

State Environmental Quality Review
POSITIVE DECLARATION
Notice of Intent to Prepare a Supplemental Draft EIS
Determination of Significance

Date: August 12, 2020

This notice is issued pursuant to Part 617 of the implementing regulations pertaining to Article 8 (State Environmental Quality Review Act) of the Environmental Conservation Law.

The Town of Ramapo Town Board, as Lead Agency, has determined that the Proposed Action described below may have a significant adverse impact on the environment and, therefore, a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will be prepared by the Applicant.

Name of Action: World Headquarters of Jehovah’s Witnesses Audio/Video Production Center

SEQR Status: Type I

Description of Action: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. has proposed a new Audio/Video Production Center in the Town of Ramapo. In connection with this project, the Ramapo Town Board has received an application for zoning text and map amendments, including the creation of a new mixed-use MU-3 zoning district. The proposed action also includes site plan and lot consolidation approvals from the Town Planning Board. The proposed project is a facility for the creation and production of audio and video/film recordings in an integrated working, living and worship facility for members of the religious order known as the Worldwide Order of Special Full Time Servants of Jehovah’s Witnesses and assisting religious volunteers. Support facilities include offices, maintenance and set production workshops, and a geothermal heating/cooling facility. The project also includes 645 residential units, dining/assembly spaces, recreation/wellness/fitness facilities, and a clinic. A Visitors Center for the public is also part of the project (the “Proposed Action”).

Location: The subject property is 242 acres in size in the Town, is located at 155 Sterling Mine Road, and is designated tax lots 38.10-1-10 through 60; 38.13-1-2 through 55; 38.14-1-1 through 75; 38.14-2-1 through 44; 38.14-3-1 through 46; 38.17-1-3 through 11; and 38.18-1-1 through 14 on the Town of Ramapo tax maps.

Reasons Supporting This Determination:

Based upon the review of the information submitted to-date by the Applicant in the application and Full EAF prepared for the Proposed Action, review of the criteria of significance listed in Part 617.7(c) of Title 6 NYCRR (the Statewide regulations pertaining to SEQRA), and given the scale and density of the Proposed Action, said action may be reasonably expected to result in significant adverse environmental impacts in the following areas:

1. Potential impacts on land associated with the clearing and grading of approximately 100 acres of the site for construction of proposed buildings and interior roadways. Clearing, grading and construction may take place in areas of the property where slopes exceed 15%, where bedrock is exposed and blasting may be required. Construction activities are anticipated to occur over several years, resulting in the need to implement and maintain phased erosion and sediment controls to avoid impacts on air, surface waters, groundwater and environmentally sensitive areas on the site.
2. Potential impacts on surface water resources, including wetlands, watercourses and other waterbodies, may result during construction and during permanent use of the property due to site grading, and the resulting diversion of surface water flows or stormwater discharges from construction activities and permanent areas of impermeable surfaces, resulting in the need for a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan meeting State and Town requirements. In addition, the proposed action included consideration of an on-site sewage treatment alternative, which would be anticipated to discharge to a watercourse with adequate assimilative capacity.
3. Clearing, grading and site disturbance may impact threatened or endangered plants and animals if the proposed development intrudes on habitat areas for such species. A habitat assessment will be required to identify such habitat areas and the proposed plan for development will be adapted to avoid or minimize any reduction or degradation of habitat used by any species of special concern and conservation need, as listed by New York State or the Federal government.
4. The proposed development may impact aesthetic resources by changing the viewshed visible from publicly accessible vantage points, visible to the traveling public or visible to neighboring properties. A visual impact analysis will be needed to identify the impact of the proposed development on public viewsheds and other visual resources and determine whether the project can avoid, minimize or mitigate those impacts.
5. The proposed development has the potential to impact an area listed as sensitive for archaeological sites on the NY State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) archaeological site inventory, and must identify the importance of the resources present in areas of disturbance, the extent of any impact on that resource, and evaluate how the project can be implemented to avoid or minimize such impact.

6. The proposed action requires preparation of a traffic study to determine whether project traffic, including construction traffic, may impact transportation resources in the vicinity of the project, and how such impacts may be avoided or minimized. The study will also evaluate whether and how the proposed parking can be reduced to minimize the impact of impervious surfaces.

