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Niagara Falls

Am. Church

Plans

Church
Hall

File

184 Plantation Court
E. Amherst, NY 14051

January 12, 1990

His Eminence Archbishop Torkom Manougian, Primate
Diocese of the Armenian Church of America
630 Second Avenue
New York, NY 10016

Your Eminence:

This is written to keep you informed of the status of the proposed dislocation of the St. Sarkis Church in Niagara Falls, New York, and to request your further guidance in pursuing a course of action to prevent this occurrence.

I have enclosed the latest details of the project, as well as newspaper articles about the situation. The community's wish is not to lose the church, since it has deep roots in their lives and is physically the nearest Armenian religious center for the Greater Buffalo area.

An important meeting is planned for next Friday, January 19, 1990 at 4:30 p.m. with Larry Krizan, Director of Urban Development who is the project manager for this. Your help in preparing for this meeting with the appropriate questions is kindly requested prior to the meeting date.

Mrs. Mekhag (Maggie) Abdo at (716) 283-9584 and myself at (716) 286-3635 will be very happy to clarify any points or supply you with any additional information should you let us know. Your legal counsel may require additional data which we will try and get for you as requested.

Please let us know how to proceed to keep our beloved church. We await your instructions.

Very truly yours,



Mary M. Mukhtarian

MMM/sg
Enclosures

1/12/90

Re: The proposed displacement of the St. Sarkis Church of Niagara Falls due to development of a shopping mall on the same ground

On Wednesday, January 10, 1990, Mrs. Mekhag (Maggie) Abdo and Mary M. Mukhtarian attended a public meeting in the Niagara Falls City Hall regarding the proposed mall project expected to be approved for Niagara Falls.

As newly appointed representatives of the St. Sarkis Parish Council we had an opportunity to listen to the proposed timing for the mall progress and to ask questions regarding the status of our church. Following are some of the highlights of that meeting:

- o The meeting was conducted by William K. Clark, Director, Department of Community Development.
- o The city of Niagara Falls has approved the project and expects to give \$30MM to support it.
- o The area affected by the project includes the 9th and Falls Street corner where the St. Sarkis Church is (that will be the entrance of the mall).
- o The general area is considered blighted, and the real estate there very inexpensive, so most residents are willing to be relocated. The St. Sarkis area is not considered blighted, but its residents are poor and the houses are modest.
- o ^{Niagara} ~~Erie~~ County has not approved the project yet pending the resolution of 15 issues submitted to the city.
- o New York State is expected to approve this project which will supply 1500 jobs, mostly for entry positions.
- o Clark explained that the project will pay for relocation of all individuals affected as allowed by the federal relocation program, in addition to compensating people for the appraised value of their homes.
- o Clark indicated they acquire the houses under the eminent domain statute, and are confident of getting the 95 or so acres they need for the mall.
- o The County Building, as well as the Baptist church, will not be acquired.

Our questions were as follows:

- o Is St. Sarkis included in their plan? He said yes and he was confident anything in that area will be acquired.
- o Was he aware that there were two churches, St. Sarkis and St. Hagop (officially recognized as a community center) on 9th Street? He said they knew, but he believed it will not be difficult to acquire them by invoking eminent domain.
- o Did he realize that the St. Sarkis church stood on consecrated ground as pointed out by one of the meeting attendees? Clark indicated he sympathized with the church community and did not see how a church could be properly classified under the project's requirements.
- o Would their appraisers know how to appraise the value of a church? As one of the attendees pointed out, it is like asking the Catholic church to move. Clark did not know what appraisers do in this circumstance.
- o When relocating the church, would they pay whatever value land is purchased? Clark thought they will have to pay no matter what the cost is.
- o Since the church is a beautiful stone building adhering to Armenian architectural guidelines, will they be willing to transport the church stone-by-stone to another location, no matter what the cost? Clark indicated they would.

