

Walnut City Council holds meeting inside Mt. SAC, tells board to build parking structure somewhere else



By [Steve Scauzillo](#), 11/12/14, 9:35 PM

WALNUT >> For the first time in history, the City Council held part of its meeting Wednesday night in front of the Mount San Antonio College board as a kind of visual protest against the college's plan to build a five-story parking structure adjacent to Walnut homes.

With city staff in tow, all five City Council members drove from Walnut City Hall, where their meeting began, to Founder's Hall in the center of the Mt. SAC campus, filled out white comment cards and were called one by one to address the college board face-to-face over an issue that is dividing the two institutions.

All five, along with about 20 community members, urged the Board of Trustees to halt plans to build a five-story parking garage abutting dozens of Timberline homes along Mountaineer Road and instead relocate the structure elsewhere on the large campus.

The tense drama included numerous threats of litigation from some City Council members and attorneys with the neighborhood group, United Walnut Taxpayers, if the project was not relocated. Councilman Eric Ching reminded the trustees the city a few years ago took on Ed Roski, who proposed an NFL stadium in nearby Industry, in court. "Is that what you want?" he said.

The odd arrangement came about after Mt. SAC's Board of Trustees refused to meet with the City Council in joint session or with a board majority. Members of both groups met informally twice but with no resolution.

"I am sorry to say our discussions, our meetings, have really been fruitless. I don't believe you paid attention to what is going on," Councilman Bob Pacheco told the college board. Pacheco said the college representatives had characterized the opposition as "just a few people" but he said they were mistaken and "need to wake up" to reality.

Opponents in the group have grown to between 200 and 300, said Layla Abou-Taleb, a Timberline resident and an early member. The group attracted 600 signatures on a petition opposing the parking structure at the Mountaineer Road location, she said.

The city says the college has not resolved issues with the California Environmental Quality Act, did not officially list the project on a revenue bond measure that was adopted by voters in 2008 and is therefore attempting to illegally spend bond money.

Pacheco, and later Ching, both said the city would from now on examine every single new building or construction project planned for the 420-acre campus for compliance with state laws.

“I want you to understand: We are deadly serious,” Pacheco said, quieting the crowded board room.

Later, Walnut City Attorney Michael Montgomery said the city has offered to work with the college to find a different location for a parking structure. “I want to suggest the parties enter into a nonbinding mediation,” he told the board during the meeting.

Mt. SAC board Chair Fred Chyr said the board could not comment on the issue because it was not listed on the agenda and any discussion of a non-agenda item would be a violation of the Ralph M. Brown Act, the state’s open meeting laws. “I personally hear all your comments,” he said after the last speaker gave his testimony.

Opposition to the \$45 million parking garage began publicly last November and picked up steam in April when Timberline residents protested the structure, which is to be built on the northwest edge of the 420-acre campus along Mountaineer Road. Mt. SAC officials said they agreed to build part of the garage underground to preserve views of nearby homes.

Later, residents and the City Council demanded the college build the structure on a part of the campus not adjacent to homes, such as the south side off Temple Avenue. But Scroggins has said the college wants to locate the garage near the new classroom buildings, bookstore and cafeteria, “where parking is needed most.”

Indeed, three Mt. SAC students spoke in favor of the parking structure at the meeting, saying students waste time and often miss classes looking for parking spots. “The students need this,” said Ayo Osilaja, 18, a sophomore.

The city is questioning the authority of the college to act without its approval, even though community colleges answer to the state, not local authorities. Walnut City Manager Rob Wishner said the city has learned the college has not adopted an exemption to local zoning rules as required.

Residents and the city are also claiming the college never notified voters of the project during the campaign for Measure RR, a \$353-million bond measure approved by voters in 2008. Scroggins said the parking project was included in materials handed out to residents explaining Measure RR.

“We believe the bond documents did not clearly indicate a parking structure,” Wishner said.

Walnut’s city attorney has sent a letter to the college, citing a case in which a group from San Diego sued the school district for using bond funds to erect lights at a high school stadium. The Taxpayers for Accountable School Bond Spending initially lost in Superior Court, but the ruling was overturned in their favor by the Court of Appeals earlier this year, which said the school district could not use bond funds because it didn’t specify the football fields lights in the list of projects.

Attorney Craig Sherman, who represented the taxpayer group, has been hired by the Walnut residents. “You will have problems with bond spending if this was to go before a court,” he told the board.



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Walnut City Council members stand for the Pledge of Allegiance as they attend the Mt. San Antonio College Board of Trustees meeting to oppose the building of a campus parking structure at the Walnut campus on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014. The proposed five-story parking garage is raising concerns with the Walnut residents and the City Council. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda/ San Gabriel Valley Tribune)



Walnut resident Lanny Martinez expresses his anger about the proposed building of a campus parking structure at the Mt. San Antonio College Board of Trustees during a meeting at the Walnut campus on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014. The proposed five-story parking garage is raising concerns with the Walnut residents and the City Council. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda/ San Gabriel Valley Tribune)



Walnut residents packed the Founders Hall to express their frustrations about the proposed building of a campus parking structure during a meeting with the Mt. San Antonio College Board at the Walnut campus on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014. The proposed five stories parking garage is raising concerns with Walnut Residents and the City Council.



Walnut resident Gayle Pacheco expresses her concerns about the proposed building of a campus parking structure to the Mt. San Antonio College Board of Trustees during a meeting at the Walnut campus on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014.



Mt. San Antonio College President Bill Scroggins, left, and Board of Trustees member Fred Chyr listen to a resident expressing his frustrations to the proposed building of a campus parking structure at the Walnut campus on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014.



Mt. San Antonio College student Beverly Yan speaks to the Board of Trustees during a meeting concerning the building of a campus parking structure at the Walnut campus on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda/ San Gabriel Valley Tribune)



Mt. San Antonio College Board of Trustee David Hall listens to a Walnut resident voice her opposition to building of a campus parking structure at the Walnut campus on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014.



A Walnut resident expresses his anger to the Mt. San Antonio College Board of Trustees during a meeting about the building of a campus parking structure at the Walnut campus on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014.



Walnut Mayor Nancy Tragarz speaks to Mt. San Antonio College Board of Trustees during a meeting to opposed the building of a campus parking structure at the Walnut campus on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014.



Walnut City Council Member Mary Su speaks to Mt. San Antonio College Board of Trustees during a meeting to oppose the building of a campus parking structure at the Walnut campus on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014.



Mt. San Antonio College Board of Trustees during a meeting about the building of a campus parking structure at the Walnut campus on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014. The proposed five stories parking garage is raising concerns with the Walnut residents and the City Council.