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City officials, others rally against Everest College plan

By [Tom Daykin](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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A growing number of Common Council members are raising questions about for-profit Everest College's plans to develop a campus in downtown Milwaukee.

Whether those concerns can be used to deny zoning approval for Everest is questionable.

Developer Dan Druml is renovating buildings in an area bordered by W. McKinley Ave., W. Vliet St., N. 6th St. and N. 8th St. to create a campus for Everest, which is owned by Santa Ana, Calif.-based Corinthian Colleges Inc.

The Redevelopment Authority in November approved an \$11 million [bond issue](#) to help finance building renovations for Everest, which would offer vocational courses.

Druml's investment group, not the city, is responsible for repaying the debt to the bond purchasers. The bonds would be issued through the authority, which makes them tax-exempt and allows Druml to pay a lower interest rate to investors who buy the bonds.

The development was headed to the Board of Zoning Appeals for what appeared to be routine approval on a special use permit. But Ald. Milele Coggs, whose district includes the proposed Everest campus, asked the board to delay acting so she could review the proposal.

Coggs and five other Common Council members are now scheduled to be among those attending a news conference opposing Everest's development plan.

That event, scheduled for noon Wednesday at City Hall, will include Aldermen Willie Hines, Nik Kovac, Willie Wade, Ashanti Hamilton and Tony Zielinski. Other speakers include state Sen. Spencer Coggs (D-Milwaukee), who is Milele Coggs' uncle; Wendell Harris, of the NAACP's Milwaukee branch; and Primitivo Torres, of Voces de la Frontera.

Hines, who is council president, said there are "too many unanswered questions" about

Corinthian's record. Corinthian schools have been [sued](#) by students who claim they were misled about whether their credits would transfer to other schools, the accreditation status of their school, or their ability to find work after graduating.

In a California case, the state attorney general's office alleged that Corinthian officials persuaded people to enroll in classes and take out school loans by overstating how many students got jobs after taking the courses, according to the Los Angeles Times. Corinthian officials settled the case without admitting wrongdoing, with the settlement including a \$6.5 million payment to the State of California.

Corinthian serves about 100,000 students annually, and the lawsuits amount to a relative "handful" of complaints, said Paul De Giusti, the company's vice president of legislative affairs.

"We try to do whatever we can to provide a quality education to our students," he said.

The Corinthian/Everest plan for downtown Milwaukee also is drawing criticism from Michael Rosen, head of the union that represents Milwaukee Area Technical College teachers. MATC, at its nearby downtown campus, offers programs similar to what Everest would provide. Rosen called Everest "the educational equivalent of payday loan cashing outfits."

But the [zoning board](#) may be limited in how much of the criticism it can consider in making a decision on issuing a special use permit for Everest.

City ordinances define a special use as one that is generally acceptable in a particular zoning district but also requires a case-by-case review. The zoning board is supposed to make sure the proposed use doesn't generate any adverse impacts.

That includes whether the use will protect public health, safety and welfare; whether other property in the neighborhood will be hurt; whether adequate steps will be taken to provide safe pedestrian and vehicle access; and whether the use is consistent with the city's comprehensive plan.

The zoning board hearing is scheduled for 7:45 p.m. Thursday at City Hall. The board might choose to issue its ruling at a later date after listening to testimony. If the board denies a special use permit, Everest can appeal that ruling to the Milwaukee County Circuit Court.