

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 The Proposed Project

Erie Community College (ECC) is undergoing a comprehensive institutional assessment. It began in the spring of 2001 with the commissioning of a study to identify the components upon which the College community could develop its Long Range Campus Master Plan. Phase I of the Institutional Assessment Feasibility Study (discussed in greater detail in *DGEIS Section 2.5*) was completed by Resultants International, Inc. in the spring of 2002. From this study came numerous beneficial recommendations.

According to the study, the next step in ECC's Planning Process should include in-depth Scenario or Alternative Modeling to explore a variety of academic, facility, and location configurations to determine which best supports the fulfillment of ECC's Mission, Vision, and Goals (described in *DGEIS Section 2.4*). Detailed Alternative Modeling has been recommended to help guide ECC in investment decisions through 2015 (the Planning Horizon) and once a preferred Alternative is chosen, it should lead to the development of a Detailed Facilities Master Plan.

Based on the study results, the ECC Board of Trustees selected the following three specific alternatives for further analysis:

- Š Alternative 1: Retention of Three Campuses—Rehabilitation of three campuses to meet student needs based on traditional public education funding.
- Š Alternative 2: One Central Consolidated Campus in Downtown Buffalo.
- Š Alternative 3: Retention of Three Campuses—Rehabilitation and rebuilding of three campuses using public-private partnership funding, including private development. This Alternative may include new campus facilities to meet the needs of the public-private partnership.

### 2.2 The Planning Process

The ECC Board of Trustees has decided to utilize a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS), pursuant to the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA [6NYCRR Part 617]), as a vehicle to fully analyze the feasibility as well as the positive and adverse impacts of each Alternative, and to ultimately assist in the selection of a preferred Alternative. Among the many benefits of having a full array of environmental, social, and economic, as well as educational, factors to analyze for decision-making purposes, SEQRA also has the added benefit of being a transparent, open-public process that informs and receives direct input from the affected public and from involved and interested agencies.

SEQRA was enacted to assure the consideration of environmental, social, and economic factors into the planning, review, and decision-making processes of state, regional, and local government agencies at the earliest possible time. To accomplish this goal, SEQRA requires that all agencies

determine whether the actions they directly undertake, fund, or approve may have a significant impact on certain environmental, social, and economic elements, and, if it is determined that the action may have a significant adverse impact, prepare or request an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be prepared.

On December 18, 2002, in accordance with SEQRA, the ECC Board of Trustees passed a Resolution declaring their intent to serve as Lead Agency in the review of the three proposed Alternatives. On January 29, 2003, in accordance with SEQRA, the ECC Board of Trustees passed a Resolution declaring themselves as Lead Agency; issued a Positive Declaration requiring the preparation of a Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement (DGEIS) for the review of the three proposed Alternatives; and initiated the public scoping process.

### ***Public Scoping***

The ECC Board of Trustees chose to conduct Public Scoping, which allows for early public input into the DGEIS and the decision-making process. It is intended to give the public, as well as involved and interested agencies, an opportunity to comment on and provide input into the scope, or array of impacts and issues to be addressed in the DGEIS. Public scoping, in this proceeding, also provides information concerning the proposed master planning process.

During this process, a public scoping session was held at each ECC Campus, and a 30-day public comment period was provided to allow for comments on the Draft Scoping Document. The Draft Scoping Document included all the elements required pursuant to SEQRA, including: (1) a brief description of the proposed action; (2) potentially significant adverse impacts, including an identification of those particular aspect(s) of the environmental setting that may be impacted; (3) the extent and quality of information needed for the preparer to adequately address each impact, including an identification of relevant existing information and required new information, including the required methodologies for obtaining new information; (4) initial identification of mitigation measures; and (5) reasonable alternatives to be considered. Based upon the comments received during the public comment period, the ECC Board of Trustees revised the Draft Public Scoping Document and released the Final Public Scoping Document.

### ***The GEIS***

The GEIS was chosen as a vehicle to analyze each Alternative due to its flexibility in allowing for the evaluation of multiple conceptual projects on a broad geographic scale, and the identification of a preferred Alternative based upon the findings. In addition, the Final GEIS (FGEIS) can reduce the amount of additional SEQRA work that may be required during the implementation of the preferred Alternative, since the GEIS includes a vast amount of the baseline data needed for future reviews and decision-making, and has already identified and evaluated a majority of the major issues. Furthermore, Findings will establish the basis for selecting and implementing a preferred Alternative, and will include established thresholds and requirements for site-specific environmental reviews.

This DGEIS has been developed in full accordance with the requirements of SEQRA and examines all of the elements and issues related to the three Alternatives as identified in the Final Scoping Document. It describes the existing environmental, social, and economic conditions of each Campus and affected adjacent areas. The DGEIS has also evaluated the existing College-wide conditions, such as the quality of educational deliverability and building and program conditions, as well as the operation and management of enrollment and related fiscal conditions. Next, the DGEIS describes in full detail each of the proposed Alternatives and then analyzes the potential adverse and positive impacts that each Alternative may have on these existing environmental, social, economic, and education conditions.

The DGEIS also includes a Draft Decision Matrix, which summarizes positive and adverse impacts associated with each Alternative. The Draft Decision Matrix is located in *DGEIS Section I Executive Summary*.

### ***Selecting the Preferred Alternative***

No decision will be made until the SEQRA process is completed. The selection of the preferred Alternative will be based upon the SEQRA findings as well as how closely each Alternative matches the mission of ECC, the planning goals and objectives of Erie County, and the opportunities for economic and social benefits to the student body and the public at large.. This DGEIS is available for public comment, and a minimum of three public hearings will be conducted to gather input from students, faculty, staff, interested and involved agencies, and the general public. Based upon the information gathered, an FGEIS may be prepared if additional questions arise during the DGEIS public comment period. The FGEIS would be subject to another public review period, and would also include a revised Decision Matrix.

The ECC Board of Trustees will select a preferred Alternative based upon the SEQRA decision-making criteria<sup>1</sup>; that is, the one that is consistent with environmental, social, economic, educational, and other essential considerations from the reasonable alternatives available, and avoids or minimizes adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable. The Revised Decision Matrix will assist the ECC Board of Trustees during their decision-making process. The ECC Board of Trustees will set forth the rationale of their selection in the Findings Statement, a requirement of SEQRA. The Findings Statement will be released after the FGEIS is completed.

## **2.3 Purpose and Need**

Government-sponsored actions, such as the proposed deployment of ECC funds, must always address a public need consistent with the concept of government accountability.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this DGEIS will address public need in the context of ECC's ability to deliver educational services for a changing student population through the year 2015. It is anticipated that student numbers, types, and educational interests will be different from today, and the capacity of ECC to deliver quality

<sup>1</sup> 6NYCRR Part 617, Regulations of the State Environmental Quality Review Act, Effective July 12, 2000

<sup>2</sup>The SEQR Handbook, November 1992, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

educational services through the proper and best deployment of funds throughout the planning period may require changes. Developing an effective plan is a critical component of preparing ECC for the challenges over the next 13 years and beyond, and ensuring that ECC can continue to provide high-quality education and fulfill its mission.

The Assessment Feasibility Study prepared in 2002 by Resultants International, Inc. has provided ECC with several different growth options for the next 13 years. Based on this study, the ECC Board of Trustees selected the three Alternatives being studied in this DGEIS. While each Alternative may accommodate the changing student needs to varying degrees, the one ultimately selected will most efficiently and completely afford the best opportunity to provide a quality education, while simultaneously minimizing the adverse consequences and maximizing the environmental, social, economic, and educational benefits.

## **2.4 Goals and Objectives**

The primary goal of the Facilities Master Plan and supporting GEIS is to support ECC's Mission and Core Values as described below.

### **2.4.1 College Mission**

#### ***Low-Cost Regional Provider of Education***

ECC is part of the SUNY Community College System. As a community college, ECC's mission is both as a regional and the lowest-cost provider of post-secondary education. While it competes in the local market with Buffalo State, the University at Buffalo, and other local private institutions, these institutions do not have ECC's cost advantage nor do they restrict or focus their recruitment to the local region. In this role, ECC's natural competition lies with other community colleges.

