



December 26, 2012

Hon. Scott Johnson, Mayor  
Commissioner John Franck  
Commissioner Michele Madigan  
Commissioner Chris Mathiesen  
Commissioner Skip Scirocco  
City of Saratoga Springs  
474 Broadway  
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

RE: PROPOSED PARKING GARAGE FOR CITY CENTER

Dear Members of the City Council:

The proposed City Center parking structure is a significant project for the city's downtown, and as such warrants serious consideration. The project has been conceived without a public planning process, and would benefit greatly from a process that encourages public review and discussion. Because the issues related to the use of a substantial downtown city-owned property for a parking garage were never thoroughly vetted publicly, questions remain as to the benefits that will accrue to the city and downtown. Furthermore, the downtown still lacks an overall multi-modal transportation plan consistent with its adopted Complete Streets Policy.

This "conceptually approved" project represents a significant investment, and possibly a capital investment, for the City itself, as well as a cultural investment for the community. Sustainable Saratoga is an organization committed, among other things, to sensible urban planning principles. Therefore, we will be monitoring the developments of this proposed project.

We have some concerns about this upcoming project:

- We advocate for an open design process; for example, we think the public should be shown plans at various stages in the design process and have an opportunity to make comments. During the City Center expansion several years ago there was no public involvement in the design process. As a consequence, various segments of the community objected when "final" plans were first presented to the public. Similarly, the recently completed Woodlawn Avenue parking deck was fast-tracked without meaningful input from the community. The land use

boards were asked for their opinions only after the design was finalized by an appointed committee, which operated out of the public eye. An open process can not only prevent added costs and unnecessary public controversy but also assure that the final design will be compatible with sensible planning principles and therefore more acceptable to the broader community.

We urge the designers to adhere to the urban planning guidelines that already exist for private development in the downtown area. The requirements of the Zoning Ordinance for the Transect-6 zone call for “liner” buildings with commercial uses along parking garage frontages, vertical building elements that provide comfortable pedestrian scale, pedestrian friendly sidewalks, street trees, street lights, etc. By adhering to these requirements, the design of the structure will conform to the established long-term vision for the city’s growth. A parking garage built out to the street, without the liner buildings indicated in the Zoning Ordinance, will eliminate opportunities for enhancing the vitality of that area and adding tax revenue from the addition of commercial and residential uses along the street.

- We recommend that the city ensure that the project is consistent with the principles articulated in the city’s Complete Streets Policy, adopted this year, by requesting input from the Complete Streets Advisory Board. We also recommend that the project designers review past planning efforts, such as the adopted Urban Heritage Plan, that calls for a pedestrian-friendly corridor along Maple Avenue to link historic sites and the mineral springs.
- The owners of adjacent properties (such as the Algonquin Building) may have expansion plans. We recommend the city communicate with them so as to optimize outcomes for all concerned.
- The potential adverse impacts of the mass of the parking structure on nearby properties and businesses, such as the adjacent historic Mouzon House, need to be carefully evaluated and reasonable mitigation measures implemented.
- This potential project presents an opportunity for the city to improve environmental conditions through the use of green infrastructure elements. Wise choices in building materials can substantially reduce the short-term and long-term environmental impacts of the construction. Elements such as porous pavement and subsurface infiltration can help limit stormwater impacts. The planting of large species trees, particularly if combined with improved planting areas, can further reduce stormwater impacts as well as shade and beautify the structure and mitigate air quality impacts from the concentration of vehicles. Solar panels on the roof over the parking spaces can further green energy use. Cisterns could be built to collect rainwater for use in the City’s tree and flower watering programs to reduce costs and conserve resources.

- Finally, we urge the City and the City Center to explore the feasibility of including multi-modal transportation features in the project. These might include enclosed rack spaces for bicycles, charging stations for electric cars, taxi stands or calling areas for cabs, and priority parking and discounts for car/van pools.. We urge that bus service be returned to the downtown area by incorporating a Greyhound bus station into the facility, if feasible.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns regarding this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rayna Caldwell".

Rayna Caldwell  
President, Sustainable Saratoga

cc:

Joseph Dalton, City Center Authority Chair  
Mark Baker, City Center President  
Brad Birge, Director of Planning and Economic Development, Saratoga Springs  
Tim Wales, City Engineer  
Jackie Hakes, Chair, Complete Streets Advisory Board