



Westport NY Economic Development Committee

... a committee of the Chamber of Commerce

www.gowestportny.com info@gowestportny.com

June 14, 2021

Essex County Board of Supervisors
Essex County Courthouse
Elizabethtown, NY 12932

Dear Members of the Board of Supervisors,

The Westport Economic Development Committee, whose purpose is to “stimulate and sustain economic growth through proactive recruitment of retail and service business, tourism, outdoor recreation, farming and food, light industry, and the arts,” requests that you restore, not replace, the Cornell Extension Building. Demolishing a historic Essex County structure, that is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and replacing it with a new building would not benefit the economic well-being of Essex County.

Despite public statements about comparable costs that favored the demolish/replace plan, it is likely to be more expensive than restoring the existing building because projections exaggerate the cost for restoration and underestimate the cost of demolish/replace. Even if restoration may cost more, doing so would provide short- and long-term benefits associated with preserving historic structures and the community’s culture.

One expected economic benefit of restoration is that it would employ local contractors and their crews, who would acquire materials from nearby businesses. This is different than new government construction projects where outside contractors specializing in government projects are hired. Thus, restoration keeps our Essex County government funds in our local communities and with our businesses and people.

Along those lines, employing local companies means more jobs for younger people and can be one step in retaining them as residents or encouraging them to return after their young adult travels.

As noted in our purposes, we encourage economic prosperity through “tourism, outdoor recreation, farming and food, light industry, and the arts.” Restoring Cornell Extension builds on all those actions in the following ways:

- Tourism: People are attracted to areas with historic structures and communities that preserve and honor their past
- Outdoor recreation: People want to hike, bike, paddle, and more in places that respect their histories

- Farming and food: Does anything need to be written here? Just think of all that has happened over so many years related to farming and food in this building. Think of all the children—now adults—who attended 4-H here. They pass these experiences through generations. Their grandchildren and great grandchildren can do 4-H in the same building, restored for posterity. Destroying a place with these memories of farming, food, community, and friends will erase this history.
- Light industry: With local businesses involved in restorations of commercial and residential properties, which will attract people to start new businesses, there will be an increased need for locally provided light industry products.
- The arts: History is art, especially with Essex County’s architectural and historic building. A county that maintains its wealth of history and restores iconic structures that are in need attention, inspires a legacy that honors beauty, creativity, and a sense of place. In this sense, restoring the Cornell Extension Building is like restoring an old painting where its past significance shines a light on future generations.

For these and many other reasons, restoring the Cornell Extension Building will provide more immediate and long-term economic benefits to Essex County than destroying part of our history and replacing it with a new, but culturally inferior building. Please restore the Cornell Extension Building. It is the right thing to do.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

The Westport Economic Development Committee

Lyn Barrett (Chair), Matthew Brankman, Peter Burns, Jim Carlisle, Alyssa Carroll, Keith Giles, and Chris Maron

cc: US Senator Chuck Schumer
US Senator Kirstin Gillibrand
US Representative Elise Stefanik
NY State Senator Dan Stec
NY State Assemblyman Matthew Simpson