- Leaders prepare to debate proposed campus expansion By LOHR McKINSTRY

ELIZABETHTOWN — Essex County lawmakers plan to take a preliminary vote soon on whether to allow North Country Community College to move its main campus to the outskirts of Lake Placid.

"We need to make a decision as to which way this (county) wants to go before NCCC spends more money looking at that site," Supervisor Thomas Scozzafava (R-Moriah) said.

"We need to let them know. We need to send the college some clear direction."

The college wants to buy the former Upstate Biotechnology campus in the Town of North Elba, just outside the Village of Lake Placid.

The college is now located on the North Elba side of the Village of Saranac Lake.

College officials say they are out of room for expansion and a new campus eight miles away would give them plenty of space.

The college's sponsoring counties, Essex and Franklin, must approve a move. Essex County has scheduled a meeting of its ad hoc college committee for 10 a.m. Tuesday in the Old County Courthouse, after which a preliminary vote will be held.

"We either need to move forward or put the brakes on it," Scozzafava said.

He said the Essex County budget includes $1.5 million now for the college, and the county's share of a new campus would be $15 million, probably in the form of a bond issue with interest.

"The debt this county would have to take on, I can't support it," Scozzafava said.

The total price for the Biotech site would be $52 million, including purchase and renovations. The cost would be shared between the two counties and the State University of New York system.

The original deadline for the counties to decide was April 18, according to college officials, but that was extended by 90 days, to July.

Supervisor Joyce Morency (R-St. Armand) said the move is a huge financial item to be carefully considered.

"The people in our area are really up in arms about it. The residents are overwhelmingly against it. I think it could be an economic disaster."

Supervisor Shirley Seney (R-North Elba) said they should wait to get more information before making up their minds.

"We should wait until they recommend what they want to do," Seney said. "We'll have a better handle on what we want to do."

Scozzafava said the college spent $70,000 for a study of the move and just approved $20,000 for additional studies.

"We'd have to be living in Oz if we think this report is going to come back recommending staying in Saranac Lake. The reports have been favoring moving to Lake Placid. We need to stop spending money on this."

He said Tuesday's vote will let the college know just where Essex County stands, so the college doesn't keep spending money on what might be a lost cause.

"We can't just keep flushing money down the toilet. If a majority of this Board (of Supervisors) is opposed to it, we should take a vote."

The NCCC Board of Trustees meeting originally scheduled for Tuesday has been moved to noon on Wednesday, May 16, in the main board room of Hodson Hall.

The change of date will allow NCCC to combine its regular meeting with a presentation by the Bernier Carr Group, which did the feasibility study on the campus move.
The NCCC Board will also discuss security plans.