#### ***Programmatic Offering***

Within New York State, approximately 80 percent of enrollment at the community colleges is in nine to ten programs. With a few name changes, these programs are the same for all community colleges. Along with the typical transfer liberal arts majors, which come in a variety of forms, the list includes programs such as Criminal Justice, Business, Computer Science, and Nursing. These programs are large and in the last two decades have taken a larger share of the total campus enrollment. As a result, community colleges have become more alike rather than less.

ECC's many transfer and career opportunities are a direct result of the Institution's Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan sets the framework to focus the resources of the College with a new mission, vision, core values, and clearly defined objectives.

The Strategic Plan umbrellas the commitment to be the leader in workforce development in Western New York by providing:

- Š Two-year academic degree programs that lead directly to employment or transfer to a four-year institution;
- Š Job skill retraining for the presently unemployed; and
- Š Developmental education for those seeking “access” to a career through education.

ECC’s Vision is clear—to make a positive difference in the intellect, character, and quality of life of every student and employee, as well as in the community they serve.

ECC’s Mission allows ECC to serve the community. ECC is a public, open access institution, providing quality, affordable education and services to a diverse community and its citizens.

ECC is guided in all aspects of its services to the community by following these Core Values:

- Š Quality teaching services;
- Š Multicultural awareness and understanding;
- Š A commitment to the needs of our community and the well-being of the College;
- Š An environment of respect, caring, and trust; and
- Š Individual and institutional integrity and accountability.

These nine **Institutional Goals** set the framework for ECC’s planning process:

- Š **Academic** – To provide opportunities for career enhancement, job placement, transfer preparation, and lifelong learning. The College offers current, continuously assessed academic programs that serve the needs of a diverse student population and facilitate the acquisition of general education competencies needed to compete in a changing economic climate. These competencies will include computer and information literacy, numeracy, and library research.
- Š **Student Support Services** – To ensure that a broad range of services will be provided to enable students to succeed in meeting their personal academic objectives, while also providing opportunities for students to develop personal, social, and leadership skills.
- Š **Workforce Development** – To provide credit and non-credit classes, workshops, seminars, forums, cultural programs, and recreational activities designed to provide enrichment opportunities for lifelong learning.
- Š **Facilities** – To develop a safe, comfortable campus environment conducive to current and future student success.

- Š **Financial** – To provide appropriate financing from the College and its sponsors for equipment, facilities, and human resources to support quality academic programming and delivery of support services.
- Š **Human Resources** – To sponsor a program of professional development for administrators, faculty, and staff in order to serve a changing, culturally diverse student population.
- Š **Affirmative Action** – To be sensitive to and protect the individual needs and rights of our diverse College community.
- Š **Marketing** – To develop a marketing plan involving the entire College community that is implemented to inform Western New York about the programs and services available at ECC.
- Š **Organization** – To maintain an appropriate organizational structure designed to facilitate efficient operation for the College and attain desirable institutional outcomes.

The DGEIS will take into consideration how each Alternative coincides with the College's Mission and Goals.

#### **2.4.1.1 Accessibility**

A segment of community college enrollments are program-dependent, while the other segment of the student population chooses an institution more on the basis of accessibility and affordability. Unlike residential, four-year, and graduate institutions that can draw from the region, the state, the nation, or even internationally, the percentage of a community college enrollment originating from more than 40 miles approaches nil. Campus size has little effect in increasing this aspect of a community college. In fact, the smaller, more remotely placed community colleges draw over greater distances because they typically have less immediate competition.

One of the goals of this project is to enhance, if practical, and not reduce ECC's accessibility.

#### **2.4.1.2 Affordability**

Community colleges are primarily regional providers of associate and lower division education. They are also increasing the inexpensive routes to a four-year degree through articulation agreements with baccalaureate granting institutions. They are low-cost providers of education, because they are supported by tuition aid from the state and the local sponsor, and because they are commuter campuses, they have no housing costs. They compete well with other state-sponsored colleges and private institutions. With the proper location, their only real competition is with other community colleges.

