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**Local**

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# Crossgates Mall — 3

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The \$85 million, 169-acre proposed Pyramid Crossgates Mall has been surrounded by controversy since plans for the development became public in 1978.

Since then, the developer has undergone a lengthy state Environmental Quality Review procedure, including an 81-day Environmental Conservation Department hearing in an attempt to obtain 11 environmental permits.

Original mall plans called for the first phase, with four department stores, to open in late 1979. A second part, originally scheduled to open in 1984, would add two more department stores to the mall, which eventually would have about 150 stores.

Delays have forced the developer, Pyramid Crossgates Co., to change the scheduled opening date of the first phase to the fall of 1982.

Construction is planned for a Pine Bush area that is in the city of Albany and the town of Guilderland between

# years of controversy

Western Avenue, Washington Avenue Extension, the Thruway and Rapp Road.

That area has been considered environmentally sensitive by local residents and environmentalists because its sandy, piney interior, similar to Cape Cod, is the home of the Karner blue butterfly, which is on the state endangered species list.

Other opponents have said they were concerned construction of the mall in the watershed of the McKownville Reservoir would do further damage to the reservoir, which has not been used as a public water supply for several years.

Some expressed concern about increased traffic on Western Avenue, as well as the social and economic impact the mall on the town.

Pyramid Crossgates is a subsidiary of the Pyramid Companies of Dewitt, a Syracuse-area firm, which has built malls in Massachusetts and New York. The firm has said the ecological impact the mall would be minimal and would be offset by the 4,475 full- and part-time jobs it would provide.

The developers said \$7 million in improvements to surrounding highways would be a boon to the community and would offset area traffic problems.

Mall opponents include the Concerned Citizens Against Crossgates, the McKownville Improvement Association, Save the Pine Bush, the Pine Bush Historic Preservation Project Inc., the Sierra Club, the Fund for Animals Inc. and several individuals.

The project, for which a zoning change was approved by the town Zoning Board in 1978, sparked political controversy that resulted in 1979 in the election of the first Democrat to the Town Board in more than 100 years, Virginia Horan, on a platform of opposition to the mall.

She since has introduced a number of resolutions that she said were intended to stop construction of the mall.

The company applied for its first state environmental permits June 1, 1979. Robert G. Sproul, then managing partner of Pyramid Crossgates, sought

permits to construct dams, relocate a classified stream and fill a 16-acre wetland. The same day an application was filed with Environmental Conservation for a permit to cover air pollution aspects.

A department environmental hearing opened Aug. 13, 1979, when Pyramid indicated traffic plans had changed, and the hearing was adjourned until Feb. 19, 1980, the start of 81 days of testimony before Administrative Law Judge William Dickerson, which ending July 24, 1980.

Witnesses for the developer supplied information on the environmental, social and economic impact of the mall, with opponents cross-examining them and later presenting their own witnesses.

Most of the hearing took place at the Ramada Inn in Guilderland, sometimes before emotionally charged crowds and at other times in nearly empty rooms.

After deliberations and a study of the record of the hearings, EnCon Commissioner Robert Flacke announced he was delaying a decision on the project, overruling a state hearing officer's recommendation denying state permits necessary to build the mall.

The permits needed for construction included a freshwater wetlands permit, a stream protection permit, a state pollution discharge elimination system permit (needed because the Krumkill and the McKownville Reservoir are protected as sources of drinkable water), a permit to construct a series of dams at the site, four air-quality permits, a permit from the state Transportation Department, a permit for access to the Thruway and a building permit from the town of Guilderland, according to Edward Miller, project coordinator for EnCon.

Pyramid has been submitting additional information requested by Flacke on capacity of runoff water retention basins, air-quality analysis and traffic factors.

Flacke announced the hearing would not be reopened to allow cross-examination based on the new information and a decision on construction of the mall would be made within 60 days.