

# **For Mt. SAC neighbors parking garage means war: Editorial**



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Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, known to all as Mt. SAC, isn't just big for a community college.

The size of its student body, fluctuating from the mid-50,000s well into the 60,000s, makes it one of the biggest colleges in the world.

With its campus backed up physically to Cal Poly Pomona's and its 22,000 students, we've got one giant hub of higher learning on our hands.

Though Cal Poly has dorms, it's also a commuter school. Mt. SAC as a community college is 100 percent commuter. With public transportation not exactly along the lines of the Manhattan subway in inland Southern California, the two schools combined make a very large traffic impact, especially when you add in faculty and staff.

Mt. SAC has been on a building boom seemingly forever in order to accommodate the growing demand for classroom and extracurricular space on the campus. Now it wants to spend \$45 million, at least partly out of Measure RR bond funds approved by local voters to the tune of \$353 million in 2008, to build a five-floor parking garage on the campus, which from many points of view makes a lot of sense.

That's because currently the central core of the 420-acre, low-rise campus is surrounded by a sea of surface parking lots. A late-arriving visitor, or a student, sometimes has to walk what seems like miles and certainly is many hundreds of yards after finding a far-flung parking space on the edge of the campus. The college was originally built in that classic car-crazy Southern California way: the place you want to get to is not nearly as big as the asphalt jungle surrounding it, like an Orange County shopping mall. It's not good planning.

So naturally, if you're a Mt. SAC administrator, the answer is to build a parking garage. Other local community colleges have done it; Pasadena City College, set in a denser neighborhood, built garages with bond money in part to appease neighbors who didn't like students parking in front of their houses.

But at Mt. SAC, it's the neighbors who are howling about the plan to build a garage. Residents on Mountaineer Road across the street from campus abutting the proposed garage site on the northwest perimeter of the college, are incensed at the plan, saying it would block views and increase traffic and air pollution. Hundreds of city residents have expressed their opposition. This could be viewed as pretty run-of-the-mill NIMBY reaction if it were just the immediate

neighbors. But the entire five-member Walnut City Council and top staffers recently adjourned a council meeting in City Hall and reconvened in official session, roll call and all, at a meeting of the Mt. SAC Board of Trustees to express their unified opposition to the garage. This isn't ordinary town-gown friction; this is war.

Community colleges have unusual dispensation to act on their own, responsible mostly to the state rather than to cities in which they are located. But it's the local residents, understandably proud of Mt. SAC and what it has long meant educationally and culturally to the region, who would foot the bill for most of this garage.

While students and administrators say they want the garage close to the bookstore and other key college buildings, there's no real reason it has be built right on the edge of campus. Rather than bite the hand that feeds it, Mt. SAC ought to build a garage in a more central campus location where it blocks no views. For students and staff, anything will be better than hoofing it from the current hinterlands.