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

Date: September 13, 2011

The University at Albany, the place where I taught Public Finance and other courses for 34 years, is considering buying two homes in McKownville—including 10 acres of land---to build some facility (the University refuses to say what facility) for university use.

As the president of the McKownville Improvement Association I must insist you do everything you can to stop this.

McKownville is an unincorporated hamlet that includes about 1,000 homes and one square mile on the eastern edge of Guilderland. The 10 acre property is commonly referred to as the Judge John Holt-Harris property though it has a much older history; it was once part of the (revolutionary war era) LaGrange farm. The older home on the property is probably from the Civil War era.

The parcel 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 the University is not subject to zoning or other Town of Guilderland land use regulations.

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

When the University was planning 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 since none are nearby.

Subsequently I made the same appeal at an Albany City Council public hearing and at another time directly to Mayor Jennings.

That the dorms on the Harriman campus did not happen must be the result of some hidden agreement. After all, it has been about 16 years since the Harriman campus began seeking tax paying buildings---none have appeared---and yet it ignores tax paying dorms that are immediately available without offering any explanation as to why. And the University continues to ask for permission to build on the Harriman campus.

I also explained that the University could build University office buildings along Washington Avenue on the University campus. There is much unused land there.

I then went on to explain that if the University closed some of the eight entrances to the main campus it could build on those sites.

I finally went on to explain that nearly every research university has multiple campuses—as does Albany—and it need not build only on its main campus.

In short—the University at Albany does not need the 10 acres of McKownville and its two homes—and—there is a long standing promise—since 1962—that the University would not encroach on McKownville. A copy of that 1962 news story is enclosed.

Since the 10 acres cannot be subdivided—by Town regulations—no private developer would be willing to pay more than about \$250,000 for the two homes (neither of which are in great shape) and land—because developable land in Guilderland brings about \$125,000 a building lot in the marketplace. The Holt-Harris family is insisting on a \$1.6 million price—but then it is a politically powerful family—and the Judge was chair of the University Council for many years.

It is vital that your office insist that the University at Albany not pay more than the market price for the property. A political price is not a market price.

A relevant rule of thumb is that no one---especially a public institution--- should pay more than the average of five appraised values for a piece of property, after excluding the highest and lowest appraised values. That seems like a reasonable rule and one that your office might insist be followed for all purchases of property including an offer by the University at Albany for the Holt-Harris parcel.

The neighborhood wants the 10 acre Holt-Harris parcel to remain residential, which is not only its present use but its present zoning. Clearing of the land, which is hilly and heavily wooded, undoubtedly would cause more storm water flooding in the community and that is probably the most severe problem the community now faces—where to find \$6 million to rebuild its old storm water system. (That NanoTech and the University's Freedom Quad dumps its storm water into McKownville certainly does not help solve our storm water problem).

The State University of New York needs the best guidance you can give it—and the people in McKownville need to have public promises honored and not have their neighborhood invaded by a public institution that makes its problems more severe.

Please do your best to protect the people of McKownville and the University.

Thank you.