

University at Albany dormitories would be the best use for the Harriman campus

To the Editor:

This is what I told the Albany City Common Council on Aug. 1:

As president of the McKownville Improvement Association in Guilderland for the past decade and as a retired professor of economics from the State University at Albany — I received my Ph.D. in economics from Syracuse in 1963 and taught at the University for 34 years — I am concerned about the University at Albany.

The university needs space to compete—more and larger and better dorm rooms for its students, more and better and larger labs and offices for its employees, more space for ancillary activities such as intramural sports.

Enrollment at the University at Albany is about 18,000. Today's students — at least some of them—can afford high quality living space and demand it. Other universities offer such. Privately-owned dorms are common—there is one for Albany Medical College students here in Albany.

Expansion of university facilities is beneficial to the city of Albany in multiple ways. However, the city is holding it back because it refuses to make the Harriman campus available.

Yes, it is true that university President George Philip has been encouraged by Assemblyman John McEneny to build parking garages on the university campus thereby freeing up space for more dormitories and other facilities. While President Philip does want a higher percentage of University students to live on campus, he considers parking garages unsafe unless well

policed and that makes them too expensive, in his view.

The Harriman campus along the Washington Avenue boundary and near the Patroon Office complex is an obvious location for new dorms. Privately financed dorms located there would add property tax revenues to the city while adding almost nothing to city costs.

If the Harriman campus is not made available, the university could seek suburban sites—such as McKownville in Guilderland or Railroad Avenue near Fuller Road in Colonie—for the construction of new dorms, depriving the city not only of the increased property-tax revenues but also other receipts such as the sales-tax revenue shares that are based on the population census. Alternatively, without more dorm space, students presently living in the city may increasingly move into suburban homes and apartments that could also cause city revenue losses.

The city has had a desire to see the Harriman campus become another "Corporate Woods" type development. For over a decade, residents have read about the Harriman campus transformation into a corporate office-building complex—but it has proven to be a dream. The Harriman campus is much like urban renewal sites—where vast tracts were made available for commercial development and no buyers came forth.

In the recent round of discussions over the dorm that is under construction—Liberty Dorm—I put forth the notion that privately financed and taxable dorms on the Harriman campus

near Patroon Creek office buildings would be a great solution—it appeared that it was going to happen—but then it did not. I do not know why—but it did not and the residents of Tudor Road have suffered, and the residents of McKownville have become even more anxious about whether they are next.

The highest and best use of the Harriman campus is for university use. The university has made it abundantly clear that the Harriman campus is where it wants to build. In my years at the university, the commonly held assumption was that the university would use the Harriman campus for its growth. It is now time.

It is time for this city council to appeal to the governor and the mayor to recast the Harriman campus as the site for several taxable university dormitories. This council is giving up a lot if it does not act. The city has already given up a lot by not making this happen a decade ago.

The more than 3,000 residents of McKownville are asking you to appeal to the mayor and the governor. It is time to enter into a new bargain with the university concerning the Harriman campus.

**Donald J. Reeb, president
McKownville Improvement
Association**

Editor's note: McKownville residents have recently become concerned about the University at Albany's interest in purchasing the Holt-Harris tract in McKownville. For the full story, go online to www.AltamontEnterprise.com and look under Guilderland archives for July 14, 2011.