

Hundreds Turn Out For FASNY Public Hearing In White Plains

by Brian Donnelly Politics 09/19/12 Comment



Hundreds packed White Plains City Hall Wednesday for a public hearing on the environmental impact of the French-American School of New York's proposed White Plains campus on Ridgeway Avenue. Photo Credit: *Brian Donnelly*

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. – Marie Bourdain was one of more than 80 people who signed up at City Hall to comment at the public hearing for the environmental impact of the proposed French American School of New York's (FASNY) campus in White Plains. She was one of many who left before their name was called because of the long wait.

Hundreds of supporters, many wearing green shirts reading, "Yes," and detractors, many wearing red buttons reading, "Stop FASNY Now," crammed into White Plains City Hall's first and second floors Wednesday night. A television was set up outside the council chambers and a projector in the lobby to allow everyone to watch on closed circuit-TV the public hearing, which is the first of two. A second [will be held Oct. 17](#).

FASNY's proposal to enroll 1,200 students in the three-school 45-acre campus on the 129-acre former Ridgeway Golf Course would exacerbate traffic, overburden the sewage system and ruin the character of the neighborhood, according to members of [the Gedney neighborhood association](#).

The school has said the remaining 84 acres would become a "Green to Green Conservancy" that would have a permanent easement. FASNY would maintain it at cost to the school, and would include trails open to the public 365 days a year. Mischa Zobotin, chair of the FASNY Board of Trustees, said the conservancy, which represents 85 percent of the total property, amounts to a gift from FASNY to the city.

Gedney Association President Terence Guerriere said his group members would make the bulk of their comments at the Oct. 17 public hearing.

"Gedney Farms is a significant portion of White Plains and always has been, and the school is going to change the environment dramatically," said Jack Weiner, who has lived in the Gedney Farms neighborhood for 41 years with his wife Berta.

Like Weiner, many residents expressed concern about how 1,200 students and 225 staff members coming and going every day would impact the flow of traffic. Michael Zarin, a lawyer for the school, said

FASNY has done several traffic studies and that it can minimize its impact on traffic.

Howard Hawkins disagreed, saying a narrow and winding two-lane street like Ridgeway Avenue isn't appropriate to handle the additional traffic of a school.

The school bought the former Ridgeway Golf Club in January 2011, then [applied for a special permit](#) from the city to operate a school, which the area is not zoned for. If approved, FASNY would begin a 10-year, \$60 million to \$80 million construction of its new campus, which school officials have said would create 500 construction jobs.

Residents opposed to the plan also expressed concern that FASNY is exempt from paying taxes and has already drained money from the city through property and sales taxes. Zarin said that would amount to approximately \$287,000 per year, or \$5 added onto homeowners' property taxes. School officials have said FASNY would pump \$14 million into the local economy once opened, which Zarin said, "would more than offset that amount."

Bourdain, a kindergarten teacher for FASNY's pre-school in Scarsdale, said the campus would attract many families with children in the schools to move to White Plains, including herself.

"I think it would be a good opportunity for White Plains," said Bourdain, whose 6-year-old daughter attends the FASNY pre-school.

The common council has been accepting written comments since it accepted FASNY's draft environmental impacts statement as complete at its Aug. 6 meeting. Public comments will be accepted in writing through Oct. 29 at 5 p.m.