

Resolution on HVAC-related Conditions in Academic Village

Background: In January 1998, NYSERDA (the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority) began providing planning, analysis and technical assistance for SUNY Old Westbury, detailing how the campus could be transformed into a model of energy efficiency and energy conservation, through state-of-the art equipment and energy management practices. The envisioned project included replacement of HVAC equipment campus-wide as well as potential initiatives in photovoltaic energy and cogeneration. The envisioned project also included educational components to connect renewable energy and “sustainability” initiatives with academic research, student internships and multi-disciplinary curriculum. Since 1998, funding for this project has been available through NYSERDA’s State EnVest program - with no upfront costs to the institution - through an energy performance contract in which physical plant upgrades are paid for by future energy savings.¹

Following delays caused by two changes in administration, NYSERDA issued an RFP for the SUNY Old Westbury comprehensive energy efficiency project in February 2000. A two-stage evaluation process was conducted in March 2000 and June 2000 for proposals submitted in response to the RFP. An award-winning energy services company, Sempra Energy, was selected by the project team on the basis of technical merit, financial merit and overall vision of energy conservation. The project team was comprised of two campus staff (one each from Facilities and Office of Business & Finance), one faculty member with a background in energy analysis, and engineers from NYSERDA and SAIC (Science Applications International Corporation).

Based on NYSERDA’s experiences with comprehensive energy projects at other SUNY campuses and K-12 institutions, an overall two-year time period was projected from initial stages of planning through completion of all construction. (In their June 2000 proposal in response to NYSERDA’s RFP, Sempra Energy projected the completion of construction by August 2001.) These timelines, however, assumed an appropriate degree of focus, attentiveness and cooperation on the part of campus administration which did not materialize.

In early 2002, frustrated by lack of progress and ongoing administrative indifference, NYSERDA removed their project manager assigned to the Old Westbury campus since 1998, re-directing their efforts to other SUNY campuses and institutions seeking their assistance. SAIC continued to provide analysis and technical assistance through Summer 2003, culminating in a cogeneration feasibility study undertaken with an Old Westbury faculty member funded by a NYSERDA research grant.

By summer 2004, the Academic Village chiller unit was completely inoperable. Indoor temperatures near 90°F, with stifling humidity and inadequate ventilation, were experienced in the AV offices of department secretaries and faculty teaching over the summer. To alleviate the hardship of these conditions, the administration provided but an empty “cooling room” in a vacant dormitory. Department secretaries could not realistically do their work from this location, since the nature of their work makes them “first responders” to problems brought to department offices by all constituencies on campus. When secretaries purchased their own air conditioners or faculty purchased AC units for them by pooling their own funds, facilities workers were prevented by their supervisors from installing these units on compensated time. Some of these workers volunteered to install these units on their own time.

Months prior to Summer 2004, sections of the A-wing had been closed off and boarded up, due to the danger of the air-conditioning unit collapsing through the roof. (Closure of sections of the A-wing has severely impeded access to the Mathematics & Computer Information Sciences Department, which lies just beyond the “forbidden zone”, having been moved to the A-wing from the B-wing last fall.) During this entire time period, there has been no meaningful information to affected employees in Academic Village regarding the dangers, impacts or plans related to failed equipment and infrastructure.

At the September 13, 2004 meeting of the Executive Committee with Dr. Butts it was learned that the College had [in May 2004] contracted with Sempra Energy to begin work on campus-wide energy projects, with the crane that recently appeared outside Academic Village evidence that replacement of the AV chiller was under way.

¹ The financing of energy efficiency upgrades and related services, in whole or in part, through an energy performance contract is described in NYSERDA Report 98-15, **Public Sector Energy Performance Contracting in New York State**.

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- a) *Whereas* building managers and administrators have the responsibility to provide working conditions that do not compromise the health and safety of employees, and
- b) *Whereas* extreme indoor temperature fluctuations and poor ventilation are known to impede employee productivity, pose certain health risks, adversely affect morale, and in academic buildings also adversely affect perceived institutional quality and student retention; and
- c) *Whereas* problems associated with the College's poorly maintained and failing HVAC equipment have been well-documented over the past decade (in both internal and externally generated reports), including problems related to physical discomfort, indoor air quality, wasted energy and wasted fiscal resources - with SUNY Old Westbury's energy consumption and costs running 40% above energy efficient levels; and,
- d) *Whereas*, during Summer 2004, inoperable HVAC systems in AV jeopardized the health and safety of affected college staff, especially department secretaries whose work is essential to the functioning of the College; and,
- e) *Whereas*, the 2003-2008 Campus Capital Plan was developed by a collegewide committee throughout 2001, using an open, inclusive process facilitated by the SUNY Construction Fund and consulting architects, planners and engineers, with this Capital Plan ranking as a top priority critical maintenance projects in Academic Village (including HVAC upgrades in Academic Village and throughout the campus), with the express assumption that Capital Plan projects would be integrated with the comprehensive energy project planned through NYSERDA; and,
- f) *Whereas*, under the project envisioned by NYSERDA and Sempra Energy (in their March and June 2000 responses to NYSERDA's RFP), Old Westbury was poised to become a leader within SUNY and the Northeast, as a model campus for energy conservation, but now, four years after Sempra's [then] visionary proposal was selected, important elements of the comprehensive project planned through NYSERDA have not been pursued by the administration (e.g., photovoltaic energy in the Campus Center Atrium; educational linkage of energy/environment "sustainability" initiatives with academic research, internships and multi-disciplinary curriculum), and one-time opportunities for related extramural funding (e.g., LIPA proposed geothermal project, 2001-02) have been lost; and,
- g) *Whereas*, the Executive Committee recently learned that Sempra has begun work on HVAC upgrades; therefore,
- h) ***Be It Resolved*** that the Faculty Senate respectfully urges the Administration to provide all needed support to expedite completion of Sempra Energy's campuswide projects, in coordination with critical maintenance projects identified and prioritized in the 2003-2008 Campus Capital Plan; and,
- i) ***Be It Further Resolved*** that the Faculty Senate respectfully urges the Administration to provide open, regular and complete communication with all campus constituencies regarding the timelines, impacts and disruptions related to the ongoing construction; and,
- j) ***Be It Further Resolved*** that the Faculty Senate commends the department secretaries and other college staff, for their dedication and valiant efforts during the summer of 2004, when forced to work under conditions of extreme physical discomfort caused by inoperable HVAC systems in Academic Village; and,
- k) ***Be It Further Resolved*** that the Faculty Senate commends the facilities workers who volunteered their own time to help colleagues in distress, and that the Faculty Senate requests that the Administration likewise expressly commend the above-mentioned staff; and,
- m) ***Be It Further Resolved*** that the Faculty Senate requests that the cost of air conditioners purchased with employees' personal funds be matched by the Administration through their donation of a corresponding sum to the Student Scholarship Fund.