



**The McKownville Improvement Association  
Founded 1924**

Mayor Gerald D. Jennings  
City Hall, 24 Eagle Street  
Albany, New York 12207

July 21, 2011

Dear Mayor Jennings:

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 including two homes and a barn in McKownville. Judge John Holt-Harris owned this property for many years. The 9-acre property has a much older history as a portion of the LaGrange farm

McKownville is an unincorporated hamlet that includes about 1,000 homes and one square mile on the eastern edge of Guilderland. The census tract 146.08 is nearly identical with the McKownville Improvement Association district and that of the McKownville Fire Department territory and contains about 4,000 people.

The 9-acres border 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 from meeting with officers of the University that it 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 you attended that a better alternative than building near Tudor Road would be to build on the Harriman campus—and build a privately owned and financed dorm, like that built for Albany Medical Center students. In that way the city and the county, two important property-taxing jurisdictions, would receive property tax revenues (and other tax and fee revenues) and building

the dorm on 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 the 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.

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 (remember “kegs and eggs”) needed by the University.

The reuse of the Harriman campus has been discussed since at least 1998—you have a great opportunity to make it into a reborn asset for the people of the Capital District while promoting employment and gaining much needed revenue for your City.

I hope that you can work to make this happen and I anxiously await your reply.

Sincerely

Donald J. Reeb  
President, McKownville Improvement Association  
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