

Mt. SAC needs to heed Walnut's wishes on parking garage: Editorial

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Site plan for proposed Mt. SAC parking structure properly deemed too close to neighbors of the college.

By [The Editorial Board](#), The San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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Town-gown disputes are as old as the fact that schools, colleges and universities usually exist in real cities rather than in mythical groves of academe.

Their buildings serve a higher calling than some others, perhaps, but these physical plants still have an impact on those who live around them. Traffic, noise, view corridors, the Friday-night lights from football stadiums — all these things are not merely academic for the real people who live around campuses.

Mt. San Antonio College is the largest — 60,000 students — and properly one of the most highly esteemed community colleges in the California system. Its liberal arts curriculum, technical training and sports have influenced hundreds of thousands of us, for the better. Its ever-growing Walnut campus is a magnet for those with a thirst to get ahead in this world. As a commuter school, its massive surface-level parking lots are legion, often far from where students need to be

in class, and so it's fully understandable that the school, as have other area community colleges in recent years, would work to build a centralized parking structure. And so it has, proposing to use construction-bond funds totaling \$48 million for a five-story campus garage.

But there comes the rub for the surrounding community. Mt. SAC planned the large structure not for the center of its campus but for its periphery, and neighbors have howled about the proposed behemoth's visual impact on their suburban homes.

A college campus is not an island. It needs to work with its neighbors, whose tax dollars support the school, and Mt. SAC usually has. But this time it dug in, and fought neighbors' objections to the parking structure. State zoning rules usually allow schools exemptions from some building restrictions for classroom expansion. But this garage is not a classroom. Rather absurdly, as it fought to be allowed to erect it, Mt. SAC that its Fire Technology Department would use the structure to teach students about fire/life safety, or the college robotics program would allow students to practice running their robots in the garage.

Now a judge has rejected that argument. Superior Court Judge Luis Lavin, in a ruling dated May 13, in the case United Walnut Taxpayers vs. Mt. San Antonio College, said that the college could not exempt itself from local zoning codes because the proposed five-story parking garage is a "nonclassroom facility." He also ruled that the college district did not properly identify the parking garage project to voters during the campaign for Measure RR, a \$353 million bond measure approved by local voters in 2008.

It's too bad legal action was needed, but the college declined to heed the wishes of neighbors, some of whom live just 120 feet from the proposed structure. In a fit of high-handed academic superiority complex, it didn't listen well enough when the entire Walnut City Council convened at a Mt. SAC board meeting to state its members' unanimous objections to the garage. The council didn't object to the garage itself, which would serve a clear campus need — it objected to the location. In a welcome change, Mt. SAC President Bill Scroggins has said that the college is "completely open for settlement in this matter," and will work with the neighbors and the city. We hope that work results in a new understanding that the gown needs to keep its town happy.

About the Author

The editorial board supervises the Opinion pages for the Los Angeles News Group's nine publications: Los Angeles Daily News, Long Beach Press-Telegram, Torrance Daily Breeze, San Bernardino Sun, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin, San Gabriel Valley Tribune, Pasadena Star News, Whittier Daily News and the Redlands Daily Facts. Reach the author at opinion@langnews.com or follow The Editorial on Twitter: [@SoCalOpinion](https://twitter.com/SoCalOpinion).

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