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Lake George Park Commission Gets New Headquarters



Above: The Lake George Park Commission's former office will be demolished soon. Staff has already moved into its new headquarters, a few feet away.

Garden-level space to be occupied by new Fort George Visitors Center

By Buzz Lamb

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Operations site at the historic Lake George Battlefield Park contains an old farmhouse building

located at 75 Fort George Road that has housed varying occupants since it was built in 1870.

According to Dave Wick, Lake George Park Commission Executive Director, the structure was originally known as the Dowling House and

later became known locally as the Ramsey House. "In the 1930s it was a regional office for the Civilian Conservation Corps," Wick said.

The DEC acquired the building in the early 1960s and over the past 60 years the occupants ranged from an Adirondack Park Agency satellite office to the Lake George Association office in the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1988, the Lake George Park Commission moved

its newly formed agency operations into the farmhouse building and has remained in this facility ever since.

Wick said the use and occupancy of this DEC—owned building is managed through a Memorandum of Understanding between the DEC and the Park Commission, last updated in 1997. The Commission has historically paid the cost of utilities associated with the administrative structure and is

responsible for routine maintenance of the structure as well.

Wick said 30 years ago plans were drawn up to put an addition on the building at a cost of about \$500,000 but they were never implemented. "We still have a copy of those plans," he said.

According to Wick, four years ago the topic of repairing or replacing the nearly 150-year-old structure was addressed once again.

"The building was in really tough shape. It needed extensive repairs, so we talked with New York State Parks, Recreation and Historical Preservation about different alternatives. They informed us that it was not a registered historical site but it did have historical significance," he said. "That allowed us to move the discussion forward."

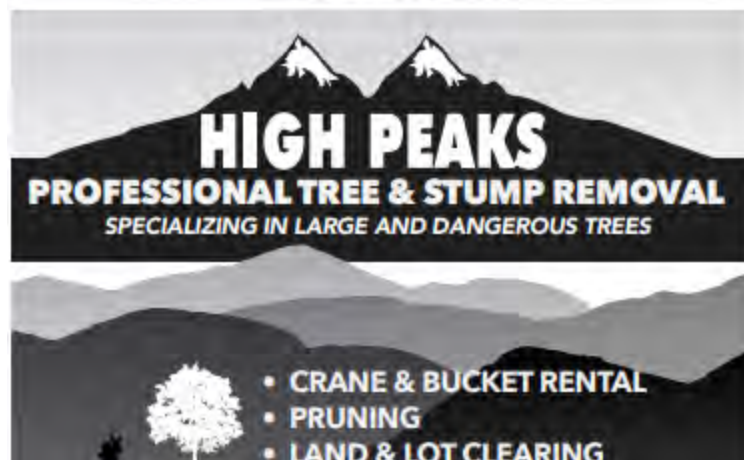
After several meetings, the Park Commission and DEC Regional leadership both agreed there was little merit in putting significant financial resources into the existing building due to its advanced age and condition. They ultimately proposed the existing structure be demolished and replaced with a modern modularly—constructed office building.

"The modular structure cost less to build than a pre-fab or stick-built building. It was built in Pennsylvania and was delivered in six boxes," Wick said. "We stored them on Ruben Ellsworth's property and then loaded them one-by-one on a flatbed and used a crane to unload them onto the foundation at the site," he added.



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The new office building is located only a few feet away from the old Ramsey House building on the same property, keeping its central location within the Lake George Battlefield Park.

"The Ramsey House has been

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prepared for demolition which will occur in the next couple of weeks," Wick said. "That area will become an environmentally-friendly parking area."

According to Wick, the new building and property it sits on will remain in DEC ownership and the Park Commission will occupy the building through a new Memorandum of Understanding.

Wick said the staff of nine employees moved into the new office facility about two weeks ago.

"We now have 3,800 square feet of office space in a two-story building. The first floor contains a 24-person capacity conference room and a large reception area as well

as offices. The second floor is all office space with the capability of adding eight additional employees without changing the footprint of the structure," he said.

Wick said the entire 1,800 square foot basement of the new building will contain a Lake George Battlefield Park Visitors Interpretive Center which will highlight the historical importance of the Lake George Battlefield Park grounds. A nonprofit group known as the Fort George Alliance was formed in the 1990s with the sole mission of increasing public awareness of the importance of the historic nature of the Lake George area, with a specific purpose of creating a visitors interpretive center to inform and educate the public and honor our past.

"The DEC will allow them to occupy the space cost-free under a separate Memorandum of Understanding," he said.

The building is a very short walk to the many large statues, historic structures, and original Fort within the park. It is also directly adjacent to one of the DEC's busiest campgrounds in the Adirondack Park. Wick said the overall plan will eventually include pathways and connectivity between the Visitor's Center and the rest of Battlefield Park's historic interpretive features.

Wick said he hopes to hold a ribbon-cutting ceremony sometime near the end of August. "That's only about five weeks away, so that's a pretty ambitious plan," he said. "But, with a concerted effort, we hope to get that accomplished."
