

Village of Aurora

Administrative & Maintenance Facility and Related Actions to IOA Properties

SEQR EAF Part 3 Narrative

The action proposed by the Inns of Aurora (IOA) includes short-term activities to develop an Administrative & Maintenance Facility (the “Facility”) on a property it owns at 492 Main Street, as well as long-term activities and development plans for other properties owned by the IOA. The Facility may consist of one structure to include administrative offices, a separate structure to include the maintenance barn, and parking to accommodate up to 50 employees. The Village of Aurora Planning Board, as the designated lead agency under SEQR, has considered both the short-term activities and uses, as well as the long-term development plans in preparing its determination of significance for the proposed action.

The Planning Board carefully reviewed the information and answers given in the Part 1 EAF by the IOA. This information informed the Planning Board’s preparation of the Part 2 EAF. In addition, the Part 1 EAF was circulated to the list of involved and interested agencies. No comments were received from these agencies. In order to determine if the potential impacts identified by the Planning Board may have a significant adverse impact on the environment, the impacts reasonably expected to result from the proposed action were compared against the criteria for determining significance provided in 617.7 of the SEQR regulations.

Based upon its review, the Planning Board believes the following criteria are indicators of significant adverse impacts on the environment:

(i) a substantial adverse change in existing air quality, ground or surface water quality or quantity, traffic or noise levels; a substantial increase in solid waste production; a substantial increase in potential for erosion, flooding, leaching or drainage problems;

The Planning Board indicated potential moderate and/or large impacts in the Part 2 EAF with regard to traffic, noise, and surface water quality and drainage.

Traffic/Transportation

In addition to the construction of the Administration & Maintenance Facility with parking on the Webster Land/College Barn property, the IOA’s current plans involve changes in use or intensity of use at the following properties owned by IOA: Former Eldred Property, Gratitude Building, Jane Morgan/Odds & Ends, Bush North, Walcourt Cottage, Zabriskie Cottage, Chimney Corners, and Taylor House (currently under development) Proposed uses can be summarized to include new commercial ventures, a year-round event center (weddings), consolidated administrative offices and maintenance functions, the Taylor House conference/retreat center, building demolition, as well as yet-to-be determined uses. Rehabilitative work as well as new construction is anticipated both interior and exterior of buildings, along with new impervious surfaces and drainage facilities, additional pedestrian facilities, and changes to vehicular traffic flows and parking.

Due to a variety of factors, including the current zoning of affected parcels under the Village Code, the exact use and the magnitude of the changes in the uses at these IOA properties are unknown at this time, as are the associated changes in traffic

volumes/patterns, parking facilities and pedestrian access and walkways. It is assumed that substantial re-zoning of the Village will be sought by the IOA to accommodate development plans. Given the relatively compact and walkable nature of the Village, and existing traffic or parking congestion experienced at times, vehicular and pedestrian transportation is an issue of great concern to the Planning Board. As a result, the Planning Board finds that the comprehensive changes proposed to the IOA properties, most of which are centrally located in the Village or located in the Village commercial area, pose a significant adverse impact to transportation conditions.

Surface Water Quality, Drainage, & Flooding

Cayuga Lake and its shoreline are critical surface water resources in the Village of Aurora. The Village is also drained by several DEC-classified streams and additional unmapped and un-named drainageways. Several of the IOA properties proposed for changes/construction are located on or near the shoreline of Cayuga Lake. Those properties that include waterfront land or are located west of Main Street are: the Former Eldred Property, Zabriskie Cottage, Taylor House, and the Gratitude Building.

As is happening in other Finger Lakes, Cayuga Lake has been significantly affected in recent years by “harmful algal blooms” (HABs) which impacts drinking water quality and the health of the habitat the Lake provides for many species. In 2018, the magnitude of the problem forced the Village to officially declare a State of Emergency with regard to water quality. The shallow depth of the Village’s water intake pipe contributes to the problem and affects all residents and visitors to the Village in terms of drinking water quality and public health. In addition, the Village has been experiencing flooding and drainage issues as a result of its antiquated drainage system and other inadequacies associated with its drainage infrastructure. The land use changes associated with the Administrative & Maintenance Facility and at other IOA properties would involve an increase in impervious surfaces or other changes in stormwater flows. Therefore, the Planning Board is concerned about assuring appropriate stormwater management and erosion/sedimentation best management practices.

