

Pine Bush, college look at land use

Nanoscale school calls for more parking

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Pine Bush activists have come out opposed to the upcoming demolition of 3 acres of land found on the campus of the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering at the

University at Albany on Fuller Road to make room for a parking lot.

In an e-mail to Alain Kayoleros, chief administrative officer at CNSE, Lynne Jackson, a Save the Pine Bush volunteer, wrote: "The Pine Bush is considered one of the best remaining examples of an inland pine barrens ecosystem in the world. The land you are

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preparing to bulldoze is part of the Pine Bush ecosystem.”

Jackson stated all Pine Bush lands on university property are “clearly under the threat of destruction.”

Some believe that all Pine Bush land is protected, which isn't the case.

The Albany Pine Bush Commission, which protects and manages lands in the Pine Bush Preserve, has a study area boundary in which this land falls. However, because of this land's isolated nature, said Christopher Hawver, executive director of the Pine Bush Commission, it doesn't fall into the commission's goal of

creating a contiguous preserve. Therefore this parcel is not recommended for any level of protection.

Hawver said he still thought the land had conservation value.

“Just because it (isn't protected) doesn't mean you should completely write it off,” said Hawver.

The commission has recommended ways to incorporate vegetation and transplantation into the project for native Pine Bush species. Hawver said that any project like this ultimately results in an excess of sand, which can be used to restore trails and habitats within other areas of the Pine Bush.

In a response prepared by Kayoleros, he said he is sympathetic to Jackson's concerns. Kayoleros and CNSE have cooperated with the McKownville Neighborhood Association, the University at Albany, and the Pine Bush Commission to ensure that the parking lot and all other construction on the land is done with consideration for the environmentally fragile land it is being constructed upon.

Future construction on the land includes a larger project that will take place across 30 acres and include a 225,000 square-foot facility.

Don Reeb, president of the McKownville Improvement Association, said recent talks with CNSE about the project have been productive.

“We were hoping to convince them that it would be nice if some of that area could be set aside,” said Reeb.

Future construction may include a parking garage—building up instead of out to maximize land conservation, a proposition that Reeb said he thought was indicative of progress.

As a result of meetings, the parking lot project was developed jointly with the McKownville Association, to be undertaken in two phases. The first phase would clear approximately one-third of the parcel to develop parking,

lighting and to provide stormwater runoff and control. Phase two would commence at the end of May and would clear the remaining two-thirds of the area. The extra time would allow work to be done with the Pine Bush Commission and the neighborhood association in identifying and transplanting native vegetation and ensuring successful regrowth.

Reeb said he was appreciative of CNSE's cooperation.

“It's asking a lot of somebody—that you own the land but can't use it,” said Reeb. “I think they are in good faith trying to figure it out and (cooperate) while reaching their own goals of expanding Nanotech.”

Steve Janack, a spokesman for CNSE, said that parking spaces are already at a premium at the campus. When it first opened in 2001, 72 people were employed by CNSE. Today that number is near 1,500. When plans for the new facility were announced in 2006, it was expected that number could reach 2,000 by completion in 2008.

“It's extremely tight now and it will become even tighter,” said Janack.

The current parking lot about to be constructed would address short-term and future parking needs. As the campus continues to grow, Janack acknowledges the need for a long-term solution, hence the development of the parking garage.

Janack said up to 500 trees may be planted in the vicinity to help keep it green.

In addition to her concern for the Pine Bush, Jackson also stated her opposition to the lack of transparency in CNSE and the University at Albany's plans.

“As a citizen concerned about the Pine Bush, I have found it impossible to find out any information about construction on the University at Albany's Pine Bush ecosystem,” wrote Jackson. “I have always discovered what the University is planning when I see the bulldozers.”