7. The non-residential site development may impact energy resources due to the amount of building space that will require heating/cooling, and electrical resources for interior and exterior lighting. The applicant will evaluate the feasibility of a geothermal facility to provide heating and cooling for residential and non-residential buildings, and incorporate LED lighting and other energy conservation methods into its site planning.

8. The project may have noise or odor impacts during construction of the facilities, due to the potential for blasting to remove bedrock, and odors that may be present if an on-site sewage treatment plan is necessary. The applicant will submit a blasting plan if necessary during construction and evaluate the potential for any on-site sewer plant to cause odors and incorporate appropriate technology to avoid or minimize such odors.

9. The proposed project may be inconsistent with the Town's adopted comprehensive plan and/or the community character of surrounding properties. The applicant will evaluate the impact of the proposed zoning, with special attention to proposed building height and determine whether the proposed plan for development needs to be modified to avoid, minimize or mitigate impacts on the surrounding neighborhood, ensure adequate infrastructure is available, that emergency services providers can provide adequate service to the proposed development and maintain consistency with the Town's comprehensive planning. The applicant will also evaluate the fiscal impact of the development to determine whether the project can avoid or minimize fiscal impacts on the Town, the local school system, emergency providers serving the property, and whether the project can create positive secondary economic impacts on the local economy.

The reasoning above is for the purpose of issuing a Positive Declaration and thereby requiring the preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement in accordance with the requirements of SEQRA. It does not serve as the required scope of the DEIS. Scoping of the DEIS will take place in accordance with the procedures specified in Part 617.

Scoping of DEIS: Due to the Coronavirus emergency and the Executive Orders issued by Governor Cuomo that discourage in-person gatherings, the Town Board has determined that it will not hold a public hearing on the applicant's proposed scope for the DEIS. Instead, it will circulate the draft scope with this Positive Declaration for public review and comment. As Lead Agency, the Town Board invites written comments from all involved and interested agencies on issues and methodologies that should be addressed in the DEIS to ensure it is adequate to allow those agencies to address their SEQRA responsibilities or bring matters within their jurisdiction and expertise to the attention of the Lead Agency. The Town Clerk will accept written comments on the draft scope until September 16, 2020 at 4:00 P.M. Written comments should be submitted to the Town Clerk by U.S. mail [Town Hall Plaza, Ramapo, NY 11550], email [TownofRamapoClerk@ramapo-ny.gov], or fax [(845) 357-8513].

Lead Agency: Town of Ramapo Town Board
Town Hall Plaza
Ramapo, New York 11550

For Further Information

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A copy of this notice has been filed with:

Town of Ramapo Town Board	Village of Sloatsburg Village Board
Town of Ramapo Planning Board	Village of Sloatsburg Planning Board
Town of Tuxedo Planning Board	Sloatsburg Fire Department
Rockland County Highway Department	Hillburn Fire Department
Rockland County Sewer District No. 1	Sloatsburg Volunteer Community Ambulance Corps
Rockland County Drainage Agency	Suffern Central School District
Rockland County Department of Health	Rockland County Planning Department
Orange County Department of Public Works	Rockland County Clerk
NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Region 3	Rockland County Sheriff's Department
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation	Rockland County Office of Fire and Emergency Services
Town of Ramapo Community Design Review Committee	Rockland Paramedic Service
Town of Ramapo Building, Planning, and Zoning Department	Orange County of Planning Department
Town of Ramapo Department of Public Works	New York State Police New York State Department of Transportation, Region 8
Town of Ramapo Town Clerk	U.S. Army Corp of Engineers
Town of Ramapo Highway Superintendent	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Town of Ramapo Police Department	Suez North America
Town of Tuxedo Highway Superintendent	Orange and Rockland Utilities
Town of Tuxedo Town Board	Deborah Munitz/ROSA 4
	Rockland Palisades Interstate Parks Commission

Notice of this determination has been provided to the following email address for publication in the Environmental Notice Bulletin: enb@dec.ny.gov