When Clark was informed that St. Sarkis had not been officially notified, and no attempt had been made to reach any member of the Parish Council, he indicated that at Urban Renewal they had assumed that St. Sarkis' silence meant the church was plotting its legal attack on the proposed displacement.

A meeting is planned for Friday, January 19, 1990 at 4:30 p.m. in the offices of Larry Krizan, the Director of Urban Renewal who is the boss of Clark and is the sole authority on this project. Krizan had apparently indicated that he had been unable to contact St. Sarkis in repeated attempts.

Walking the beat

Niagara Falls Police Detective James F. Lincoln, left, and Officer Andy Regalia talk to Latrice Sims, 10, of Jordan Gardens, as they patrol on Wednesday. Police patrols are part of a new security program at the housing complex.

Niagara Gazette 1/11/90

Mega mall relocation lagging

By MARY WOZNAK
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Hurry up and wait.

Residents in the area to be cleared or the proposed Niagara Factory Outlet Mega Mall found out Wednesday that they will have to be patient a little longer before they get the final answers to their numerous relocation questions.

The project is behind schedule but progress is being made. Community Development Director William K. Clark told them at a monthly meeting held in City Hall. "The Benderson people are very interested in getting going on this," he said. "They're waiting for the city's go-ahead."

The city hopes to settle on an appraiser for properties in the area by Jan. 31, he said. The environmental review of the site should be completed by mid-February. The city also needs state Job Development Authority approval for bonds to be

issued to the Urban Renewal Agency for the \$27 million needed to clear the site, he said.

Larry Krizan, coordinator of development services, may travel to Albany next week to present the proposal. If all the pieces of the puzzle fall into place, officials should start making offers to residents in April, Clark said.

After an appraisal is done, an offer will be made. If the offer is not satisfactory to the owner, then an "appraisal review" takes place, Clark said. If there is no resolve, the city will take the property through eminent domain and the homeowner can go to court. But before the court date, a second appraisal will be made, he said.

Offers will be made first to residents living on the mall "footpath," or boundary lines of the building itself, he said. This covers roughly from Falls Street to about a block

south, then from 10th to about 14th streets.

Robert Yamonaco of Ninth Street wondered whether the city would try to force the East Side residents to re-settle in properties that become available in Love Canal. Clark said the city cannot steer residents to a particular area.

On the other hand, Mark Mellon of 15th Street said he would not mind moving into the Love Canal neighborhood and asked if residents displaced by the mall would be given preferred status for properties there. Clark said no such arrangements have been made at this point, but that it was a possibility.

Clark told one resident that the federal government has raised the cap on relocation costs from \$15,000 to \$22,500. The relocation cost is in addition to the purchase price of the property.

The next meeting is tentatively set for Feb. 14 at Holy Trinity Church.

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Since then, the home has been in receivership, with the sale awaiting approval from the state Health Department.

Approval came last fall, said L. Schottenfeld, a representative of the state Health Department in

The home was turned over

BOCES plans \$4.75 million referendum

By CHERYL GREENHOUSE
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NORTH TONAWANDA — Residents of nine Niagara County school districts will vote March 7 on a \$4.75 million referendum to replace three Board of Cooperative Educational Services buildings in Sanborn.

Peter Kachris, Orleans-Niagara

BOCES superintendent, on Wednesday made a presentation on the referendum to the North Tonawanda Board of Education.

"I hope the referendum passes, but if it doesn't pass we will still replace the facilities," Kachris said.

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BOCES Niagara-West campus on Saunders Settlement Road have to be replaced because they are not suitable for students. If the complex continues to operate in those facilities, he fears a lawsuit.

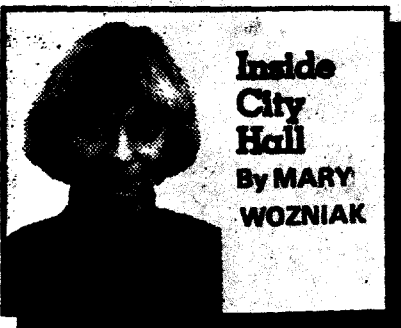
If the referendum passes, BOCES school districts will have contribute toward the cost of the new building.