At this time, the Planning Board does not have enough information to evaluate how the property and use changes proposed at IOA properties would interact or exacerbate issues concerning drinking water, public health, flooding and drainage. Given increasingly stringent water quality standards, existing drainage issues, and the importance of Cayuga Lake to the overall character of the Village, the Planning Board identifies a lack of information regarding water quality, drainage and stormwater management for the suite of changes proposed at the IOA properties and finds that the proposed action has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in this regard.

Noise – The development and use of the maintenance portion of the proposed Facility at 492 Main Street is of concern with regard to possible noise impacts. Potential noise issues also arise from proposed uses that potentially involve the hosting of moderate to large outdoor events or the use of amplified sound indoors. The use of the Former Eldred Property as a year-round event center is a prime example. Moreover, it is unknown whether outdoor gatherings would be held in the future at the Taylor House (conference/retreat center use), the Gratitude Building (proposed use as Taste NY purveyor of NYS wine, beer, other products), or at other IOA properties where uses would be changed over the long term.

At this time, moderate to large impacts on Noise have been identified in the Part 2 EAF. The Planning Board needs additional insight into the level of potential impacts through information on IOA plans, in order to determine the need for mitigation measures.

(ii) the removal or destruction of large quantities of vegetation or fauna; substantial interference with the movement of any resident or migratory fish or wildlife species; impacts on a significant habitat area; substantial adverse impacts on a threatened or endangered species of animal or plant, or the habitat of such a species; or other significant adverse impacts to natural resources;

Research done on behalf of the Planning Board indicates that NYSDEC has identified the potential presence of species listed as threatened/endangered or of special concern in the project vicinity, including Bald Eagle and Lake Sturgeon. The Village is also aware that rare, threatened or endangered plants are present in certain areas of Aurora, such as the woodlands on the Wells College campus, including the Kentucky coffee tree, a NYS listed endangered tree species.

Given the Planning Board's current level of information regarding the type of work proposed at IOA's properties, no significant tree cutting or other modification of potential habitat is proposed, and moderate to large impacts have not been identified at this time in the Part 2 EAF. However, the Planning Board would like to have additional insight into the level of potential impacts through information on IOA plans, in order to determine if compliance with the State or Federal Endangered Species Acts would be needed.

(iv) the creation of a material conflict with a community's current plans or goals as officially approved or adopted;

The parcel at 492 Main Street is currently included in an Agricultural/Residential zoning district. The definition in the Village Zoning Law is as follows:

AR (Agricultural/Residential): Land for agricultural and/or residential purposes. Agriculture includes farming, pasturing, agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, and viticulture, and the necessary accessory uses for packing, treating, or storing the product, provided, however, that the operation of any such accessory uses shall be secondary to that of normal agricultural use. Residential includes one- and two-family and multi-family residential use on a lot of minimum size of 15,000 square feet.

The construction of the Administration & Maintenance Facility is inconsistent with the current zoning designation of the subject parcel and would require an amendment of the Village Zoning Law.

The total acreage of the Village of Aurora is estimated at 588 acres. IOA owns 27 tax parcels within the Village encompassing a total of approximately 115 acres comprising 19.5 percent of the Village's overall acreage. These parcels include 19 buildings, providing a total of approximately 136,500 square feet (includes basements, porches/decks, barns, garages and other ancillary buildings). The majority of these buildings are more than 50 years old, and therefore are either designated as historic structures or would be considered eligible for historic designation.

Attachments to the Part 1 EAF (Exhibits 4 & 5) include a table showing a breakdown of the IOA parcels, buildings, square footage and acreage, along with a map showing their location in relation to the rest of the Village. Review of the mapping indicates that the IOA owns a substantial portion of the commercial district and the northern half of the Village, while Wells College occupies a large portion of the southern half of the Village.

As a result of the substantial footprint of buildings and acreage owned by the IOA within the Village of Aurora, as well as the importance and historic nature of the structures, any short-term and long-term plans made by the IOA with regard to land use, zoning amendments, changes in land or building use, construction, renovation, parking and the like would have a significant impact on the achievement of overall Village plans and goals. Understanding such IOA plans is essential to the continued land use planning, zoning, and related regulations overseen by the Village leaders in order for them to ensure critical municipal services and to maintain a functional and vibrant Village. The Planning Board indicates moderate to large impacts in the Part 2 EAF with regard to the community planning and zoning and finds the potential for significant adverse environmental impacts with regard to the proposed action.

