

Mt. SAC students angered after court order stops work on parking garage



An artist's rendering shows what the five-story parking structure will look like that is being proposed for Mt. SAC near Mountaineer Road in Walnut. (Image courtesy of Mt. SAC)

By [Richard Irwin](#), San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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WALNUT >> Students are angry that work has stopped on a new parking structure at Mt. San Antonio College after a Los Angeles Superior Court judge approved a temporary restraining order Wednesday to halt construction on the controversial \$48 million project.

“Parking is horrible, we just have to drive around the parking lot and wait for a space to open up,” said psychology student Richard Ramos. “One day, I missed a whole class waiting.”

Nursing student Kat Allen said that the community college needs a parking garage. The students were surprised that a judge halted work after residents filed a lawsuit over the project.

Cami Alvarado said she arrives at 7 a.m. so she can get a good parking space.

“Mt. SAC was here first, the [homeowners](#) knew they were buying homes next to a college,” said art student Jasmine Gonzalez. “That’s a good location for a parking garage. If the homeowners don’t like it, they should move.”

Layla Abou-Taleb, co-chairwoman of the residents' group, said she checked the zoning before buying a home across the street.

"We looked up the zoning and that area is zoned for housing, so we thought we had a buffer zone between us and the college," Abou-Taleb explained. "Not a five-story parking structure practically in our back yard."

The Timberline resident said the taxpayer's group wasn't against a parking garage at the college. They just want it in another area.

"They do have a parking problem. All along, we've been trying to work with the college to solve the parking issue," Abou-Taleb said. "Why not put the parking garage on the other side of campus?"

Mt. SAC's Director of Facilities Gary Nellesen told the board of trustees it would cost \$14.5 million to [move](#) the parking structure from Parking Lot A to Lot F. His staff figured it would also take three years to replan and build a garage there.

The college also considered putting instructional buildings at the contested site.

"If it's a building for instructional purposes with a proper environmental impact report, that's OK," Abou-Taleb said.

The city has also filed a lawsuit claiming the college violated its zoning code. But the college contends it is exempt from city zoning ordinances.

President Bill Scroggins was surprised when Judge Luis Lavin shut the project down Wednesday. On April 1, Lavin had denied a similar temporary restraining order requested by the city.

"I understand the citizens' concerns and think the judge was being responsive to their needs. It's part of the legal process," Scroggins said. "But I think we'll prevail because similar cases are in our favor."

"We asked the judge to move the preliminary hearing up so the delay wouldn't be excessive," he said. The preliminary hearing is set for May 7 in Superior Court.

Mt. SAC's attorney Stan Barankiewicz said a delay could cost the community up to \$25,000 a week.

"The fact is that we've had two different rulings from the same judge," said Mt. SAC Trustee David Hall. "I'm assuming he's reserving time to study all the documents that have been filed in this case."