SGA hosts first ever town hall meeting

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The Student Government Association conducted its first Town Hall meeting and covered student grievances about parking, campus safety, SGA transparency and sexual harassment allegations.

Students turned in questions anonymously to SGA President Chandler Harris on index cards, the first of which asked why SGA has remained silent in wake of sexual harassment allegations against University of Louisiana at Lafayette President Joseph Savoie by two former UL Lafayette softball players.

“The reason why we, as an SGA, have stayed quiet is because the University of Louisiana system, the system above (UL Lafayette), is currently conducting an investigation. It’s now being taken out of the hand of the university and into the hands of someone else,” Harris said. “Further on, we can decide together, as an SGA, our stance on it.”

The majority of the questions covered at the meeting were about student parking, particularly the recent enforcement of ticketing vehicles until 9 p.m. on campus if the driver doesn’t have a night pass, whereas in previous semesters, ticketing was enforced until 5 p.m.

SGA Treasurer Reece Walker said he is meeting with the Office of Parking and Transit this week to discuss student questions and complaints.

“The rule is nothing new, it’s been around since 2011...This semester is just the first time they are enforcing it,” Walker said, adding those with on-campus parking passes have to move to another parking zone, such as the Oliver Parking Tower, after 3 p.m., while those who park at Cajun Field have to pay for a $25 parking pass.

Education Senator Dylan Hebert said the new enforcement comes in wake of new on-campus construction and lack of parking space.

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"With the construction on Louis Street, they lost 500-plus parking spots," Hebert said, "(Parking and Transit) has the authority to enforce their pass as late as it goes, and it sucks for us, because we're not used to it...It's generous that they do it till 9 p.m. because if they wanted to they could do it all night if they really wanted to."

A student spoke from the audience and asked SGA why the university decided to build a luxury apartment complex instead of use funding to improve student parking.

"I'm just curious why UL thought it was necessary to build luxury apartments instead of a parking tower," the student said.

Jacob Lemeunier, the SGA Chief of Staff, said it is within the university's best interest to build the luxury apartments.

"Our university is growing right now; we're trying to become the best university in the state...In the future we will have more parking towers, we will have more luxury apartments and more people will want to come here. That money inflow will be coming in the future," Lemeunier said.

Education President Ally Domangue raised concerns for student safety at night without nearby parking, as she said the nighttime shuttles are unreliable.

"I know people who have waited for over two hours for the shuttle because they just don't answer the phone. I know girls who have waited for two hours at Bourgeois...and I end up driving them back to campus," Domangue said.

University College President Adelai Lynch said she doesn't feel safe walking to her car on campus after dark.

"I don't have time during the day to move my car to campus even if I paid the $25. I really don't like that the lights (at Cajun Field) get turned off...I really do think that we need cameras because I don't feel comfortable walking through the parking lot," Lynch said.

Hebert told the senators to seek a UL Lafayette Police Department escort if they feel unsafe, as that service is available to students.

"The police do escorts to vehicles. You can call them and they'll bring you at any time of day, and I promise you they're not doing a whole lot," Hebert said, adding he knows the ULPD officers well and meant they would be willing to help.

Harris said even if SGA can't answer the questions students have at the Town Hall meetings, they will do their best to find answers after the meeting.