

Panel recommendation on civic center delayed

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A final recommendation on whether and where to build an Albany County civic center is being delayed until April so additional interested groups can be heard, says the head of the county civic center review commission.

"We're targeting to complete our report and present it to the county executive March 30," commission Chairman Thomas Cairns said this morning.

That would mean Albany County Executive James J. Coyne would not make his formal recommendation to the County Legislature until its April 9 meeting, Cairns said.

Coyne had hoped to make a recommendation to the legislature March 12. When the debate over a county civic center began last fall, Coyne had hoped to have a plan in place by January.

Cairns said the commission report was being postponed to allow downtown Albany business interests to appear before the commission and keep open the

possibility of allowing an Albany neighborhood group to do likewise.

Also, a civic center proposal by Colonie developer Salvatore Beltrone has been delayed and cannot be presented until March 21, Cairns said.

Meanwhile, it wasn't immediately clear how the changed schedule would affect a planned rally by Albany businessmen in support of a downtown civic center.

"The rally will be to focus attention on a downtown site," Geoff Trimble, a member of the Committee for a Downtown Civic Center and owner of La Serre Restaurant, said Monday.

Trimble said another committee member was contacting builders and operators of civic centers to address the rally.

"We would hope to have some speakers like the fellow who developed the Hartford Civic Center or the Worcester or Springfield civic centers," he said. "Possibly Ned Harkness, too. We're hoping to get at least one of them."

Harkness is executive director of the Olympic Regional Development Authori-

ty, which operates the former Olympic arena and other facilities in Lake Placid.

There are three primary civic center proposals, with a fourth expected to be unveiled this week. Only one of those is in downtown Albany. The others are in Latham, the State University at Albany campus on the Albany-Guilderland border, and at an undisclosed Colonie location.

Coyne has been seeking state financing for a civic center adjacent to the Empire State Plaza. Another proposal to build the center at Union Station has failed to win the backing of Albany Mayor Thomas M. Whalen III, who is supporting the SUNYA site.

Downtown businesses have not come out in support of a specific downtown site.

However, Trimble said, he would like to see discussions more concentrated than they have been on the convention aspect of a civic center. Much attention is being focused on sports and concerts, but conventions would have the most economic impact on downtown, he said.