Towson University is updating its master plan and has begun that process by meeting with internal and external focus groups. The University has retained Ayers Saint Gross, a local planning and architectural firm with national and international higher education experience, to develop the plan update as it has done in 2003 and 2009. The following is a summary of the comments received from the focus groups meetings and collected into broad themes:

- Academic Space
- On-Campus Housing
- Student Life
- Athletics
- Roads, Transportation, and Parking
- Pedestrian Experience and Campus Legibility
- Sustainability and Stewardship
- Infrastructure
- Presence in the Community
- Community Issues

If any of the comments need to be clarified, please contact Kris Phillips, Director of Planning, at kphillips@towson.edu.

**Academic Space**

Note: In addition to the focus group meetings, a detailed space analysis will be performed in the context of the master plan update in order to clarify and streamline our understanding of space needs. The following points are based on general, cross-departmental discussions. More detailed departmental needs will be highlighted upon completion of the space analysis phase.

1. Multiple internal focus groups suggested the need for larger, more flexible classroom (50+) and lab (24-30) space for future growth. Capacity and square footage requirements will be further vetted through ongoing detailed space analysis.
2. Large lecture halls, large meeting spaces (75+), medium training spaces (40+) for computer-based learning and large training spaces (200-225) were suggested by internal focus groups. Capacity and square footage requirements will be further vetted through ongoing detailed space analysis.
3. Collaborative delivery methods and more personalized learning needs to be supported in classroom infrastructure, even as more students are accommodated.
4. Additional meeting space for instruction is desired.
5. Future building projects should include consolidated departmental faculty offices with integrated collaborative/meeting spaces.
6. Distribution of quality and quantity of instructional spaces is unbalanced amongst departments. Strategic renovation of existing spaces and structures to achieve parity and cohesiveness are desired.
7. Additional collaborative alternative learning spaces within existing spaces were requested.
8. College of Business and Economics requested to move out of Stephens Hall and into a new building.

**On-Campus Housing**

1. Increasing on-campus housing is strongly supported by students, staff, faculty, administration, and surrounding neighborhoods. Housing types should reflect differing user-group needs. Ideally, all students, including transfer students and graduate students, should be given the opportunity to live on-campus.
2. Towson University fraternities and sororities currently represent approximately 12% of the undergraduate population and contribute significantly to campus social life. Dedicated Greek housing was suggested by many focus group attendees, including Greek system members, other students, staff and the surrounding neighborhoods. While free-standing houses are the traditional model for such housing, other models may be considered. Funding sources are uncertain.
3. Housing and Residence Life indicated that they have maintained and increased the percentage of full time students housed on campus since 2002 and they expect to continue in the future. In the West Village, 700 new on-campus beds are under construction. Once completed, renovations of the older on-campus housing stock are scheduled over the next few years while maintaining and increasing the number of available beds.
4. The 2009 master plan evaluated several available sites for additional on-campus housing. Striving to increase the percentage of students housed, the 2015 master plan will reexamine the housing capacity of the campus in relation to the projected enrollments and propose additional locations for on-campus housing.

**Student Life**

1. The University Union was consistently cited as undersized, overcrowded and outdated by students, faculty and staff. There is significant support for improvement and expansion. Program space in an expanded union would be in high demand and could include revenue producing venues, student services and student extracurricular groups were listed as possible occupants.
2. Several internal focus groups identified a grass-roots interest in the creation of an Interfaith or Spiritual Center.
3. Dedicated space for between-class commuters could also be incorporated in the union expansion.
4. With 250 student organizations, after-hours meeting space is lacking for student groups, particularly for groups of 50+. Also, student dance troops require specialized spaces. Reserving meeting space for student groups is a reoccurring issue.

5. Many groups asked if the university would consider communal use of existing academic classroom spaces at evening hours in lieu of creating dedicated student group meeting space.

6. Student Life felt a large 1,500 seat venue space would be well used.

7. Student services are currently housed across campus and lack visibility. In particular, programs in the Administration Building feel too remote. Consolidating student services in the campus core and increasing visibility was suggested in multiple internal focus groups (e.g. Career Center, Civic Engagement, Disability Support Services, Veterans Services, and other student services).

8. The West Village Commons was intended to be a satellite union, however it has operated more as a meeting and conference center due to its adjacency to the West Village parking deck. Students tend to travel to the core of campus and remain there throughout the day. West Village Commons has not provided significant relief to the overcrowding in the union.

Athletics

1. Vehicular access to athletics precinct is hindered by the loop-road configuration of Auburn Drive.

2. Repeated observations were made about student pedestrian access to the athletics precinct from the heart of campus needing improvement. The current path is made of narrow, discontinuous sidewalks routed around the back of the CFA and culminates in a busy at-grade crossing at Osler. While it is not far from the campus core, the lack of a strong pedestrian connection isolates the athletics precinct from the rest of campus.

