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Hundreds Debate FASNY Proposal at City Hall

Supports and opponents of the proposed French American School of New York debate the impacts of creating a new facility on the old Ridgeway Golf Club site in White Plains.

By [Zach Oliva](#) | [Email the author](#) | 10:03 am

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A standing room only crowd filled rooms and hallways in City Hall Wednesday night, debating the French American School of New York's controversial proposal to build a new campus on the former site of the Ridgeway Country Club.

A long line of speakers addressed the White Plains Common Council to discuss FASNY's lengthy Environmental Impact Study as the school petitions the City for a permit to build on the property. After acquiring the property in 2011, FASNY hopes to build a unified school campus on 46 acres on the southern end of the property. The proposal also includes an 84-acre conservancy of maintained walking trails that would be open to the public.

FASNY supporters used the opportunity to discuss the expected construction jobs and environmental positives of the proposal. Opponents said the added traffic, development and overall change to the former golf course will forever alter their neighborhood if approved.

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Mischa Zabotin, chairman of the FASNY board of trustees explained the proposal's inclusion of open space and the creation of approximately 500 construction jobs within the City creates a win-win for White Plains.

"There aren't many \$60 million projects in the pipeline of local communities in lower Westchester," Zabotin said.

Some neighbors, particularly members of the Gedney Association, which represents about 450 homes in the area, see things differently.

Terence Guerrere, president of the Gedney Association, said while FASNY has made every effort to focus the proposal on the conservancy on the northern portion of the property, the focus should remain on the construction of the new schools.

FASNY opponents are fearful that thousands of drivers will clog Ridgeway Ave. and surrounding roads while dropping off and picking up students every day. They also fear that parking lots and school buildings on the campus will detract from the historic neighborhood.

"We can all agree that FASNY offers a fine education, and that open space is preferred use for this land and many others," Guerrire said. "But this application is about a developer who wants to construct several buildings next to homes in the center of a neighborhood."

The proposed campus would house about 1,200 students and 250 staff members. In addition to the 84-acre open space conservancy, the proposal includes the construction of an upper, middle and lower school totaling 230,863 sq ft., three playgrounds, four tennis courts, four soccer fields, a six lane track, a basketball court, baseball and softball diamonds and 428 parking spaces.

FASNY representatives opened the hearing with a brief overview of the project, as well as a list of possible alternatives for the site if the school had not purchased the property. Representatives said athletic fields, parking lots and school buildings will take up only 15 percent of the property. They added that the proposal allows for most of the traffic to be handled on-site and that the school will prevent drivers from cutting through neighborhoods during peak traffic hours.

Alternative uses for the site, including a house of worship, recreation center and the construction of a 39-lot single home development were deemed unrealistic alternatives during the presentation.

Opponents believe there are better options.

Steven Gould, who lives in the Gedney neighborhood, said the proposed school would funnel more traffic into the City's most dangerous intersections, including Bryant and Mamaroneck Ave. and Ridgeway and Mamaroneck Ave.

"This is where they are feeding all this traffic into," he said. "Our biggest accident intersections."

Gould also said the traffic issues won't be limited to mornings and afternoons, as the school will host hundreds of after school events and activities year-round.

Hundreds of people attended the first public hearing on the proposed project. The common council room in City Hall was filled well before the hearing began, hundreds of other people watched on projectors and televisions placed in the hallway outside and City Hall's entryway.

The two sides of the project were, for the most part, easy to identify, wearing either green shirts and stickers to support the project or red shirts and buttons to oppose it.

Ellen Mellyn, an Eastchester resident wearing green on Thursday said she attended the meeting because the construction of the school would be great news for her family, though she can understand why people in the neighborhood are concerned.

"I can understand that it adversely affects a few people, if you live there and a parking lot is in your backyard, yea I understand that," she said. "But the majority of residents, it's beneficial because it's going to be open space."

Frank Banister, who attended the meeting with his wife Barbara Hamil, said while leaving the meeting he is one of the few people in his neighborhood who have supported the project. Residents of Macy Ave, located near a proposed baseball field on the campus, both said the proposal is better than housing developments of other alternatives.

"I think the alternative uses for the property, this seems to be the best that's out there," Banister said. "(Housing) development would be a shame."

But other residents, who have placed hundreds of anti-FASNY signs in front lawns surrounding the property, don't see it that way.

"What we're talking about tonight is certainly going to change the character of our neighborhood," said Gould.

The common council didn't provide feedback as a line of speakers shuffled to the podium for hours. The second, and final, public hearing will be held on Oct. 17. After that, FASNY representatives will be given the opportunity to respond to any environmental concerns in writing.

Written comments will be received until 5 p.m. on Oct. 20 and should be directed to the City Clerk, City Hall at 255 Main St., White Plains, NY 10601.

Click [here](#) to view the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for the project. A copy of the DEIS will also be available for view at the [White Plains Public Library](#).

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