(v) the impairment of the character or quality of important historical, archeological, architectural, or aesthetic resources or of existing community or neighborhood character;

Historic, Architectural & Archeological & Resources

The majority of the Village of Aurora is included in the “Aurora Village-Wells College Historic District” which was officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2002 (90NR00105). The District is located along the shoreline of Cayuga Lake and includes both sides of Main Street along most of the length of the Village, as well as the western portion of the Wells College campus and all of Oak Glen Cemetery. At least 30 structures are individually listed within the Historic District, four are indicated as eligible for listing, and several more are undetermined. These historic structures are a critical element of the Village character.

The IOA owns at least seven listed historic buildings in the designated Aurora Village-Wells College Historic District. The following summarizes the IOA proposals concerning these buildings:

- The Webster Barn (also referred to as College Barn) at 492 Main Street is an individually listed building within the Historic District. The property containing the Barn is proposed as the location for the Administrative & Maintenance Facility.
- The Former Eldred property at 491 Main Street is an individually listed property within the Historic District and is being considered for the location of the IOA Year-Round Event Facility for weddings and other events.
- The Zabriskie Cottage at 441 Main Street is an individually listed building within the Historic District and is being considered for demolition.
- Chimney Corners is not an individually listed building but is located within the Historic District, and its proposed future use is unknown at this time.
- The Taylor House building is not an individually listed building but is located within the Historic District.

- Other IOA buildings proposed for use changes have not been researched but are likely included as contributing or non-contributing structures located in the Historic District.

In addition, mapping available on the SHPO Cultural Resource Information System (CRIS) website, indicates that several areas within the Village of Aurora are considered archeologically sensitive. This indicates that artifacts from the pre-European settlement time period may be present and disturbance of the ground surface associated with construction may result in the loss of such artifacts in their pre-historic context.

The Village of Aurora Zoning Law includes the goal of protecting and enhancing historic areas within Village boundaries. Local Law #2 of 1998 is intended for designating certain properties as Historic Village Landmarks. The original 1998 Landmarks list contains five Wells College buildings and 13 properties in the Village, including Taylor House and other properties currently owned by the IOA. Local Law #4 of 2017 expanded this list of structures by 14 structures and included “Selected Trees.” The Planning Board encourages the IOA to consult with Village Historian regarding locally significant historic and archeological resources.

The Planning Board acknowledges the importance of the Aurora Village-Wells College Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the magnitude and significance of historically and architecturally important structures within the District, the presence of archeological sensitive areas within the Village, and the Village’s local list of designated historic landmark buildings. The Planning Board also recognizes that these elements are integral to the historic and scenic character of the Village.

As a result of the IOA’s proposed changes (including demolition) to listed and contributing or non-contributing structures within the National Register Historic District, as well as the Village’s own list of Local Historic Landmarks, and the potential for ground disturbance in archeologically sensitive areas, the Planning Board indicates potential large impacts in the Part 2 EAF with regard to historic archeological resources and finds the potential for significant adverse environmental impacts on such resources with regard to the proposed action.

Aesthetic Resources

Cayuga Lake is a recognized Statewide aesthetic resource. Much of the character of the Village of Aurora is derived from its linear location along the shoreline of Cayuga Lake. As previously stated, four of the IOA buildings currently proposed for structural or use changes are located on or near the shoreline of Cayuga Lake (west of Main Street). Ten additional properties owned by the IOA, which are not proposed for structural or use changes at this time, are also located on or near the shoreline of Cayuga Lake. Moreover, given the upslope of the topography of the Village, much of the remainder of Village lands and buildings are visible from Cayuga Lake to boaters and other recreational users.

The Village of Aurora itself is considered scenic, and as previously described, most of its area is included within the Aurora Village-Wells College Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Village and Route 90 (Main Street) through the Village, as well as Cayuga Lake itself, are part of the Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway. This

87-mile route was officially designated as a New York State Scenic Byway in 2002 by the New York State Department of Transportation, with the following Vision Statement:

The Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway is a diverse transportation corridor, which links scenic views of Cayuga Lake and the surrounding agricultural and woodlands; year-round recreational opportunities; historical resources; wineries; the City of Ithaca and quaint village and hamlet areas to form an interesting, inviting rural traveling experience.

Given the scenic nature of the Village and its setting on Cayuga Lake, as well as the importance of the buildings and lands owned by the IOA within the fabric of the Village, the Planning Board has identified moderate to large impacts in Part 2 EAF and finds the potential for significant adverse environmental impacts on scenic resources with regard to the proposed action.