3. The Athletics Department envisions increased student involvement, making Athletics central to student life at Towson. Indoor practice, outdoor practice and game-day facilities need expansion and improvement to keep pace with this vision and peer institutions.

4. The athletics precinct currently feels isolated from the rest of campus. Precinct studies should consider best use of land and diversifying programming to create an active, integrated community.

5. Improve community connectivity with improved way-finding, directional signage, and entry points.

6. Improve campus lighting near athletic precinct.

7. Athletics indicated that they want to find ways to increase opportunities for neighboring communities to use facilities.

Roads, Transportation and Parking

1. Density of pedestrian and vehicular traffic along perimeter county roads creates a potential for incidents. The corner of Burke and York, the athletics precinct crossing at Osler and the full extent of Cross...
Campus Dr., particularly at pedestrian crossings, are major points of congestion and concern.

2. Campus vehicular egress and ingress points are strained. Left-turn access onto campus for York Road is worsening congestion. The intersection at Burke and York is congested at close of day. Limiting vehicular access along Cross Campus Dr. at certain times of day could alleviate some of the strain.

3. Examining a different approach to roadway infrastructure, augmenting pedestrian and bicycling experience is a low-cost, high-impact method to aiding traffic mitigation.

4. There is significant interest from Towson University’s internal community, the greater surrounding community, and local leaders to integrate bicycle routes onto and around campus. As part of the 2015 master plan update, the university will evaluate the process of establishing Towson University as a bike friendly university as developed by the League of American Bicyclists. In addition, there were suggestions from the university to tie into the Baltimore County master plan and the Towson Bike Beltway.

5. Several focus groups noted confusion regarding parking availability during peak demand. Despite carrying a parking surplus, there is the perception that the campus lacks parking and that garages are filled daily. Real-time signage or zoned permitting may alleviate frustration.

6. Parking signage is unclear. The parking policy for after-hours visitors is unclear which limits participation by the surrounding community to attend cultural or sporting events on campus.

7. Student parking in the neighborhood continues to be a source of tension.

**Pedestrian Experience and Campus Legibility**

1. The Glen is a natural amenity of the campus but its deep swale results in a path with numerous steps. Ideally, a bridge would connect the Cross Campus parking deck to the core.

2. Handicap access to campus facilities remains challenging, due to topographic changes across campus (e.g. Access to the Center for the Arts from the Osler parking Deck, crossing the Glen, crossing Cross Campus Dr. to the Administration Building). Although attention has been given to creating accessible walkways on campus, there is a feeling that the overall length of routes presents a significant challenge. This is seen as a major impediment to visitor and alumni experience.

3. Challenging path systems contribute to visitor confusion. While some focus group participants thought campus signage and pedestrian and vehicular map kiosks were lacking, others thought that environmental design measures could sufficiently address and orient visitors in a more intuitive manner. Parking for first time visitors was noted by several groups to confusing and not welcoming.

4. It was suggested that campus safety could be further improved by environmental design measures, such as improved lighting on pedestrian walkways and selective tree maintenance to enhance visibility.
5. The pedestrian bridge connecting the West Village to the heart of campus has been successful and well-received by the university community as well as the community at large.

6. Academic, administrative, university boards, and business groups recommended stronger design standards to help identify and tie campus buildings together and to create an improved sense of place.

Sustainability and Stewardship

1. Preserving campus green space is seen as extremely important by Towson University students, staff, faculty, and the surrounding communities. Several focus groups suggested that the Glen be put into a conservation zone. As part of the campus master plan, Forest Conservation zones will be identified.

2. The small campus feel of Towson was repeatedly mentioned by faculty, staff, and students as one of the university’s greatest attributes and major attractors.

3. Internal groups emphasized that building footprint, scale and materiality of buildings, and scale of exterior spaces should support the historic feel of campus.

4. Stormwater management strategies require review and updating. Strategies for localized treatment and absorption of rainwater need to be developed to support future growth. Stormwater management and forest preservation strategies need to be studied within the scope of the master plan update.

Infrastructure

1. Several older buildings on campus do not adequately address the needs of the departments housed within. Consideration of existing building stock potential and strategic renovation is important and could make older buildings an asset rather than a hindrance. Multiple buildings were cited as potentially aged past their useful lifespan (e.g. Annex, Media Center, Linthicum, Psychology, and Hawkins). Other buildings were identified as needing facility investment (residential towers).

2. Building servicing and emergency access are limited by land-locked buildings and the absence of a continuous on-campus roadway. Use of pedestrian walkways by various facilities, campus police, and off-campus vendors creates potential for incidents if not managed properly.

