

# GOP demands center feasibility study

By ANDY DANZO

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Republicans in the Albany County Legislature will block funding for a county civic center unless there is a new study to determine the need for one, legislative Minority Leader W. Gordon Morris says.

Although they have only 14 of the legislature's 39 seats, the Republicans can block county bond resolutions, which require a two-thirds majority to pass.

County Executive James J. Coyne said Wednesday he would suggest the county issue bonds for a civic center in downtown Albany if the state built a parking garage for it.

"I want to see a study done that says there is a need for it," Morris said later Wednesday. "If the majority party fails to give us any more information in connection with the civic center than they have with resolutions in the past, then the minority party, I'm sure, will stand fast and refuse to authorize any funding for it."

Coyne has maintained there is a strong need for a civic center in the Capital District. He said past studies, including one recently done by the county Planning Board, had shown the need existed.

"I think we've been studied to death by this point," he said. "If Gordon Morris wants another study, it just delays it."

However, Morris said he did not consider past studies adequate to determine the demand for a civic center now.

"There has been some outstanding oratory from county officials and potential developers, but no studies," the Bethlehem Republican said. "This came from a dream of Joe Futia's and Jim Coyne's when his campaign was at a low ebb."

Futia, the developer-promoter who runs the Colonie Coliseum, proposed a 6,000-seat civic center adjacent to the Coliseum in October. He announced his plan with Coyne, who said the county would buy the \$11 million center from Futia after it was built and lease it back to Futia so he could operate it.

In December Coyne appointed a nine-member commission to study alternate civic center proposals after Albany Mayor Thomas M. Whalen III suggested it be built in the city and the State University at Albany proposed a center on its campus.

Coyne now is backing construction of the center on 5.7 acres owned by the Albany Housing Authority adjacent to the Empire State Plaza.

Testifying Wednesday before the state Senate's Minority Task Force on Professional Sports, he suggested the county finance a 12,000- to 15,000-seat arena on the site if the state paid up to \$10 million for a parking garage to serve it.

He does not have a projected cost to the county, but Coyne recognized the need for getting two-thirds of the County Legislature to go along with the scheme.

"There is a catch of course," he testified. "We would need 26 positive votes."

Morris said he also favored a downtown site because it would spur economic development in downtown Albany, but added: "That's the only area (of Coyne's plan) we agree upon."

He said he was concerned over the course of the civic center debate, specifically the enlargement of the proposed center from 6,000 to up to 15,000 seats without formal study.

The size was increased after Ned Harkness, director of the Olympic Regional Development Authority, suggested it in a closed meeting he had with county officials.

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— W. Gordon Morris  
GOP legislator



While Coyne has not estimated the cost of a 12,000-seat plus center at the Empire State Plaza he has acknowledged it would be considerably more than Futia's original \$11 million plan.

Morris said he was afraid the county could be borrowing as much as \$25 million under Coyne's proposal.

"I don't care how favorably we get the money, the debt service on \$25 million is a lot," he said. "I don't want to see some hype artists pushing the people of Albany County into debt obligation."