

# Butterflies may snag center

By ROBERT WARD

Knickerbocker News Reporter

State University at Albany officials are considering whether the presence of some Karner blue butterflies on the site of a proposed civic center will affect their plans for the center.

"We are in the process of looking into the situation regarding the butterflies," university spokesman Phil Johnson said Thursday. "Right now, no one has deter-

mined what, if any, population exists there."

SUNYA officials and Albany Mayor Thomas M. Whalen III are pushing university-owned land west of Fuller Road and south of the Washington Avenue Extension for a proposed Albany County civic center.

That land is home to an undetermined number of the butterflies — which are on the state's endangered species list, ac-

ording to Don Rittner, the Albany conservation officer regarded as an expert on the Pine Bush.

Karner blue butterflies live only in areas where lupine plants grow. Although populations are found in eight states ranging as far west as Minnesota, the 100,000-plus in the Albany Pine Bush are the largest concentration, Rittner said.

Rittner, who previously has opposed most Pine Bush development out of concern for the butterflies and other rare species there, said building a civic center on the university land might actually help the insects.

"Since the area is not being managed as pine barrens, it's probably going to convert to hardwood in 10 to 20 years," he said.

Lupine and other plants characteristic of pine barrens — the generic term for lands such as the Pine Bush — tend to be crowded out by deciduous plants unless occasional fires kill off the hardwood plants.

If such crowding-out happens on the SUNYA land, the Karner blue butterfly colony would die out. Rittner said he hopes development of a civic center could include saving the butterflies' home and managing its future with periodic burning and other steps.

"If we can work with the developers, we can actively manage the butterfly and perhaps keep it there longer than it would be naturally," he said.

Albany County Executive James J. Coyne is supporting a proposal under which businessman Joseph N. Futia Sr. would build an \$11 million center north of the Coliseum Theater in Latham.

## Rensselaer County eyed for possible civic center

Joseph N. Futia Sr., who wants Albany County to help him build a civic center in Latham, says he will consider doing so in Rensselaer County if Albany County officials aren't interested.

Thomas G. Cholakis, Republican majority leader in the Rensselaer County Legislature, has invited Futia to "explore the possibility of locating the proposed civic center in Rensselaer County."

Cholakis, of North Greenbush, wrote to Futia this week, noting the Latham proposal "may be embroiled in city vs. suburban legislators."

Albany County Executive James J.



Futia

Coyne proposed in October that the county join Futia in developing an \$11 million center north of the Coliseum Theater.

Since then, Albany Mayor Thomas M. Whalen III and others have suggested the center be built elsewhere. Whalen is among those supporting a proposal to locate the center on the campus of the State University at Albany.

Cholakis said he will not know whether Rensselaer County would help finance the center — as Albany County officials are considering — until studying the matter further.

He suggested the center be built near Interstate 90, perhaps along unfinished Exit 8.

Futia said he is interested in Cholakis' idea but will give Albany until around March 1 to decide whether to accept his Latham site.

### 'Not in our backyard'

To the editor:

Gene Levy's column (KN, 1/10/84) says it like it is in respect to the proposed civic center. Levy brings up the important question of why (or if) a civic center is needed in our community. He says a new "play pen" may be a nice but very costly toy that has a dim chance of paying its own way through sports use and rock concerts. I agree.

Mayor Whalen, SUNYA officials and others think the corner of Washington Avenue Extension and Fuller Road may be an ideal location for such a facility. As a resident of McKownville, I find it appalling. The majority of McKownville residents fought Crossgates for years and finally lost. Now that the huge shopping mall is nearly built, out civic leaders decide that if one giant next to a small community is good, two giants less than a mile apart can only be better. The thought is enough to make strong men weep.

The hamlet of McKownville is a delightful residential community. It would be shameful to see it degraded and overwhelmed by heavy traffic and parking problems generated by one or more large institutions, whether public or private.

If a civic center is to be built, let it be located to contribute to the resurgence of downtown Albany or as originally proposed, in an undeveloped area of Latham. We don't need, and certainly most of us don't want, it in our backyard.

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