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By Pat Zarkowski

Crowd voices opposition to WMU park

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Open space clashed with economic development Tuesday night in a neighborhood forum on a proposed research and business park that supporters say could meld the two.

An overflow crowd of more than 150 people jammed the Winchell Elementary School gymnasium to ask questions, voice concerns and state opposition to the park project Western Michigan University is proposing at Parkview Avenue and Drake Road.

No one in the audience spoke in favor of the project site during the 90-minute informational meeting sponsored by the Oakland Drive/Winchell Neighborhood Association.

But Richard Burke, WMU vice president for regional education and economic development, said several people told him after the meeting that they support the project.

"I was not surprised" by the opposition to the project, Burke said after the meeting.

"There are critics going through neighborhoods with information that this is an industrial park and there's visions of smokestacks, waste and noise that people are reacting to. We'll work to develop a report that will answer many of these questions."

A consultant has recommended that the 319-acre park include research and development, business,

and light industrial zoning, and possibly a Foreign Trade Zone for international business.

A tentative Dec. 1 deadline has been established for a study committee appointed by WMU's Faculty Senate Executive Board to present its recommendations on the project. A recommendation from WMU President Diether Haenicke may not come before the university's Board of Trustees until spring.

Project supporters say the park would enhance recruitment of new business to the area, generate jobs and tax revenues and strengthen WMU's research capabilities. Development of at least 265 acres within the proposed park area is inevitable, they argue, and there would be more opportunity for public input if WMU were the developer.

Storm water runoff and sanitary sewage entering the 274-acre Asylum Lake property north of Parkview Avenue, which is not part of the park proposal, also could be halted by extending sewer lines to the site, supporters say.

While recognizing the financial benefits of the proposed park, opponents say the open space should be preserved and that other sites should be explored. But WMU and Kalamazoo officials contend there are no other viable locations in the city for such a park development.

Other project concerns include: potential traffic congestion and noise and odors; the cost of widening Parkview Avenue and Drake Road and who will pay for it; en-

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vironmental impact; required zoning changes; and removal of restrictions to permit development of a 54-acre parcel included in the proposed park.

Burke and five other speakers, representing different interests, made brief presentations on the project during the meeting and answered questions from the audience.

Panelist Mark Hoffman, a Milwood resident who opposes the project site, said the concerns and opposition to the project voiced at the meeting corresponds with comments he has heard going door-to-door in city neighborhoods.

Audience members applauded comments by Hoffman and panelist Judy Mayo, a member of Kalamazoo's Environmental Concerns Committee, which also opposes the project site.

"It is totally inappropriate to

put manufacturing, distribution, smelly research and business/commercial buildings in a residential neighborhood when there are fully accessible, vacant industrial sites and office space in need of revitalization throughout the city and county of Kalamazoo," said Hoffman.

Douglas McFarlen, vice president of the Oakland Drive/Winchell Neighborhood Association board, said he thinks many residents are still undecided about the project as they await proposal specifics.

But Oakwood neighborhood resident Robert Piellush indicated he has made up his mind. "There's a real uphill battle (for WMU) because we don't want it," he said.

Even if the park project is turned down, improvements on Parkview Avenue and Drake Road will be needed because of area growth, said panel member Wil-

liam Nelson, Kalamazoo's public works manager.

The Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study has appointed a study committee to assess options and the impact of the project on local streets. KATS projected in a 1983 study that growth would require that Parkview be expanded from two to four lanes by 1995. "In my opinion, we may be lucky to get three (lanes) in without significant impact," Nelson said.

Burke rejected as "absolutely not true" reports that only 18 acres of the 319-acre park would be used for research. "There may be many more," he said.

He also could not say whether the park proposal would be put to a neighborhood vote if it wins approval from WMU trustees.

"One could make that argument," said Burke, noting the project would affect the entire Kalamazoo metropolitan area.

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