SYRACUSE, N.Y. - SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry is seeking a $20 million state grant to build science labs and classrooms along Onondaga Lake's Inner Harbor.

The college is partnering with Onondaga Community College to create the SUNY Water Research Education Center. The money is being sought from phase 3 of the New York SUNY 2020 Challenge Grant program. The 2013 state budget included $55 million to fund phase 3 of the program, according to this year's executive budget.

The proposal calls for a 34,000 square-foot building, with docks, a floating classroom and a 4,000 square-foot exhibition hall highlighting the history of the region's Native Americans and the industrial history around Onondaga Lake. The building would be built to the gold standard of the U.S. Green Building Council, with technology to reduce energy and water use and carbon dioxide emissions.

SUNY's lakefront center would be built on land now owned by COR Development Co., which COR would transfer to SUNY. SUNY ESF would own the building.
commercial and recreational facilities. The harbor was a former state Barge Canal terminal that opened into Onondaga Lake.

For OCC, the partnership with SUNY ESF would give the community college a presence at the Inner Harbor, without the financial commitment of a go-it-alone satellite campus, something that has been discussed for several years.

"This (proposal) struck me as a more fiscally responsible way to approach the challenge (a presence at the Inner Harbor) because we wouldn't have the kind of operational costs we would have with a center that was just OCC," said Casey Crabill, OCC president. "We would be able to select from our programing what was most appealing to people who would be drawn to that location. We would be able to rotate different courses in and out based on consumer need."

SUNY ESF officials would not comment on the proposal. SUNY ESF and OCC declined to provide a copy of their grant application. Syracuse.com obtained a copy of the proposal's executive summary.

The center would be built next to a five-story, 134-room waterfront Aloft Hotel, being built by COR Development Co., according to an executive summary of SUNY ESF's proposal.

OCC could offer a range of credit and non-credit classes there, including classes in hospitality management, which could benefit from being next door to a hotel, Crabill said.

SUNY ESF's proposal emphasizes benefits to science research, and to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education for students of the Syracuse City School District.

Crabill said it was unlikely the project or an OCC presence at the Inner Harbor would materialize without the state grant.

"It seems unlikely we'd be able to generate enough money from our typical funding stream - tuition, state and county support - to duplicate operational costs that we have on campus," she said. "We're really looking for how can we get our product out in a way that doesn't create a huge amount of additional cost through owning and maintaining real estate that may or may not be filled by us full time."

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