated at Agency meetings, public hearings and other programs. In addition, the fairly new vehicle maintenance garage at the existing Agency headquarters could be included in the design of a new Agency building in Ray Brook and could continue to serve the same purpose.

The State Office Campus in Ray Brook was set aside in the State Land Master Plan to house State government offices. If alternative sites away from Ray Brook were to be identified, first consideration should have been given to other State-owned properties. But the question must be asked, why leave the Ray Brook location?

Important security concerns are also met in Ray Brook through the presence of the New York State Police and Department of Environmental Conservation's law enforcement staff. And, the NYS/DEC's location across the parking lot from the APA provides the public with easy access to DEC and APA staff for consultations and joint meetings on permit applications and other important matters.

Residents of Saranac Lake recognize that a critical need in the Village is and will continue to be affordable housing. The section of the existing parking lot on which the Agency proposes to construct its new office building will consume what could otherwise, with current zoning, be developed for a multi-family housing project.

In conclusion, we are simply looking for a transparent, common-sense approach for siting a new Agency headquarters which will be more in line with the priorities and sound thinking that are important to your Administration. An approach that is respectful of public input, which takes into account the clear guidance of the State Land Master Plan and which seeks to ensure a proper balance of costs and benefits. The site selection process should also be respectful of the history of the Adirondack Park Agency. It should take into account what the Agency will require to best serve the people of the Adirondacks in the future. Frankly, the current proposal to move the Agency headquarters is not in the best interest of the Agency, its staff, other State agencies or the public which we have long served. It is also not in keeping with the strong ethical standards and transparency that have characterized your administration.

We hope that you will seriously consider these comments prior to any further decisions being made.

Respectfully,

Former Agency Board Members, Executive Staff and Staff Members:

Richard Lefebvre, Board Member, Board Chair & Executive Director  
Sherman Craig, Board Member & Board Chair  
Katherine Roberts, Board Member  
Chad Dawson, Board Member  
James Connolly, Deputy Director Planning  
Mark Sengenberger, Deputy Director Regulatory Programs  
Steve Erman, Special Assistant for Economic Affairs  
Dan Spada, Director of Resource Analysis & Scientific Services  
John Quinn, Regulatory Programs  
Mike Hannon, Regulatory Programs  
Suzanne McSherry, Regulatory Programs  
Sunita Halasz, Resource Analysis & Scientific Services  
Mark Rooks, Resource Analysis & Scientific Services  
Rita Quinn, Jurisdictional Inquiries  
Doug Miller, Jurisdictional Inquiries  
Ellen George, Attorney  
Susan Streiff, Secretary to the Executive Director  
Betty-Jane Forester, Secretary/Receptionist  
Stevie Summers, Secretary/Receptionist

Cc List:

John O'Leary, Deputy Secretary for Energy & Environment, Executive Chamber

Ashley Dougherty, Assistant Secretary for Environment, Executive Chamber

Jimmy Williams, Mayor, Village of Saranac Lake

Jordanna Mallach, Supervisor, Town of Harrietstown

Adirondack Park Agency Members & Designees

Barbara Rice, APA Executive Director

Senator Dan Stec

Assemblyman Billy Jones

Assemblyman Mathew Simpson

Martin Blair, PEF Regional Representative