(viii) a substantial change in the use, or intensity of use, of land including agricultural, open space or recreational resources, or in its capacity to support existing uses;

The parcel proposed for the Administration & Maintenance Facility at 492 Main Street is currently in agricultural use (though not within a County Agricultural District). As few details are currently available regarding the preferred site plan and location of the Facility within the 47-acre parcel, it is unclear what impacts may occur to the continuing agricultural use of this parcel. The farmland acreage occupied by the Administration & Maintenance Facility would be irreversibly converted into developed use, and this action may ultimately result in development pressure and farmland conversion within additional portions of the property.

The related plans currently disclosed by the IOA involve changes in use and intensity of use at eight additional IOA properties, and the Planning Board assumes that continued planning by the IOA will reveal changes to additional properties over the long-term. As previously stated, the IOA owns 27 tax parcels encompassing approximately 115 acres within the Village of Aurora, along with 19 buildings, providing approximately 136,500 square feet. The properties owned by the IOA occupy a substantial portion of the northern half of the Village.

Given the announced changes to IOA properties, as well as the probability of future changes, and the geographic scope of these parcels within the Village framework, the Planning Board has identified the potential for significant impacts upon land use, intensity of land use and the capacity of the Village to support existing uses.

The capacity of the Village to support existing uses is a key concept in the evaluation of the significant impacts upon the intensity of land use. Specifically, the Village needs to remain an independent and functioning population center with an appropriate mix of residential, commercial and municipal uses, including a balance of owner-occupied and rental properties. It is important that the Village maintain a threshold level of permanent residents, as well as local economic opportunities and space to pursue commercial ventures.

(xi) changes in two or more elements of the environment, no one of which has a significant impact on the environment, but when considered together result in a substantial adverse impact on the environment;

The Planning Board has indicated the potential for impacts on individual elements of the environment that interrelate and overlap in such a manner to create significant adverse impacts. Many of these impacts have been described in the paragraphs above. The resources affected by the project at a large, moderate or small level include the following:

- Transportation/parking facilities
- Lack of pedestrian facilities
- Village zoning
- Village planning
- Public water & sewer utilities
- Drainage facilities
- Stormwater management
- Sedimentation & erosion control
- Land use & intensity of land use
- Village capacity to support existing uses
- Scenic/aesthetic resources
- Community character
- Historic & architectural resources
- Archeological resources
- Cayuga Lake & waterfront
- Noise
- Lighting
- Endangered/threatened & special concern species

The combination of impacts on the above resources is considered by the Planning Board to have the potential for significant adverse environmental effects.

(xii) two or more related actions undertaken, funded or approved by an agency, none of which has or would have a significant impact on the environment, but when considered cumulatively would meet one or more of the criteria in this subdivision.

In making its determination of significance, the Planning Board gave considerable weight to potential cumulative, long-term, and indirect impacts associated with the proposed action. According to the SEQR Handbook, cumulative impacts must be assessed when “actions are proposed, or can be foreseen as likely, to take place simultaneously or sequentially in a way that the combined impacts may be significant”.

The SEQR Handbook includes the following:

Assessment of potential cumulative impact assessment should be done under the following circumstances:

If two or more simultaneous or subsequent actions themselves are related because

- One action is an interdependent part of a larger action or included as part of any long range plan,
- One action is likely to be undertaken as a result of the proposed action or will likely be triggered by the proposed action,
- One action cannot or will not proceed unless another action is taken or one action is dependent on another, or
- If the impacts of related or unrelated actions may be incrementally significant and the impacts themselves are related.

The Planning Board has identified potential moderate to large impacts with regard to cumulative impacts. In the identification of potentially significant cumulative impacts,

the Planning Board has placed significant emphasis on the unique setting and social fabric of the Village, as well as its current land use patterns and ownership of properties. As has been described throughout this narrative, the actions proposed by the IOA and their wide-scale geographic scope would reverberate broadly in terms of Village infrastructure, planning and the number of residents affected in the Village. The conversion of property uses to commercial or event space are unlikely to be reversed in the near- or moderate-term future. As such, the Planning Board finds that the combination of the IOA properties which would be affected by use or redevelopment as the IOA's short and long-term plans are implemented have the potential to result in significant cumulative environmental impacts.

Consideration of the above evaluation supports the issuance of a Positive Declaration by the Planning Board as its Determination of Significance for the proposed action.