



February 18, 2025

Mayor James Orman
& Village Trustees
J.D. Balloni
Matthew Bianconi
John Miller
Janet Murphy
Village of Aurora
456 Main Street
Aurora, New York 13026
c/o Ann Balloni, Clerk
via e-mail: villageclerk@auroranewyork.us

Re: Local Landmark Designation
Campbell & Barler Halls at Wells College

Dear Mayor Orman & Village Trustees:

DOCOMOMO US/New York Tri-State is a local chapter of Docomomo US, which is a national working group of Docomomo International, an organization founded in 1988, now working in over 70 countries to increase public awareness and appreciation of Modern architecture, landscapes and urban design; to identify and document local examples; and to advocate for the protection of those determined most significant. Since 1996, the chapter has been advancing this mission in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. I am writing to you to express our chapter's strong and enthusiastic support for designating Campbell Hall & Barler Hall at Wells College as local landmarks.

Walter Netsch, FAIA, of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), who designed Campbell and Barler Halls, was a nationally significant and prolific Modern architect, who completed major projects across the United States. Netsch was known for his Field Theory, a geometrically based design methodology involving superimposed grids, which he began developing in the early 1960s and described as an "ordering device". The distinctive designs which resulted displayed complex geometries, especially in their floor plans, and were an obvious departure from the rectilinear forms with ninety degree angles that often predominate in Modern architecture. Netsch joined Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in 1947 and was a Design Partner in their Chicago headquarters for 24 years, from 1955 until his retirement in 1979.

Established in Chicago in 1936, during the Post-War period SOM was one of America's most acclaimed and successful architectural practices and Netsch was among their most prominent designers. During Netsch's tenure, the firm completed numerous seminal works of Modern architecture such as: the Lever House (1952) in Manhattan designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM's New York office, a recipient of the Pritzker Prize; The Sears Tower (1974) designed by Bruce Graham; and the entire new campus of the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs with its iconic Cadet Chapel (1963) designed by Walter Netsch.

In addition to Netsch's Louis Jefferson Long Library at Wells College, which was previously designated a Local Landmark in 2018, at least three other buildings designed by Netsch have already been designated as landmarks, reflecting his importance. Netsch began the design of the celebrated Inland Steel Building (1958), completed by Bruce Graham, and it was designated a Chicago Landmark in 1998. Netsch also began the design of the Crown Zellerbach Building (1959) in San Francisco, which became a City of San Francisco Landmark in 1987. Most notably, the central Cadet Area of the Air Force Academy designed by Netsch, including the Cadet Chapel, became a National Historic Landmark in 2004. Netsch's Cadet Chapel was also recognized in 1996 by the American Institute of Architects with its national 25-Year Award, celebrating the enduring value of its design, and an AIA poll of America's Favorite Architecture, conducted in 2007, ranked it #51 of all buildings in the entire country.

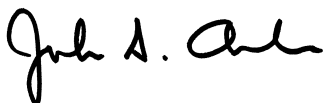
Buildings for higher education, such as those at Wells College, comprise a substantial and important part of Netsch's built legacy, and many of them incorporate his Field Theory. He built on campuses of some of America's most prestigious colleges and universities and in many cases, as at Wells College, he designed multiple buildings for them. Many of those projects have been recognized with design awards and publication. Netsch designed at least eight buildings for Northwestern University, including their main library (1970), featured on the cover of *Architectural Record*. His two buildings for his alma mater, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, include the Vannevar Bush Building (1965), recipient of an AIA National Honor Award in 1967. Netsch's Joseph Regenstein Library (1970) is the main library of the University of Chicago. The three buildings he designed for the University of Iowa include the Medical Sciences Library (1974). Netsch created the Masterplan (1961) and designed numerous buildings, including the library and student union, for the entirely new University of Illinois, Chicago Circle Campus, now renamed University of Illinois at Chicago, the largest scale application of Field Theory, published twice on the cover of *Architectural Forum*.

Netsch considered the Louis Jefferson Long Library, completed in 1968 at Wells College, his best building and it is a notable example of the application of Field Theory. The Barler Hall of Music and the Henrietta Campbell Arts Building, which Netsch designed later adjacent to the library, were both completed over fifty years ago in 1974. Together with the exceptional library, these three buildings form an important ensemble, obviously closely related to one another through similar materials and their distinctive geometric forms. Campbell and Barler express the Field Theory just as the library does. A quick look at an aerial photo of the three buildings clearly shows that they are part of a whole, utilizing the same unusual angled geometric forms, and that Campbell and Barler are far from routine institutional buildings of their era. The similarities between the two later buildings and the library continue on the interiors. The unusual internal columns supporting the library roof, with wood supports sprouting above masonry piers, appear again inside both Campbell and Barler, although there the wood supporting elements are replaced by steel. As he originally used bright colors within the Long Library (unfortunately later altered), Netsch did the same within the two buildings he added next to it.

In addition to significance, integrity is an important consideration in evaluating whether buildings deserve to be designated landmarks. It is important to note that both Campbell and Barler largely retain their original design integrity both on the exterior and interior. Neither has been significantly altered from their original Netsch designs. As we understand it, the interiors of both Campbell and Barler even still retain Netsch's original bold colors.

Barler and Campbell Halls clearly deserve to be designated as local landmarks. The trio they form together with the library is among the most significant groupings of Modern architecture in the Finger Lakes region. It would be a significant loss to Aurora and to Modern heritage if two of the three were to be destroyed as the campus is repurposed for new uses. Please protect this important Modern ensemble!

Sincerely,



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