

Square Footage Cap – History & Context

The recent history of campus improvements was initiated in the 1970's with the creation of a campus master plan. The need for such planning resulted from the 1973 demolition of De La Salle Hall for seismic reasons. This 51,000 square foot building that opened in the fall of 1927 was the largest building on campus and included administrative offices, classrooms, laboratories, cafeteria, chapel, living quarters, and other facilities.

Since the creation of the original master plan in 1974, the evolution of planning and improvements has been a dynamic process with a complexity resulting from changing educational needs and programs as well as from limited construction funding resources. For each campus project, an application was submitted to the City of Albany for approval of the project and resulting changes to the master plan. Over time the approach has varied and the people have changed. And each time there has been a re-evaluation of the needs of the school, the master plan, and the impact on the community.

In 1994, the new approved Conditional Use Permit for conversion to a co-educational campus, a master plan for phased classroom replacements, and the construction of the auditorium/gymnasium, placed restrictions on enrollment and classroom square footage. The enrollment limitation was placed to allow for planning approval without the requirement of a full environmental impact study. The square footage cap limited the school to 90,675 square feet, resulting in a floor area ratio of approximately 18.5%. The 18.5% cap may be the most restrictive land use in the entire city.

In 1999, when Saint Mary's sought approval for the construction of the new Frates Hall classroom building, the City required a tabulation of the square footage of classroom space of the proposed building and future phases with the requirement that at the end of each and all phases, there would be no increase in the total amount of square footage. Thus, it was required that for each new square foot constructed, a corresponding square foot was to be removed. Because the first phase, Frates Hall, was in excess of the total, the City required as a condition of approval that Saint Mary's would remove the 3,032 square feet of space in excess of the 18.5% floor area ratio that would result from the construction of the new building. The City required that Saint Mary's identify what space would be removed. As Saint Mary's anticipated that the next projects would include music facilities and classrooms, Saint Mary's identified classroom 516, the snack bar, and the band pavilion.

Saint Mary's expressed concern to City staff about losing these facilities and the impacts on the future classroom phases. A request was made to retain them for student use and as temporary facilities during construction of future phases. Staff informed Saint Mary's that to retain the facilities it would have to submit a request for a modification to the 18.5% cap within one year of taking occupancy of Frates Hall. Also in 1999, during a Planning and Zoning Commission public hearing, Saint Mary's expressed its need to keep the facilities. Some commissioners reacted by inviting Saint Mary's to return to the Commission with an updated master plan of the square footage it needed.

In November 2002, Saint Mary's met with City staff to discuss modifying the 18.5% square footage cap. The City decided to hear only an application for allowing the retention of the excess 3,032 square feet.

In December 2002, within one year of occupancy of Frates Hall, Saint Mary's filed the application requesting the retention and continued use of the excess square footage and paid the City the one thousand dollar filing fee. The first public hearing took place in March of 2003; six additional public hearings followed.

In April 2005, finding no neighborhood impact, the Albany Planning & Zoning Commission approved the school's application.

In May 2005, thirteen neighbors appealed the Planning and Zoning Commission decision to the Council. On September 6, the council upheld their appeal to the extent that Saint Mary's may no longer use one classroom and the snack bar.

As required by the City, Saint Mary's has closed room 516 and the snack bar. As of September 19, these facilities will no longer be used until such time the City permits otherwise.