

Let community help chart course for Renaissance Square project

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As plans for the proposed Rochester Renaissance Square take shape, concerned members of the community increasingly approach individual legislators and the Legislature as a whole to voice concerns about it.

Many who speak out during public legislative forums or to the media call for more public participation in the planning process of such a costly and significant capital project. Concerns range from traffic patterns and the project's location and design, to possible effects on downtown businesses and taxpayers' wallets.

Most of all, those who voice concerns need to know that they are heard by the local decision-makers and authorities charged with bringing the project to fruition.

Neither of us has yet formulated a "yea or nay" opinion on the project as proposed. As legislators, we intend to maintain an open mind and open ears in order to hear all arguments, ideas and concerns from the community.

It is only reasonable to expect that step one of any civic project, especially one of this magnitude, would be a needs assessment.

That is where all interested citizens can express questions and concerns - and thereby lay out for project planners a broad range of relevant considerations.

After all, before the Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority adds a new bus route or even modifies an existing one, it asks the basic question: Does the community need this? Clearly, the authority's data must include input from current and potential bus riders - the stakeholders. If something as simple as a route change deserves to be scrutinized, a new \$230 million project that includes a bus terminal deserves the same consideration, and the same opportunity for input from the public who will use and fund the facility.

An audit by New York State Comptroller Alan Hevesi and a set of recommendations by an Arts & Cultural Council of Greater Rochester subcommittee stress that, above all, planners first study and select the best site for the project.

Hevesi's audit noted that there was no needs assessment conducted, an oversight that must be addressed by bus station planners by the end of June.

Earlier this month, County Executive Maggie Brooks told the Democrat and Chronicle that the county and city would soon form a committee of Renaissance Square stakeholders to further develop project designs and details.

By definition, "stakeholders" are not only those parties who own shares in an enterprise

but also people affected by or having an interest in the operations of the enterprise, such as employees, customers and local community.

We know our community has many needs, like nurses in our schools, police patrols in high-crime areas, lower taxes and more good-paying jobs. The question that must be asked is: Do we need a \$58 million bus station?

Members of the Democratic caucus stand ready to hear all responses to this question and the related concerns that may arise.

We encourage a robust, ongoing dialogue among members of the public, lawmakers and the decision-makers who will set the direction of the Renaissance Square project.

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