

Locals outraged at possible UAlbany expansion

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The University at Albany is considering purchasing a nine-acre parcel of land that has separated the uptown campus from the residents of McKownville for nearly 50 years and residents aren't happy about it.

Donald Reeb and around 30 supporters from the McKownville Improvement Association gathered outside UAlbany's Western Avenue entrance Saturday to protest the purchase of the Holt-Harris property, which is on the market for \$1.6 million.

Reeb, who taught economics at UAlbany for 34 years and is the president of the McKownville Improvement Association, said the building on the land would further add to the stormwater damage that university properties such as the nanotech building have already caused the area.

He said with the university in the running for purchase, no other buyers are even considering the property, now owned by the descendants of former Albany judge and confidant of former Albany Mayor Erastus Corning Judge John Holt-Harris, because they couldn't compete with its "deep pockets."

The property is mostly wooded, with two homes on it from the Civil War era. One property is five acres while the other is

3.75 acres and there is also a barn.

"It's quite a beautiful piece of property," Reeb said.

UAlbany's uptown campus was a lush country club before it was developed and Reeb said he fears he'll see the same thing happen to more of the area.

University spokesman Karl Luntta said there is no immediate plan for what to do with the land if it is purchased.

"It would be useful for us down the road in our master plan," he said. That could mean nothing would be built on the property for several years after the purchase.

Luntta stressed the fact that the university has not yet decided to purchase the property and no plans have been set.

Reeb insisted that the university has other properties that it could use to develop, specifically the 330-acre Harriman campus just down the road from UAlbany.

While Reeb said he hasn't received any answers from the university about why they specifically want the Holt-Harris property, Luntta said they were mainly interested in it because of its proximity to the uptown campus.

There is no timeframe set for when the university plans to make an official decision regarding the purchase as they are still investigating whether or not it would be a beneficial invest-

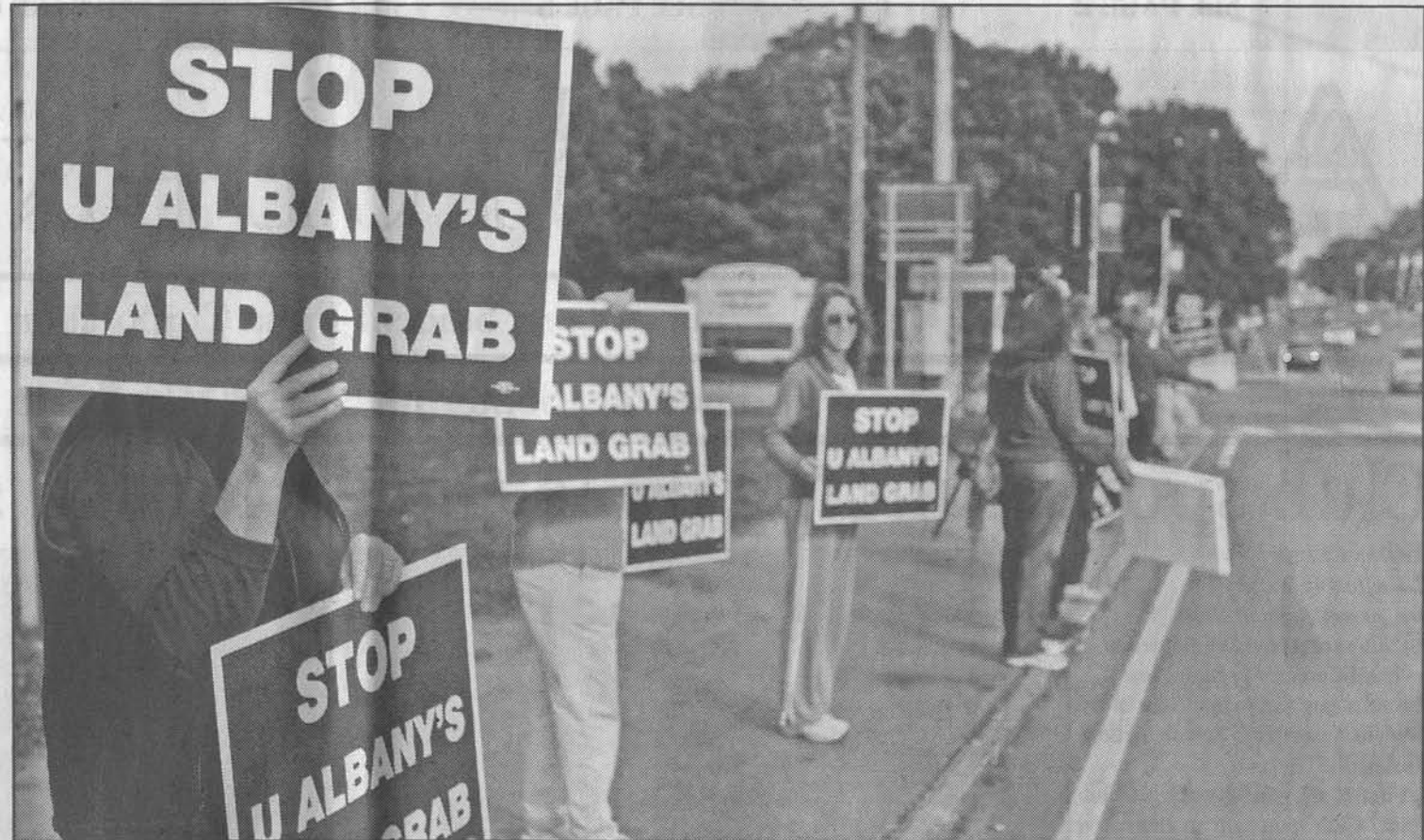


Photo by Erin Colligan

The President of McKownville Improvement Association and over 30 other protestors stood outside UAlbany's Western Ave. campus.

ment.
UAlbany President George Philip said, according to a memo from Reeb, the university only plans to purchase the land at a lower price than the \$1.6 million listing. It is valued at \$597,900 according to the same memo.

Luntta said that contrary to some speculation, there would not be an athletic facility built on the plot.

He also said that they have met with residents and plan to continue working with them as time goes by.

But Reeb said that during his meeting with UAlbany President George Philip, he was less than convinced the school would be willing to negotiate.

Another concern McKownville residents have is that since the university is a state-funded

institution, it would not have to follow typical town zoning laws. The Holt-Harris property is zoned for residential use, but UAlbany could use it for virtually any use as long as it conforms to state environmental codes.

Along with the members of the McKownville Improvement Association, the Guilderland town supervisor Ken Runion has spoken out against the purchase.

"I don't think it would be the right thing to do," Runion said. "It would be detrimental to the neighborhood and the town."

Runion cited reasons such as pollution, noise and glare as reasons for the university not to purchase the land. He has sent letters to both Gov. Andrew Cuomo and State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman denouncing the potential deal.