

Walnut council member joins fight against Mt. SAC parking garage



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

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WALNUT >> For the first time, a City Council member has joined the fight against a new 2,200-space parking garage on the northwest edge of Mount San Antonio College.

Walnut City Councilwoman Mary Su told the Mt. SAC Board of Trustees she's opposed to building the \$45 million, five-level parking garage across from the Timberline neighborhood and suggested the college erect it on the southern end of campus, away from Walnut homes.

She also echoed suggestions from residents who spoke at the board meeting that Mt. SAC cap student enrollment and/or find satellite campuses to serve students from western parts of the district.

"Students from Baldwin Park or El Monte, they don't have to go all the way to Walnut (to attend community college). They can have a small campus over there," Su said during an interview.

New Mt. SAC board trustee Laura Santos had spoken in favor of a satellite campus at the Flanner School in the Bassett area during a meeting last month of the 2+2+2 Committee, a Baldwin Park advisory panel with members from the City Council, Baldwin Park Unified and Valley County Water District.

But the idea did not gain traction.

"There is no interest in having credited college programs offered at a satellite campus anywhere in our district," Mt. SAC President Bill Scroggins said last month.

Nonetheless, the group of about 100 Walnut residents called United Timberline will continue to suggest alternatives to the parking structure planned for Mountaineer Road and Edinger Way and plan on addressing the City Council. The group is looking into bringing a lawsuit against the college on environmental grounds, said Mansfield Collins, one of the original Timberline homeowners and current resident, during an interview.

United Timberline is concerned that the parking garage will add traffic congestion to Mountaineer Road, the only road in and out of their neighborhood, Collins said. "That will be a disaster because it will add air pollution and they will cause more cases of asthma for our children," he said. "It will definitely affect our quality of life."

Collins wants the college to build the parking garage on the south side of campus, near the Hilmer Lodge Stadium, which will undergo a \$62 million renovation. His group is calling for a separate Environmental Impact Report on the parking garage, hinting that they may file a legal action suggesting the 2012 Master Plan Subsequent Final EIR, which included the proposed parking garage and was approved by the board in December, is inadequate.

The college says the location of the garage — the first in college history — will best serve the students because it is located near the bookstore, the art classrooms, the cafeteria and other classroom buildings. Studies by independent engineers found the intersection at Grand Avenue and Mountaineer Road “will function at an acceptable traffic level, significantly better than either Grand and Temple or Temple and Bonita,” according to the study.

Santos supports the parking garage. She said many Walnut residents, including those in Timberline, had complained of students parking on residential streets. In 2012, when the college delayed the project, many Walnut residents complained, saying they favored the parking garage because it will help alleviate parking problems in neighborhoods around the college campus.

“Adding these additional spaces will relieve some of the intrusion into residential areas as far as cars go,” she said.

The college is paying extra to submerge the garage underground. Only two levels will be above ground and “it won’t obstruct views,” she said.

She said the issue of satellite campus is separate and needs more study from the college.

Finally, the group has raised the issue of growing student enrollment and is asking the college to cap enrollment.

“When I moved here Mt. SAC had 15,000 students. Today they have 60,000 and expect to have 80,000 by 2025,” Collins said. He suggested they cap enrollment and encourage students to attend Citrus College in Glendora or Chaffey College in Rancho Cucamonga.

In 2012-2013, the college’s student count was 53,830, said Jill Dolan, communications director.

The college’s 2012-2025 projected increase in student enrollment is 8,369.

Mt. SAC official said they hope to start construction next summer. Construction will take from 18 to 20 months.

Staff writers Jason Henry and Richard Irwin contributed to this article.