Another goal of this project is to enhance, where practical, the affordability of an Erie County student's education. ECC currently provides the best educational experience at the most affordable rate when compared to any other College in Erie County as well as when compared to surrounding community colleges.

#### **2.4.1.3 Quality**

Even though a community college's role is as a low-cost regional provider of education, many community colleges excel at providing quality undergraduate education. Graduates of many of SUNY community colleges are highly recruited by New York State private colleges and universities.

To advance the issue of quality, the goal of this planning study is to retool ECC's educational facilities to align them to the delivery of the programs in demand by Erie County residents.

### **2.5 Previous Planning Initiatives**

Even though a community college's role is as a low cost, regional provider of education, many community colleges excel at providing quality undergraduate education. Graduates of many of SUNY community colleges are highly recruited by New York State private colleges and universities.

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The College has identified several Campus Project and Planning Initiatives. The project initiatives range in dollar amount, the year for which funds are requested, and the location of proposed projects (i.e., at the North, South, or City Campus). The project initiatives have been categorized into building, code and security, site, and other initiatives.

The planning initiatives are not specific in regards to dollar amount at this time, but as stated, are in a planning phase of implementation. All of the Campus Project and Planning Initiatives have been provided by the College and are as follows:

#### ***Project Initiatives***

##### **Buildings**

- Š` Roof Replacement
- Š` Windows, Doors, Trim Replacement
- Š` Electrical Renovation
- Š` Heat Plant Renovation
- Š` HVAC Controls
- Š` Loading Dock

- Š Exterior Masonry Restoration
- Š Miscellaneous Interior Renovations (including locker rooms, elevator, auditorium, flooring, etc.)

#### Code and Security

- Š ADA Compliance
- Š Fire Alarm Replacement
- Š Surveillance and Detection Installation

#### Site

- Š Athletic Facility Renovation (including ball fields and tennis courts)

#### Other

- Š Technology/Equipment Software Upgrades
- Š Institutional Assessment

#### ***Planning Initiatives***

- Š University at Buffalo – South Campus: Possible site for relocation of Allied Health programs.
- Š Sheehan Hospital: Possible site for relocation of Allied Health programs.
- Š UAW-GM Human Resources Center: Possible site to house Workforce Development and conduct non-credit programs.
- Š Metalworking Institute of Western New York: Metalworking building and equipment to be liquidated with the agreement that all assets be placed in the ECC Foundation to provide scholarships for students and funding for a Machine Tool Tech program at North Campus.
- Š Erie County Public Safety Center: Possible site to house Criminal Justice, Fire Protection Tech, Emergency Medical Tech, and Workforce Development non-credit programs.
- Š Great Lakes Building: Possible site to house Criminal Justice, Fire Protection Tech, Emergency Medical Tech, Buffalo Public School projects, and Workforce Development non-credit programs.
- Š 100 Seneca Street: Possible site for Department of Social Services programs and services and the Buffalo Public School Middle and Early College programs.
- Š Advanced Training Center: Currently pursuing leased space at this facility to house a Workforce Development grant-funded Entrepreneurial Assistance Program (EAP).

### **2.5.1 Institutional Assessment Feasibility Study**

Commenced in August of 2000, Erie Community College embarked on a detailed planning initiative with the focus of preparing a Master Plan to guide the growth of the College. The first phase of the project consisted of the development of the Institutional Assessment/Feasibility Study with the assistance of Resultants International, Inc. ECC's faculty, staff, administration, students, and community leaders met over the course of six months in a series of public forums and focus groups. The six major focus areas consisted of: Curriculum Currency, Facilities, Operational Economies and Efficiencies, Support Services, Alternatives, and Technology. Technical studies of the existing facilities and a preliminary property evaluation were also performed. The planning process focused on ECC's future over the next fifteen years. Following months of data collection and meetings, five preliminary facilities scenarios emerged. Subsequent priority ranking exercises led to the selection of the three alternatives under consideration in this DGEIS.