

Neighbors, University at Albany discuss upgrades

McKownville residents talk about possible capital improvements at school

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Local residents recently shared their concerns about the effect potential capital projects at the University at Albany would have on the surrounding neighborhoods.

At a Tuesday, March 10, public information meeting, university officials presented an environmental impact statement and discussed the possible impact the construction and resulting structures might have on neighboring communities.

At the meeting, held at the SEFCU Arena Hall of Fame room, residents from McKownville, a small neighborhood located at the border of Albany and Guilderland, and community

advocates offered praise in addition to concern.

"I thought they [university officials] did a forthright presentation," said Don Reeb, president of the McKownville Improvement Association.

Reeb gave credit to the university for extending an invitation to the community to participate in a discussion about potential expansions, but he did voice some worries about the growing stormwater problem McKownville has experienced over the past few years. With more paved areas and concrete structures, and less green space and grass to absorb water, Reeb said he was worried that the construction will only exacerbate the problem.

Reeb said he was also concerned with the traffic the structures might generate.

"They don't all travel through McKownville, but probably a large hunk of them do," Reeb said of the numerous cars coming and going from the campus.

Karl Luntta, a representative from the University at Albany, said the suggestions made by Reeb and others who spoke at the meeting will be considered

as plans to improve the campus move forward.

"We were pleased that so many neighbors showed up to speak," Luntta said.

The university's plans included 20 separate projects, spanning completion periods between 2011 to 2017, and included new buildings, such as a 500-bed apartment, parking structures and a walkway around campus known as the Purple Pathway. Some projects already have funding set aside, while others remain unfunded.

A final version of the environmental impact statement is expected to be completed by July.

John Giarrusso, assistant vice president of finance and business, presented the plans for capital improvements.

Stuart J. Spiegel, of O'Brien and Gere, an engineering firm working on the project, assured those in attendance that the university does not have any plans to "expand its footprint."

"None of the projects go off the campus," Spiegel said. "[But] that doesn't mean they don't impact other communities.

Also at the meeting Reeb said

he was concerned about the possibility of an expansion to the university's College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering, and its effects as it stands now. That project is separate from the capital improvements covered by the environmental impact statement presented Tuesday.

"We don't know very much about the other side of Fuller Road, and that is troublesome to me," Reeb said of the location of the Albany Nanotech Complex.

He said he is worried that no study has ever been done to fully assess the drainage issues associated with the university's water table, including the impact of expanding the buildings that house the nanoscale college.

He said he is worried about the health effects of the nanoparticles. However, Steve Janack, a representative of the nanoscale college, said the site does not handle "nano-particles," but only nano-chips.

Janack addressed some of Reeb's other concerns, as well.

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Janack addressed some of Reeb's other concerns, as well.

"At this point we have spoken actually on multiple occasions, publicly, about what we see as the next phases of expansion," Janack said. "We're part of the neighborhood. We agree flooding is an issues because we share the same problem."

He said there are plans to construct a parking structure, although the site plan involves constructing it on an already paved surface to prevent more storm-water runoff.

Janack said there are plans to construct a zero-energy nanotechnology building that would serve as both a structure dedicated to studying alternative energy, and one that runs completely on those alternative energies.

"It would be a living laboratory," Janack said.

He said that building is planned to go on a landlocked parcel between Interstate 90 and Washington Avenue, away from McKownville.

"We're working with the county to try to secure funding to make that happen," Janack said.

He added that the traffic generated from the expansion will be a "drop in the bucket" compared to the 31 million cars per year Crossgates Mall generates.