

Civic center proposal leaves community fearful

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SUNYA President Vincent O'Leary's plan for a civic center and fieldhouse complex at Fuller Road and Washington Avenue has upset nearby home-owners who say they are worried and fearful of a large increase in traffic on the already busy roads.

O'Leary is away at a conference and was unavailable for comment.

"It's just too much traffic for that small a space," said McKownville resident Dorothy Ellinwood. "The people of McKownville are concerned about keeping the area as a nice place to reside and bring up a family," said SUNYA Math Department Chair and area resident Lindsay Childs.

McKownville is the residential area directly adjacent to the proposed site of the center and a part of the Town of Guilderland. Acting President of the McKownville Improvement Association Jim Lane said that the association executive board would meet with SUNYA Vice President for University Affairs Lewis Welch on March 1 to discuss the proposed civic center. Lane added that no stand was being taken by the board until after that meeting, but that the association is concerned and that the community "doesn't want to be overwhelmed by large groups of people coming in here."

Lane said his first thought was that the civic center should be built in downtown Albany or in Latham. "We really don't need another large institutional structure around here."

Guilderland Town Supervisor Kevin Moss agreed with community concerns over the proposal. "The town of Guilderland has strong reservations...about the traffic to be generated at the site," he said. He expressed concern over the combined effects of a civic center and the new Crossgate Mall, a 975,000 square foot shopping mall, opening in two weeks on the Washington Avenue extension.

"Putting it at the SUNY campus would cause real problems...problems we can't even imagine," he said. Moss, who said he has already met with Welch, also maintained that O'Leary's plan probably will fall through. "There are grave questions right now as to whether the University plan is feasible," he said.



Houses adjacent to proposed site

Residents fear increased traffic and for children's safety.

Moss said the civic center should be put in downtown Albany because "there are areas in the core of Albany that need this draw, like downtown Albany...if you put the civic center up here near the border of Guilderland you're certainly not helping the revitalization of the city of Albany."

Welch said that Moss raised the concerns of Guilderland residents but that "he didn't raise specifics" when they met.

Speaking of his upcoming meeting with the McKownville Improvement Association Board, Welch said, "I can answer their questions; whether or not they will be satisfied is another question." He said the Crossgate Mall was taken into consideration in the proposal. "There are answers to their concerns," he maintained.

"Most of the people in my neighborhood (McKownville), are vehemently opposed to the civic center. We know that we're going to suffer from the noise, the crowds, the traffic congestion and the automobile pollution," said SUNYA Psychology Professor Carol Waterman, who lives a block away from the

proposed site.

Waterman said her neighbors were "unenthusiastic" about the idea. "I haven't spoken to anyone in my street or the McKownville area that wants it here," she stated. Most of the people of McKownville don't think the center will actually be built, she added.

SUNYA Sociology Professor Steve Messner, who lives on Warren St., a block away from the proposed site, expressed his concern about the traffic increase in regard to the nearby Thruway, Northway, and I-90 interchange. He said it was too close to those highways and that they could become backed up with the additional use.

Childs agreed with Messner's assessment and noted that the interchange was approved for rebuilding last fall, and that during the planning stage a proposal to redirect an exit ramp was scrapped because there was no available land.

Childs also expressed fears for the safety of neighborhood children, and said that the busy roadways are already a source of worry for parents. "A lot of us have kids...they (the roads) act as moats and don't allow the kids

to meet their friends," he added.

Parking was another of Childs' concerns. He said that plans include using the Dutch Quad parking lot and charging patrons \$1 per car left in the lot during events at the civic center. "Anyone who knows the neighborhood at all will park on side streets," he said.

Childs said he feared people might allow cars to park on their lawns adjacent to the center, a common practice around the University of Illinois' Stadium and the Orange Bowl in Miami. Not only is this ugly, he maintained, but "it doesn't make it very safe for the kids."

Welch said the proposal calls for 2,500 on site parking spots, but that that would be bolstered by the 900-1,500 spaces available on the west edge of the campus after 5 p.m. on weekdays and all the time on weekends. □