

UAlbany reconsiders dormitory location

Police union supports downsizing managers to save money

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In response to area residents' concerns, the University at Albany is reconsidering its location of a 500-bed dormitory.

Concerns about noise and other distractions related to college students have been raised in recent months by neighbors to the University in McKownville and on Tudor and Cambridge roads and the Eagle Hills neighborhood. The university had planned the dorms for a spot located near Perimeter Road on the Western Avenue side.

While the dorms do not represent an necessarily mean there will be an increase in students, it is possible in the future, officials said.

"We are going to reach out to elected officials and explore other options," said Karl Luntta, a representative of the university's public relations department. "We've taken a step back."

Luntta said the board of trustees for the state university system approved the transfer of 3.3 acres from the Harriman State Office Building Campus on Tuesday, Nov. 17, in order to help push the dorms back as far from the perimeter of campus as possible. This would make the current site proposed "more viable," he said.

Some are calling for the new dorms to be built on that Harriman site outright.

Don Reeb, president of the McKownville Improvement Association, said other universities have had success with private hotel chains building dorms and renting them to students at comparable prices to what the school would charge. This would generate tax revenue for the City of Albany,

the best place for them is inside the Harriman park, away from residential areas.

McEneny said that as the university grows, the options to expand are to go off site, which he described as "sprawl" or to build somewhere closer or on campus.

He said the Harriman location is one that would best serve the university system, rather than the "state bureaucracy."

"It's a very anti-sprawl, pro neighborhood point of view," he said.

McEneny also said that he is supportive of a "green" solution and said adding black top is not optimal for the construction project. He said building the dorms over the parking lots on campus would help cut down on blacktop.

In an Oct. 21 letter to the university, McEneny wrote that the run-off is something that needs to be monitored and said covered parking lots could also keep cars snow-free in the winter months.

"Nothing's off the table," Luntta said. "We're willing to listen."

The dorms are being built in the wake of testimony to the SUNY Board of Trustees by the New York State University Police Officers Union that "there are number of inefficiencies within the state

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university's police department," according to James McCartney president of the union. "The members of our union recognize the critical nature of our state's fiscal crisis and we

want to do our part during these tough budgetary times to make recommendations that we feel will make the state university's police department more efficient and less expensive," said McCartney in a statement. "We see a lot of waste inherent in the unusual structure of a highly decentralized university police department that employs 65 managers at a cost of \$6.2 million

Reeb said, and provides a win-win situation.

He said he is hopeful that the final decision, whatever it is, is away from residential neighborhoods.

"There is widespread agreement that the Tudor Road spot is not a good spot," Reeb said referring to the proposed location on the Western Avenue side. "They have to find someplace else."

Reeb also noted that he is glad that the university is taking time to have public meetings and said 20 years ago a decision might have been made without public input.

Attempts to contact Albany Mayor Gerald Jennings for comment were unsuccessful.

Bob Van Amburgh, a representative of the mayor's office, said the mayor is apprised of the situation, but Van Amburgh said he could not comment on the mayor's behalf on privately owned dorms.

Assemblyman Jack McEneny, D-Albany, said he is "indifferent to who owns" the dorms, but said

for 400 officers. Compare that with New York's three other police agencies combined (State Police, Environment Conservation and Park Police) that manage nearly 4,500 officers with only twenty-four managers at a cost of \$3.8 million."

Luntta said the dorm construction does not necessarily mean that the student population is rising, in fact he said the university is going to be more selective in its upcoming class selection, lowering the number of students admitted.

He said the expansion allows students to move from off campus to the university's location, something that has been expressed by a number of students in recent years and allows the university to make repairs and maintenance on older dorms by moving students to the new ones.

Luntta said that the university always faces the possibility of expanding, but was unable to comment on the downsizing of the police force.