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TV reporters from the local stations showed up to record the end of the 44-day festival, just as they had appeared at its beginning. "Festival of Lights (significant pause) — or Festival of Loss?" intoned the anchorman at one station, which led its Sunday night newscast with the 28 percent drop in attendance at this year's festival.

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But this was real. Note the words "playful" and "unison." They were having fun as one. As a community.

Isn't that what it's all about? Besides a few calories, maybe these people had gained something. A little pride, perhaps. As a community.

"I enjoy it," said Irma Montagna of Niagara Falls, who attended the festival closing. "I think it's really good for the city image."

Bettino wants to improve that image. A meeting will be held within two months to seek residents' ideas on how to make the 10th annual festi-

complaint that the festival is getting too commercial? "Just off site," said Steiner. "No, people like to see things that are spectacular, different."

Bettino agreed. "It's not commercial with businesses light I've never gotten that kind back from patrons."

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Armenian churches in mall's way

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Western New York's Armenian congregation also will be left without a church. St. Sarkis Armenian Apostolic Church at 300 Ninth St. is part of the area to be razed to make way for the proposed mall. So is St. Hagop's Armenian Apostolic Church, located in the neighboring Armenian Community Center at 322 Ninth St.

"We heard about it from other people. We had not been contacted officially about it to date," said Maggie Abdo. She and Mary M. Mukhtarian represented the St. Sarkis Parish Council on Wednesday at City Hall at the monthly meeting held to hear concerns of people who will be displaced by the mall.

Ms. Abdo said she did not know how many people are served by both churches. What she does know is that if the churches are torn down, area Armenians will have to go to Rochester to attend an Apostolic church service, she said.

Ms. Mukhtarian said the city should not have considered the churches part of the mall project. "A church is not like a house," she said. "A church is consecrated ground. It is considered holy."

Nevertheless, the city can take the land, said William K. Clark, city community development director. Larry Krizan, city coordinator of development services, had made some attempts to contact church representatives, he said.

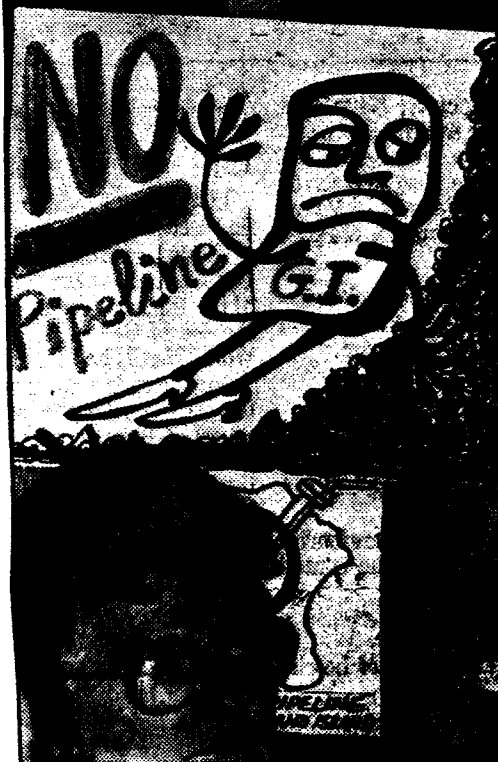
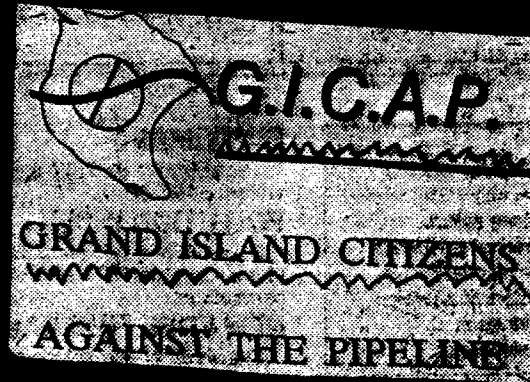
Aris Ohanesian, chairman of the community center, said he spoke with Krizan six months ago but has not heard anything since. The center serves Armenian people from a wide area, including Buffalo, Lockport, Olean and Bradford, Pa., he said. "We've served people from Rochester, Hamilton, (Ont.) and St. Catharines for 70 or 80 years."

