

Mt. SAC solar farm protested

SAN GABRIEL VALLEY
TRIBUNE

Walnut residents protest in front of the proposed Mt. San Antonio College solar farm site at the southwest corner of Grand Avenue and Amar Road in Walnut on Monday, Oct. 24, 2016. The empty hillside is proposed to be an 11-acre solar farm project that will produced 2.2 megawatts of electricity. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda, San Gabriel Valley Tribune/ SCNG)

By [Steve Scauzillo](#), San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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WALNUT >> About 35 residents protested a hillside solar farm proposed by Mount San Antonio College by marching onto campus Monday and demanding the college president's resignation.

"We have brought the community to you because you have failed to come to the community," said Layla Abou-Taleb, leader of United Walnut Taxpayers during an extraordinary confrontation with President William Scroggins just outside his office. "It is time for you to step down."

The crowd stayed for about 20 minutes, shouting "Scroggins must go!" and demanding the college reverse its position on building the solar project, which the residents say will lower property values, cause glare and destroy a natural hillside habitat.

The college wants to level a hillside across the street from campus on the southwest corner of Amar Road and Grand Avenue to construct a massive photovoltaic array that would be one of the largest solar power systems in a Los Angeles County community. Mt. SAC plans on spending between \$7 million and \$9 million on the 11-acre project that would produce 2.2 megawatts of electricity and supply about one-third of the college's electrical power, while cutting \$480,000 from its annual electric bill.

After distributing 50 letters to residents of Snow Creek on Stonybrook Drive, Regal Canyon Drive and Buckskin Drive on Friday, saying grading of the natural hills would begin Monday, the college reversed itself and indicated it had placed the project on hold. Since the city of Walnut and UWT had taken the college [to court over this project and a proposed five-story parking structure](#) (which the court placed on hold last year), the college said it wanted to wait until after the results of a court-ordered mediation session scheduled to begin Nov. 17.

"The work on the solar project is on hold pending the mediation," Scroggins told the angry crowd that gathered inside the plaza at Founders Hall, the administration building. When told some earth-moving equipment would be moved onto the east side of campus by next week, residents and members of UWT called it a trick and said they wanted zero work done until the judge decides the case.

During the tense confrontation, Scroggins was asked by a member of the group if he would be willing to reconsider the location of the solar farm, something residents say should be put atop campus buildings and on carport structures. After first saying it was not up to him but to the college board of trustees, he said: “No direction has been given by the board or by me,” promising that the college is going into mediation with an open mind.

However, the college rejected any alternative, saying “the west parcel,” land owned by the college since 1946, was best for the project. Photovoltaic arrays on rooftops or on carport structures, such as done by high schools, City of Industry and Metrolink, would cost more and would not produce enough electrical energy, explained Jill Dolan, director of public relations.

She said the project is not using bond money from one of the college’s two recent improvement bonds. Instead, the college received funding from Proposition 39, a green-energy measure passed by voters in 2012. The college wants to fulfill the governor’s call to reduce fossil-fuel consumption and greenhouse gases that cause global warming.

“We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint,” Dolan said. “This project is right in line with that. So, there are no conditions under which we will stop the solar project.”

Before the march, about 50 protesters stood beneath the site on Grand Avenue waving placards and shouting slogans. They were joined by City Manager Rob Wishner, as well as council members Mary Su, Eric Ching and Andrew Rodriguez.

Wishner said [a city stop-work order](#), along with assurances from the captain of the Walnut Sheriff’s Station of enforcement, had an effect. The city contends the college must pull permits for the project, but the college says it is exempt.

“I am hopeful we can put this dispute to bed,” he said.

Wishner said he understands the residents’ concerns about Mt. SAC’s growth adding to noise, traffic and environmental degradation in the small city. “Now with about 60,000 students, it is beginning to have a quality of life impact on the community,” he said.

He chastised the college for not doing a better job working with residents and City Hall. What had been usually a positive relationship has degraded these last two years, officials and residents said.

Abou-Taleb put the blame on the president, there for the past six years. “Scroggins always wants to have it his way,” she said.

Grading was supposed to have started Monday and be done in phases: clearing the site would have lasted until Nov. 15; major grading until June 2017; paving and landscaping until September 2017, and solar panel installation completed by late November 2017, according to Mt. SAC. Work would be done between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday.