



THE LEGISLATURE  
STATE OF NEW YORK  
ALBANY

September 7, 2021

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

Dear Governor Hochul:

We are writing to ask for your urgent help preserving an undeveloped stretch of Cayuga Lake. Bell Station is a remarkable, 470-acre property featuring 3,400 feet of pristine shoreline on the east side of Cayuga Lake. The property was originally acquired by New York State Electric & Gas (NYSEG) for a power plant that was never built. Bell Station features wooded hillsides, cascading waterfalls, extensive fields currently leased for agriculture, and several tributaries to the lake. According to the Cayuga Birding Club, “rare and threatened plant communities, including a large and flourishing population of a NYS threatened plant called Butterfly Leaf and a NYS rare plant called Pale Pea” thrive on this property and need our protection. “The population of Butterfly Leaf is the only such population in Tompkins County and is one of the largest of this threatened species in the State. Additionally, the mature Maple-Basswood forest provides necessary habitat for warblers, vireos, orioles, and other birds that have been declining in NYS due to habitat loss.”

The Bell Station project is recognized as a priority in New York State’s Open Space Plan and is designated as “future public access conservation land” in the 2018 Town of Lansing Comprehensive Plan. It is the largest privately owned parcel of shoreline remaining in the Finger Lakes.

Acquisition of the site for conservation will greatly enhance public access to the east side of Cayuga Lake, which is 90% privately owned. Permanent conservation of the property will also prevent additional residential development on the steep hillsides above the lake, development that would likely contribute significantly to increased erosion and to the lake’s harmful algal blooms (HABs). Given that Cayuga Lake already has the highest prevalence of HABs outbreaks in the Finger Lakes, allowing for further increased risk is unwise both for our ecology and for the agritourism industry that is a bedrock of our local economy.

Fields on the eastern portion of the site could provide an opportunity for solar energy development that has bipartisan support both in the Town of Lansing and in the Tompkins County legislature. This large scale solar project would add significantly to the State’s efforts to reach our CLCPA goals. It is a rare confluence to have both a site perfect for a large solar installation and local community support and it would be a loss for the community and State not to capitalize on this opportunity.

For all these reasons, the Finger Lakes Land Trust has been pursuing the conservation of the Bell Station property for a number of years. Interest in this conservation project is shared by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) such that the NYSDEC has designated the Land Trust as its agent to pursue acquisition of this land.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust proposes to work together with the NYSDEC, the Town of Lansing, Tompkins County, and other key stakeholders to acquire the land and create a public wildlife management area on the lakeshore portion of the property, while exploring the feasibility of utilizing the easternmost portion of the property for solar energy production. The wildlife management area would be owned and managed by the NYSDEC and open to the public for a variety of recreational uses including hiking, cross country skiing, wildlife watching, hunting, and fishing.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust has expressed its interest to NYSEG in negotiating a sale of the land that would achieve

these public benefits while providing the company with fair market value compensation. Unfortunately, NYSEG has recently announced its intention to sell the land through a sealed bid, public auction.

While the Land Trust is able to participate in this auction, it makes a positive conservation outcome much less certain. To date our offices have received thousands of signatures from local constituents urging us to stop the auction and support the open negotiations between the Land Trust and NYSEG.

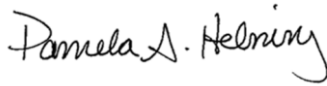
In order to preserve this rare stretch of undeveloped land for the enjoyment of New Yorkers and the preservation of our natural resources, we urge you to request that NYSEG cancel its auction and instead enter into transparent negotiations with the Land Trust, as agent for the NYSDEC. This will offer an opportunity for NYSEG and the State to ensure the future of this unique stretch of Cayuga Lake shoreline.

Thank you for considering this important request.

Most Sincerely,



Anna Kelles, Ph.D.  
New York State Assemblymember  
125<sup>th</sup> District



Pamela Helming  
New York State Senator  
54th District