

# SHOULD THE APA LEAVE RAY BROOK?

## Village move is nonsense

The Adirondack Park Agency and Department of Environmental Conservation, administering many overlapping and complimentary regulations, were ideally located in Ray Brook. The agency was meant to be near its sister agency, and not anywhere else.

The agency's executive director has promoted the "transformational" concept of a village location but with a lack of transparency that limited analysis to only Saranac Lake and Ray Brook.

At best, the state money involved would provide limited benefit to Saranac Lake and a great deal for contractors and construction. Not only would there be additional cost, but design would have to include potential rehabilitation of the dam as well as major improvements to the downtown Power & Light building.

Why should the agency leave Ray Brook when current offices are in a land use area designated for "administrative use" under the Adirondack Park Land Use and Development Plan? To relocate to a hamlet or village robs the community of the potential for creating new structures serving much more important needs and involving real economic potential.

It is a mistake to think that the term "smart growth" can be applied when the village is facing other critical needs. It is not the responsibility of the agency to preserve historic buildings or to create economic development.

Smart growth assumes that any new structure would be tied to regular movement throughout the community as opposed to an office building with limited public access. Smart growth assumes that people would leave the structure to spend money. Smart growth is planning for affordable housing.

The recent release of a staff survey demonstrated that most current employees were opposed to the move. Few of them would alter their spending habits in the proposed location. Many agency staff already live in the village and shop there.

The agency would leave the state campus even though major renovations and additions to the building have occurred. These include construction of a new board meeting room, a new maintenance garage, improved communications equipment allowing for the broadcast of agency meetings as well as other improvements.

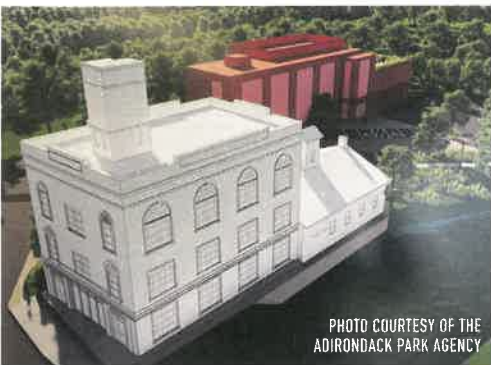


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ADIRONDACK PARK AGENCY



PHOTO CHLOE BENNETT

The proposed new site for APA headquarters is ill-conceived and poorly rationalized. It would have a negative impact on the agency's role in regional planning and cooperation with DEC. ■



**JAMES CONNOLLY**, Lake Clear, APA deputy director 2002-2012; prior to APA, a Region 5 DEC staffer for 22 years

## Saranac Lake HQ is the right call

The Adirondack Park Agency's (APA) proposal to locate its headquarters in the village of Saranac Lake is the right choice for the Adirondacks. It locates development within a hamlet-designated area, provides a stable downtown anchor in a pedestrian-oriented community, and breathes new life into an underused historic building.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and supporting downtown revitalization while investing in an existing historic building is good economic development and environmental stewardship. Preservation of existing buildings has shown to create a ripple effect,

creating jobs, fostering local businesses and sustaining the economic viability of historic downtowns and Main Streets.

The 1927 Paul Smith's Electric Light & Power & Railroad Company Building sits on a prominent corner in the heart of Saranac Lake, overlooking Lake Flower and the Saranac River. A village-commissioned condition assessment of the building outlined the necessary steps that would bring this beautiful terra cotta building back to life. Since completion of that report, no private developer has come forward with a proposal for reusing this building or developing the site. The APA's proposal is consistent with the village's downtown revitalization plan to increase connectivity along Main Street while maintaining its historic character.

Relocating the APA to a historic building in Saranac Lake also meets many of our state's environmental goals. These climate initiatives support and promote sustainable development, renewable energy, walkable communities, alternatives to driving, shared resources and use of existing infrastructure—all exemplified in this proposal. For example, participating in the village's planned geothermal system will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the shared parking lot will maximize use of the paved surface while providing a community benefit.

When the APA was created 50 years ago, government agencies were leaving cities and villages. Since then, the area surrounding APA headquarters in Ray Brook has expanded to include big-box stores and sprawl. This move relocates the agency fewer than four miles up the road, maintaining proximity to the state agencies at Ray Brook. It is appropriate that as the agency celebrates its 50th birthday, it leads the way in focusing development inside of our hamlet centers, leaving the forests and open space for wilderness and creating a less car-centric culture.

This decision is the most responsible land use policy a state agency can employ, especially one like the APA, charged with protecting the public and private resources of our Adirondack Park. ■



**ERIN TOBIN**, executive director, Adirondack Architectural Heritage, Keeseville