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The city can buy the real estate from the parishes and the center, he said. "We can help them find an alternate location and we can help them with moving expenses. Their question was, how do you put a value on a church. You're looking at something that's been in the community for years. It's got more of a theological value or spiritual value. You can't look at it just like a piece of real estate. We don't really know how the appraiser will look at it," Clark said.

The ideal would be to keep them in Niagara Falls, but that depends on the real estate market, he said.

Abdo's view of the ideal solution differs: "We don't like to move. We like to stay where we



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A group of residents formed "Grand Island Citizens Against the Pipeline" one month ago and gathered 4,500 signatures on petitions opposing Empire State. Those petitions, along with dozens of letters from Grand Island residents, were presented to Moynihan during the hearing.

"We feel like victims in a game of corporate profits," said John Wozniak.

Moynihan also received a strongly worded resolution from the Grand Island Town Board, which vehemently opposes the pipeline, said Councilman James H. Pax. He asked Moynihan for a separate public hearing on Grand Island, but the judge said that would not be possible.

The testimony taken Wednesday will be considered by the commission when it makes its decision, Moynihan said.

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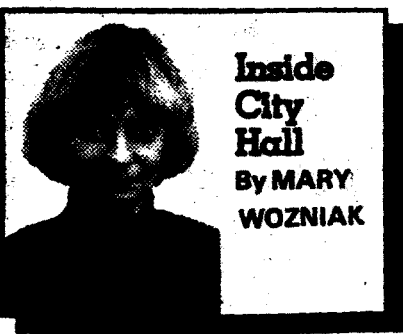
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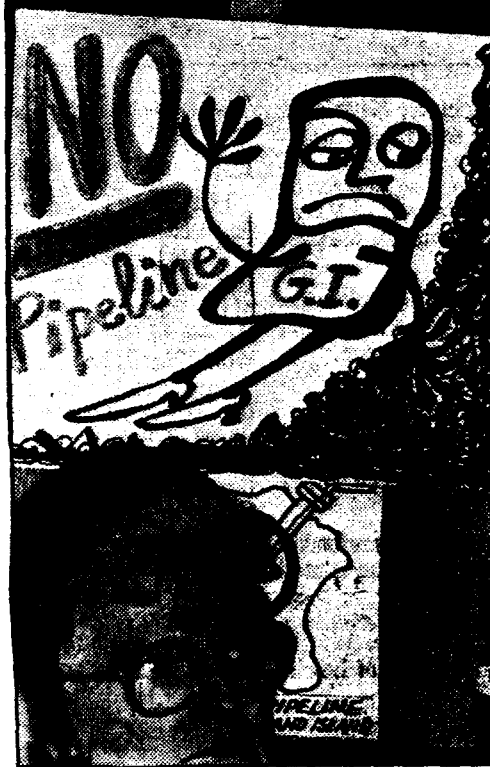
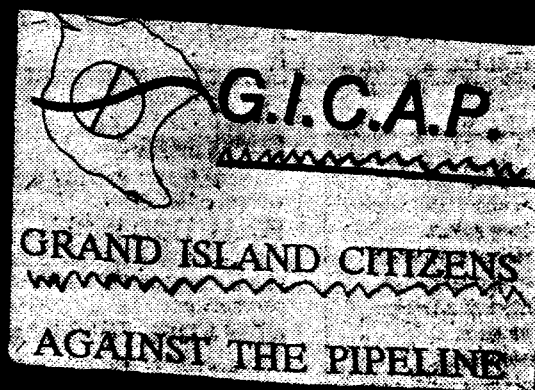
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