ALFRED -- A proposal by Alfred University President Edward Coll to move AU-connected fraternities off Main Street and on campus appeared popular with the more than 100 residents who attended Tuesday's public forum.

The forum, at the Union University Church Center, was designed to address both present problems and future growth.

One of the most nagging contemporary issues, as evinced by lengthy discussion Tuesday, is zoning — particularly how multi-person dwellings, especially fraternities, can co-exist peacefully with family residences.

It was the permit request to build an 11-room addition on an Elm Street fraternity that sparked the residents' call for a public forum and a six-month moratorium on any new construction of, or additions to present, multi-person dwellings.

A public hearing on the issue of the Elm Street fraternity expansion will be held at 7:45 p.m. May 24 at the Alfred fire hall.

Coll acknowledged there is strife between the downtown fraternities and their residential neighbors; "It's just not working," he said. The fraternities "think the neighbors are hassling them because they can't have their parties all the time."

Meanwhile, residents had their own complaints. "When the fraternities on Main Street get going," said resident Mario Prisco, people have to content with the "noise, the traffic across the street, the beer and the frisbees."
said resident Mario Frisco, people have to content with the “noise, the traffic across the street, the beer and the frisbees.”

The fear among residents, he said, is that the downtown deterioration will “rise to the lower expectations ... so that the next group that comes in realizes that trash is the norm.”

In lieu of the difficulties, Coll said, the university is considering asking its seven downtown fraternities and sororities to move to a special area on campus.

The two key factors: “Money and willingness,” he said.

The Greek houses must first agree to move, because they own titles to their downtown properties, he said. Secondly, the university has to come up with about $500,000 to finance the relocation, which could involve building new houses or moving present structures.

“It all boils down to money. None of this stuff is cheap,” he said.

The picture is not as clear for Alfred State College, which has students in three downtown fraternities.

College President John Hunter said his school does not have access to money to finance a similar relocation project. Instead, he said, “we could pressure fraternities and sororities with our influence, on the need for better relations with the village.” But, Hunter added, “I really don’t think the situation is quite as bleak as it may be painted.”

Officials from both the university and college said they have no legal controls over the downtown fraternities. Both Coll and Hunter pledged their support for future action by the village to alleviate what Hunter called the “town-gown” problem.

One upcoming piece of village legislation calls for the creation of an “education zone” in the village. Planning board member Roger Freeman said the proposed zoning amendment would require new

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fraternities or sororities to be housed in the zone of institution-owned land.

The proposed creation of the education and research-and-development zones will be examined at a June 13 public hearing.

There was some debate as to whether fraternities or the student body were responsible for all of the cited problems.

At least one resident — former village trustee Herbert Ehrig — felt the Greeks alone weren't the cause for all the problems. "I don't think you can blame everything on the fraternities, although they're not blameless, certainly."

"I don't think students are our enemy," said the Rev. Leon Wheeler, pastor of the Alfred Seventh Day Baptist Church. "I try to think as a student would, what it would be like if I lived in Alfred, and I find that I'm not respected a whole lot if I live downtown."

A number of residents, including a student, said shabby downtown housing only encouraged more unsightliness. "If the rest of the properties aren't kept up in the village, certainly the fraternities and sororities won't," said Donald King, AU's vice president for student affairs.

But resident Daniel Rase indicated another cause for problems: alcohol.

Noting that most Alfred State students are under the legal drinking age of 21, Rase asked Hunter, "How come I see so many Ag-Tech students plastered out of their minds?"

"I think that's the root of a lot of the problems in Alfred. It's a 21-year-old drinking age, but you have to be blind not to see 18, 19, 20 year-olds consuming alcohol like it's going out of style."

Hunter agreed, saying alcohol is the most serious problem facing colleges today. "Unlike 10, 12, 15 years ago, many of (the students) are coming to us with alcohol experience" from high school and junior high school.