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Debate over future of 'Dinky' station in Princeton continues

March 3, 2012

By Bonnie Schultz, for NewsWorks

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Princeton University's planned move of the one-car train that shuttles passengers between Princeton and Princeton Junction continues to be a source of debate in Mercer County.

The Dinky is the nickname for the one-car NJ Transit train that shuttles between Princeton, which has no mainline train station, and Princeton Junction, a stop on the Northeast Corridor line.

The station is considered an important part of the community and is even registered as a historic site.

At a joint Borough and Township meeting last year, University officials presented a **development plan** for a new arts campus, which would mean moving the local station 460-feet to the south.

During the meeting, residents testified as to the economic benefits of the arts proposal, including construction jobs and the revenue generated for the community from the project.

Many other Princeton residents, however, oppose the move and feel the proposal would lower Dinky ridership, eventually leading to its demise. Some have even taken legal action against the plan. The citizen's group "**Save the Dinky**" is behind a pending lawsuit against the University over the move.

According to borough councilwoman Jenny Crumiller, members of the council felt at the time the economic benefits were worth the challenges of moving the station, but have since changed their minds.

In a series of hearings, a joint committee with members from Princeton Borough, Township and the University, came up with a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** to outline an agreement regarding the Dinky move that committed to several improvements, including; reopening the waiting room, increasing **University transit** service at the new station and a commitment to transportation in the future.

Crumiller herself made an impassioned speech at a meeting urging fellow members of the Borough council to vote against the MOU.

"The entire plan is misguided. The University is building a major new graduate housing development – expanding Hibben Magee when it should be building housing near the Dinky so people can walk into town and put the arts building near Carnegie Lake," she said in an interview later.

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"Setting it up so students can walk into town promotes walkable communities and is smart growth and smart planning. People from Hibben Magee now have to drive into town, contributing to congestion on Alexander Road."

Other residents feel the move is inconsequential compared to gaining the arts and transit neighborhood.

Dorothea Von Moltke, owner of Labyrinth Books, feels the new neighborhood would be an "exciting addition to the cultural life of Princeton."

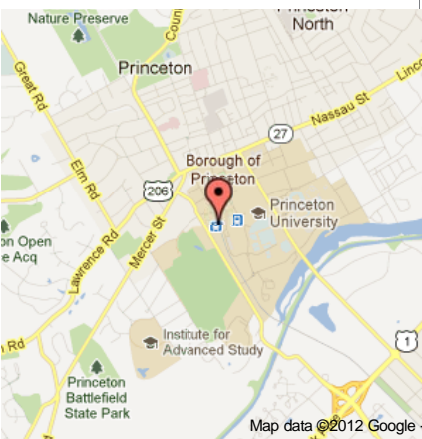
University officials say the ultimate goal is to improve the Dinky.

"The most important concept from the beginning of planning the arts neighborhood is to help sustain and improve the experience of riding the Dinky," Bob Durkee, University Vice President and Secretary said.

"Under our plan, there will be a new station, the existing WaWa will be integrated into the station and there will be more parking than there is now for people riding the Dinky. It will be a lively arts complex, there will be other retail space in the area, and the existing train buildings will be converted into restaurant space."

Durkee feels that it's important to note that "more than half the people riding the Dinky are associated with the University as members of faculty and staff, or visitors to the University, so we have a large stake in sustaining the Dinky."

At the most recent hearing last month, the Historical Sites Commission tabled the proposal to move the Dinky station until they could get a better understanding of the facts and legal issues surrounding the move.



The entire plan is misguided. The University is building a major new graduate housing development – expanding Hibben Magee when it should be building housing near the Dinky so people can walk into town and put the arts building near Carnegie Lake.
-- borough councilwoman Jenny Crumiller



The one-car "Dinky" as it leaves the Princeton station. Some residents oppose the Princeton University proposal to move the station, saying the action would lower ridership. (Bonnie Schultz/for NewsWorks)

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