3. Existing below grade infrastructure locations are unclear. Identification of existing and planning for future below grade infrastructure corridors should be considered to the full extent possible. In particular, establishing a utility loop through central campus is important to support future growth and infrastructure. Utility distribution boxes have been haphazard in placement to date.

4. Attendees suggested a larger warehouse facility could include expanded shop storage, incoming and outgoing deliveries and university print shop currently housed across campus.
Presence in the Community

1. Many campus edges lack definition and do not reflect the quality of Towson University as an institution. Better marking of campus borders, definition of thresholds and beautification of surrounding streetscapes is desirable. Additional campus gateways will also be considered as part of the master plan update.

2. The opportunity to build connections between neighboring institutions exists, particularly with St. Joseph’s Medical Center as part of the University of Maryland Medical System.

3. Towson University and downtown Towson can each benefit from proximity. The location of community outreach programs in downtown Towson, such as the Wellness Center, the Hussman Center for Adults with Autism, and WTMD have been successful to date. Future location of appropriate university programs within the heart of the community can strengthen ties and be beneficial to both the university and the community.

4. The Towson business community is eager to see the university create a stronger physical link to downtown. The current pedestrian route between campus and downtown is challenging. In particular, the corner of York and Burke presents a missed opportunity for increased connectivity. This corner was mentioned by multiple focus groups as a point of particular pedestrian vulnerability.

5. Multiple university focus groups indicated that the campus is too internally focused. Visitor experience is diminished by wayfinding difficulties and the lack of parking near venues.

6. A Welcome Center/Alumni House would strengthen prospective student, visitor and alumni experience. Additionally, university relations groups cited a need for formal gathering spaces that could be housed in such a facility.

Community Issues

1. Meetings with Community Relations, which have occurred monthly over the last five years and comprised of community representatives, Baltimore County representatives, business groups, and the university in an effort to keep all parties informed about university events, problems which need to be addressed, and discuss ways to meet mutual objectives. During the focus group sessions, it was requested that the groups should be given construction project updates on a quarterly basis and the representatives should actively report back to their communities through their neighborhood newsletters.

2. Light spill from campus fixtures shining into adjacent residential neighborhoods, particularly from parking structures and athletic fields, is an issue for adjacent communities. The parking structure lighting has recently been upgraded with energy efficient LED light fixtures on motion detectors. It was noted by the university that the previous fixtures gave off a yellow tint but with higher foot candles all the time. The new fixtures are a white light which may appear brighter but uses fewer foot candles, provided setbacks and improved energy use. The university plans to examine the situation by assessing light spill while maintaining safe light levels.
3. Community groups also discussed light spill from Unitas Stadium during early morning and late evening weekday hours and non-event times. The university will include this area in light spill assessment.

4. Amplified noise from Unitas Stadium is a concern for adjacent communities. Neighbors sited the 10 decibel increase in the university sound policy and the existing low frequency sound traveling from the stadium to the community as an ongoing issue.

5. Student and event parking in neighborhoods strains neighborhood relations. Many adjacent neighborhoods have instituted permit parking which has helped.

6. It was suggested in one community meeting that Towson University could partner with county park and ride facilities to shift parking to the perimeter of the community and run a university shuttle bus to these lots. Additional park and ride lots could be created as well.

7. The surrounding neighborhoods would appreciate university support to curb student rentals in single family homes.

8. There is concern that additional enrollment growth puts strain on surrounding infrastructure, particularly when coupled with growth of downtown Towson. Although, Towson University has not increased enrollment projections from the 2003 master plan. The community has requested traffic studies of the surrounding roadway infrastructure.

9. Increasing on-campus housing to the full extent possible is strongly supported by surrounding neighborhoods to mitigate impact of student housing in the community. There is concern that increases in student housing are not keeping pace with enrollment growth. In reality, the university has maintained and slightly increased the percentage of full time undergraduate students housed on-campus since 2002.

10. There is general anxiety surrounding private, off-campus residential developments catering to Towson students. There is a perception the housing will create additional disruption in the community in terms of both student behavior and traffic density.

11. Both the university and neighboring communities recognize the need to improve Towsontown Blvd. The university expressed concern due to environmental impact of relocating the exiting Towson Run culvert and stream bed.

12. Community groups requested to partner with the university on a reforestation plan to add trees within neighborhoods for improved community green space.

13. Community groups expressed interest in attending university events but felt events could be better publicized.

14. An adjacent neighborhood requested a buffer zone be created by pushing intensive uses away from shared perimeter with adjoining residential areas. Neighbors suggested an improved buffer zone may reduce noise and light issues.