

To: The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

From: Donald Reeb, professor emeritus, Department of Economics
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Subject: Possible expansion of the University into McKownville
Date: July 12, 2011

This is an appeal.

The University at Albany, the place where I taught Metropolitan Economics and other courses for 34 years, is considering buying approximately 9 acres of residential land and two homes in McKownville to build a gymnasium for its students.

McKownville is an unincorporated hamlet that includes about 1,000 homes and one square mile on the eastern edge of Guilderland. The 9-acre property is commonly referred to as the Judge John Holt-Harris property though it has a much older history as a portion of the LaGrange farm.

The land borders the University on the south and is on the northern edge of McKownville.

The University does not need the neighborhoods permission to buy the land and of course is not subject to zoning or other locally administered land use regulations.

But that is not the reason I am appealing to you.

It is obvious that the University would rather expand into the Harriman campus but that is not permitted—why it is not permitted is not as obvious.

When the University planned its newest dormitory, Liberty Dorm, I explained at various public meetings, that a better alternative than building near Tudor Road would be to build on the Harriman campus—and build a privately financed dorm. In that way the city and the county, the property taxing jurisdictions, would receive property tax revenues (and other tax and fee revenues) and building the dorm near

Washington Avenue would negatively impact no residential neighborhood. It appeared that the idea was accepted but then, it was not.

It is not clear what is preventing the University from building on the Harriman campus---obviously the State, the county, the city and possibly others are involved but I am certainly not close enough to the discussion to know who or what is preventing University from using the Harriman campus.

Now that the University is considering buying land up the street from where I live the alternative of building on the Harriman campus comes again to mind.

So this is really two appeals---do not permit the University to expand beyond its boundaries into the McKownville residential area—and—permit the University to expand into the Harriman campus. The latter would relieve much anxiety among my neighbors and since I am the president of the neighborhood association---the McKownville Improvement Association, founded in 1924—that would be of great help to me also.

The “highest and best use”—the old dictum from courses in housing economics when discussing land use—is for the Harriman campus to be used by the University. No one else is bidding to build there and, given the recession that we cannot seem to get out of, there is no other user likely to appear in the next few years.

The Harriman campus if opened for University use will release the University from fighting with its neighbors for space—and going to the extra expense of creating buffers and other ameliorations for the neighborhood. It will also give an opportunity for local governments to gain tax revenue from new privately owned dorms that are desperately needed by the University (remember “kegs and eggs”) and give space for the construction of more traditional University buildings such as a gymnasium.

The reuse of the Harriman campus has been discussed since 1998—you have a great opportunity to make it into a reborn asset for the people of both the State and the Capital District while protecting McKownville and, possibly, other residential areas from becoming overdeveloped by the University.