**Altmar Elementary School**

**Opportunity for New Partnerships and Collaborations**

The Altmar Elementary School building and associated acreage was put up for sale by the APW Central School District in July 2012 as their consolidated campus (elementary, middle and high school) will open in September 2012. The building is 47,460 sq. ft. on a 30.11 acre parcel with approximately 1500’ of prime Salmon River frontage, with an asking price around $410,000.

A preliminary engineering report done by Fairweather Consulting/DiMarco Constructors LLC in April 2012 indicates that the building is in very good condition. In addition to 21 classrooms, there is also a full commercial kitchen, gymnasium, library, loading dock, and administrative spaces. The grounds contain a large parking lot, sidewalks, playground and athletic fields.

The Altmar School is geographically located in the Tug Hill Region and within easy access to nearby state facilities, the internationally renowned Salmon River and its fishery, close proximity to Interstates I-81 and I-90 (NYS Thruway), metropolitan areas of Utica-Rome and Syracuse and the College of Environmental Science and Forestry. The timing of the sale of the school and its location make this a striking moment to develop a collaborative educational, research and training facility in the Tug Hill Region.

The **NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC)** is interested in both the building and the acreage, particularly the portion of the acreage along the Salmon River. NYSDEC owns two facilities in the area: the Salmon River Fish Hatchery located approximately .5 mile from the site, and the NYSDEC Training Academy located in the former Portly Angler Motor Lodge approximately 5 miles from the site. The agency also has public fishing rights/conservation easements on approximately 11 miles of river.

NYSDEC Fisheries staff would like to secure the river frontage, via public fishing rights, conservation easement, or outright purchase, to maintain public access to the resource. NYSDEC has made significant investments in the Salmon River Corridor for the past 10+years, and continues to pursue opportunities to enhance the river corridor by making habitat improvements and providing for additional fishing access (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/71912.html>). The school district has informally allowed fishing on the property, particularly to a good fishing area known as Schoolhouse Pool. NYSDEC is also in the process of acquiring land downriver of the site from National Grid as part of a settlement. A 2010 creel survey of the Salmon River showed that angler hours for Chinook salmon, steelhead, Brown trout, Coho salmon and Atlantic salmon, spent on the Salmon River outmatched those spent in all of Lake Ontario. Sportfishing is a significant segment of the economy in this area of Oswego County.

In addition to its unique location, the school building itself has features that could prove valuable to the Training Academy. The Academy has a near-term need for access to gym facilities to meet the requirements of their training program. The Captain and Lieutenant who oversee the Academy did a thorough tour of the building in July and believe they could use the gym, cafeteria, several classrooms for teaching and some others for storage. However, that would not take up the entire original 1935 section of the building and would leave the later additions vacant. There are 21 classrooms, including 14 in the sections that were built in 1962, 1987 and 2001.

The Captain is considering whether the Academy might be able to expand its operation to include training for non-DEC staff. To date they have declined requests to run a Municipal Training Academy for sheriffs deputies, etc. because of conflicts with DEC's use of its existing facilities but could potentially use the Altmar school for that purpose.  Depending on what other uses the Captain identifies and the potential for other tenants, such as the Freshwater Institute, the possibility for purchase of the building by NYSDEC is still on the table. However, the justification for purchase will have to be great enough to overcome the issues of maintenance and operation costs.

The **SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF)** is a teaching and research institution located approximately 45 minutes from Altmar in Syracuse, NY. With a well-known reputation for applied research in forestry, fisheries and recreation, the Altmar site could become a natural extension of ESF’s network of regional campuses and would give the College a Tug Hill presence that is within an easy day trip of its main campus. With the potential for a DEC Training Academy annex, the facility could offer education and training opportunities for ESF’s Wanakena campus.

NYS Tug Hill Commission staff is working with The Freshwater Institute and its founding organization **The Conservation Fund** to investigate other possible partnerships. TCF has played a direct role in many large landscape conservation deals in NYS (such as Champion and International Paper) and helped conserve a significant stretch of the Salmon River by working with National Grid (formerly Niagara Mohawk).

The project consultant, Fairweather Consulting, has reached out to and continues to investigate the possibility of having a private sector recreation partner as to their interest in using a portion of the facility for recreational fishing and outdoor activity training, marketing and education.

**Tug Hill Visitors Interpretive Center** – The Tug Hill is a unique 2,100 square mile region of New York State located between Lake Ontario and the Adirondacks. The region has a wealth of unique natural resources and long cultural and economic history connected to working landscapes (forest and agriculture), abundant water resources (and snow) recreation and cultural resources. The Altmar facility provides a unique opportunity and location for a regional visitors’ interpretive center to offer educational opportunities on the Tug Hill region. (<http://www.esf.edu/aic/>)

Link to Altmar Preliminary Engineering Report: <http://parishschoolplan.ning.com/forum/topics/altmar-elementary-school>)