

Town board says University's Holt-Harris property should remain residential

By Elizabeth Floyd Mair

GUILDERLAND — Supervisor Peter Barber received rounds of applause twice from the crowd of about 30 residents at the Feb. 2 town board meeting.

The first time was after the board unanimously passed a resolution written by Barber, enjoining the University at Albany and the University Foundation against building on the 9-acre Holt-Harris property that the foundation recently bought. Any large-scale structure would be out of keeping

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with the property's historic use or McKownville's residential character, the resolution said.

The second was when he thanked firefighters, police, and dispatchers for their “heroic efforts” in successfully rescuing three people from inside a burning home on Ayre Drive in McKownville on Jan. 24, which he noted was the first of two large and destructive fires in Guilderland in just one week, the second being at the Regency Park Apartment complex on Jan. 31. (See related stories.)

Holt-Harris property

In January, the university foundation announced that it had purchased an 8.7-acre parcel between the university campus and the McKownville neighborhood. Known as the Holt-Harris property, the parcel contains two historic homes in disrepair, at 100-200 Nicholas Lane and 18 Waverly Place. The homes, one of which dates from the 19th Century, were built by Judge John E. Holt-Harris, whose descendants sold the property to the foundation.

Copies of Barber's resolution will go to the University of Albany Foundation, the president of UAlbany, the board of trustees of the State University of New York, the chancellor of the State University of New York, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Senator George Amedore, Assemblywoman Patricia Fahy, and Albany County Executive Daniel McCoy.

Don Reeb, who heads the McKownville Improvement As-

sociation, stood at the meeting and said that the association “enthusiastically endorses this resolution.” He called the purchase “a threat to the two homes on the property, the 13 homes that border the property, and all of McKownville.”

Councilman Paul Pastore praised the resolution as “proactive,” but asked whether there is anything more the board can do, since, if the property is transferred from the foundation to the university, the university will not be obligated to conform to any town regulations.

Barber, a lawyer who had chaired Guilderland's zoning board for years before he became supervisor in December, said there are other steps — “more aggressive, adversarial” — that a town could take in a case like this, but that he does not even want to discuss them at this point.

Senior center