

Fall Forum Q&As

September 18, 2008

University Union Potomac Lounge

Q: The campus construction is exciting, but the one thing that confuses me is the arena development. The Towson Center is old and outdated. The new arena is exciting. Maybe we should consider more seats. Five thousand seats may not be enough as we continue to grow. Should we spend the money now to increase seating rather than later?

A: We are still in the early stages of design and will consider all options for expanding seating capacity within the limits of the program and budget. We don't sell out our current capacity, which is approximately 4,500 seats. Capacity in the new arena will be able to go up with other events like Commencement. One of our major goals for the new arena is to have a full house at sporting events.

Q: During the presentation, I was dismayed not to hear a single mention about bike paths. The current conditions are hazardous. We need good sidewalks, bike paths, and bike racks on campus.

A: The university is just beginning a nine-month process to update its campus master plan, and as part of that process we will be revisiting the 2003 master plan recommendation for a bike path system on campus. To date no formal bike path lanes have been established; however, bike use on campus is encouraged and all riders should follow the accepted "rules of the road." Currently, the university is in the process of adding substantially more bike racks across campus. These additional racks should be in place by Thanksgiving. Also, the CLA Building will include showering facilities for bike riders.

Q: Do you have any plans for Residence Tower? There are many problems due to the age of the building.

A: University administrators are rethinking the campus housing strategy. In the 2003 master plan it was recommended that the Residence Tower be demolished and redeveloped as an open green space on campus. However, based on a high demand for on-campus housing, it has been decided that Residence Tower should be kept as part of the campus housing stock. In addition, a comprehensive renovation of the facility has been included in the ten-year capital improvement program.

Q: Are there any more plans for a monorail system?

A: Facilities Management has superficially studied this concept. The West Virginia University campus is an example, but our campus is much less sprawling. Based on early analysis, cost is very prohibitive. Is the monorail really a green benefit? Will it actually reduce vehicular use?

Q: Please tell us about the proposed overpass for West Village to the main campus.

A: There is a signaled cross walk there now. It seems to work okay, but it is inconvenient to wait for the signal, and it can be unsafe. The topography is difficult to work with relative to a bridge or tunnel. The Enrollment Services side is elevated and the baseball field side is low, so it makes it hard to create a bridge to connect both sides without having the pedestrians walk up or down many stairs. We are investigating all the options. Making the street -level crossing more pedestrian-friendly is another option we are studying.

Q: Will the parking lot by Van Bokkelen always be only for handicapped permits?

A: As of now, yes. This area is also available to department guests who have been issued a pay station visitor code.

Q: Faculty and staff parking costs are enormous. The average cost of parking according to the presentation is \$200-300, but that is grossly less than what I and my colleagues pay. Faculty tend to make higher salaries so they are affected more than staff, who bring the average salary down.

A: Parking costs are determined by salary and based on a sliding scale. There was a university decision in 2001 that parking would be based on salary. That has carried through. It's been reviewed recently and the decision was made that we would stick to that plan.

Q: We would like a re-evaluation of the parking permit salary scale. There are more people in the upper levels than lower levels as salaries increase each year.

A: The scale is reviewed each year by the administration. At this point the decision was made to retain the current ranges. Keep in mind that Parking and Transportation Services is a self-support operation, which means the department does not receive funding from the state or tuition. Therefore, any change in ranges that might affect overall revenue would likely result in higher rates within a range in order to cover expenses.

Q: Are there any significant renovations coming up?

A: The next major academic capital project is the Smith Hall expansion and renovation. Part of this project will involve tearing down Linthicum Hall and redeveloping it with the expansion building. Upcoming auxiliary renovation projects include the comprehensive renovation of Newell and Richmond Halls, and the conversion of Ward and West Halls into a new counseling and health center, respectively.

Q: Hybrid vehicles take up just as much parking space as other cars, and the batteries aren't environmentally-friendly.

A: The hybrid program is one of many initiatives geared toward reducing the university's carbon footprint; its main goal was not to reduce parking demand. We have to start somewhere, and this is just one part of our Traffic Demand Management program, similar to how the government has tax credits for hybrids.

Q: Has the university considered Park-n-Rides as an option to reduce commuter traffic?

A: In the future we will likely offer financial incentives to carpoolers. As part of this initiative, we are looking into Park-n-Rides close by for commuters coming from the Pennsylvania and Timonium areas. We've hired a Traffic Demand Management (TDM) manager this year, who will look specifically into TDM initiatives.

Q: How many of the capital projects planned will actually happen considering the economic times?

A: The CLA phase II construction funding in the amount of \$74 million is the university's major capital funding priority in the 2009 legislative session. We are going to focus on that this year. Any of the USM capital projects in the 5-year budget has the potential to be delayed or deferred based on state economic and budget factors. CLA phase II has already been funded for design.

Q: Is HR considering a 4-day work week to go along with other green initiatives? What about alternate scheduling?

A: The USM has asked all institutions to make a telecommuting plan, so yes we are looking into it. There are a lot of considerations to be made. The bottom line is that operations have to continue regardless of the work schedule.

Q: Are all of the new recycling bins in place?

A: Not currently; however we are in the process of procuring and installing them. All 2,700+ containers and the associated signage will be in place by January 1, 2009.

Q: Can we have the dirt path behind Glen Towers paved to make it safer?

A: No, the university has designated the Glen as an area for conservation. As an alternate route, individuals might try using the existing paved and lit path behind the Glen Towers that goes to the 7800 York Road Building. This path is designated for pedestrian use, especially during the evening for safety purposes.

Q: Students are walking into the parking lot in front of Enrollment Services because of the new West Village housing, creating vehicular issues.

A: Facilities Management is aware of this issue, and we are in the process of developing a plan of improvements to address the pedestrian-vehicle conflict. We intend to have improvements in place by the end of the semester.