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Plan for University of Kentucky could bring road closures, new buildings

Published: April 27, 2013



Construction continued Friday on the new Woodland Glen I dormitory on Woodland Avenue near the W.T. Young Library. UK is increasing the number of on-campus beds from 5,000 to 9,000.

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By Linda B. Blackford — lblackford@herald-leader.com

The University of Kentucky is an urban, landlocked campus where every decision about building or planning can ripple into the community for years to come.

So as UK planners work on a new master plan to guide campus growth in the coming decade, the questions are both general and specific: How can UK protect and expand green space while constructing more buildings? How will new student housing patterns affect Lexington traffic? What if Rose Street were closed and turned into a pedestrian space?

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"We focused to a large extent on UK within the broader community," said Bob Wiseman, UK's vice president for facilities.

UK hired Sasaki and Associates, an architecture firm from Boston that has worked on master planning at campuses all over the country. They called UK's issues particularly complicated, given its location in central Lexington.

"It's been a very complex plan because there are so many different components," said Mary Anne Ocampo, an urban designer with Sasaki, who got her undergraduate architecture degree at UK.

The master plan, which still includes a variety of options and alternatives, is posted online and will continue to change in coming months. Administrators hope to bring most of its major ideas to the UK Board of Trustees this fall, presenting a blueprint that focuses on new construction, new green space and opportunities to save many old buildings rather than tear them down.

The proposals incorporate building plans already underway, such as new dorms on Cooperstown Drive, Euclid Avenue and Huguelet Drive; a renovated business school; and a new science building on Rose Street. Those projects have been financed and are either under construction or in design phases.

Other proposed ideas include:

- Closing or restricting traffic on Rose, which dead ends just short of South Limestone and gets a great deal of foot traffic from students.

The plan also looks at significantly slowing traffic on South Upper as it merges into South Limestone, possibly by closing part of South Upper near where the future Newtown Park Extension will connect with South Limestone.

- Enhancing pedestrian pathways that already naturally exist on campus. For example, Ocampo pointed out a natural but unmarked corridor through campus between Memorial Coliseum and Funkhouser Hall, both buildings designed by Ernst Johnson, the UK architect who designed many of the school's most iconic buildings between 1938 and 1950.

"It is a walkway that could be strengthened" with trees and other low-cost landscaping, she said.

Another pedestrian walkway could be created between Memorial Hall and the W.T. Young Library, turning a small parking lot into green space.

- Accommodating fewer surface parking lots with expanded bus service and a new transit center at Commonwealth Stadium, where many students and employees already park.

- Creating a new road that would skirt a new complex of student housing known as Cooperstown. The road would start at Woodland Avenue near Columbia Avenue, curve around the housing complex, and empty onto Cooper Drive by some of the athletic facilities, or possibly continue behind Commonwealth Stadium to Alumni Drive. This would allow the university to reduce or eliminate traffic on Woodland and Hilltop Avenue in front of the library.

- Replacing fraternities on Hilltop with a south campus student center. A new "Greek Park" could be located on Rose Lane, which is already home to many fraternities and sororities.

"We love the concept," said Woodford Hoagland, vice president of the UK Interfraternity Council. "We want to see it happen because a lot of fraternities that deserve houses don't have them, and it would be more centralized, with people in a community. Moving closer together would be a perfect solution to everything."

- Building a new high school, possibly behind the Taylor Education School near the intersection of Upper and Limestone. Plans are already under way for the school, a joint venture between UK and the Fayette County Public Schools.

"We have been looking for a home for the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) on or adjacent to the campus for several months and had asked for this to be put on the UK plan as a possibility

depending on the outcome of our search," said Fayette schools spokeswoman Lisa Deffendall. "We appreciate UK setting aside land in the master planning process for our exciting new partnership. We are still in the very early stages of planning and determining a permanent location."

The school district would pay for construction.

- Extending campus farther north of Euclid closer to downtown. The proposal shows new housing, retail and other developments stretching along South Limestone from Maxwell Street to High Street. For example, a hotel and conference center might someday occupy the land where Good Samaritan Hospital now sits, but not until construction of UK's new medical complex is finished.

"We want to keep Limestone active from UK all the way to downtown," Wiseman said.

Last year, the city commissioned urban planner Omar Blaik to do a study of town-gown possibilities, focusing on commercial corridors that link downtown with UK, Transylvania University and the Bluegrass Community and Technical College, which is moving to the old Eastern State Hospital site at Fourth Street and Newtown Pike.

UK declined to hire Blaik for its master plan, but Sasaki's plan would move UK's growth further north into downtown, a key recommendation made by Blaik.

Derek Paulsen, the city's commissioner of planning, said he has put money into his budget to bring Blaik back to further study the best ways to accommodate students and residents along Limestone and Euclid.

A major strength of those streets is that businesses along them are supported by townspeople when students leave for the summer, Paulsen said.

"For the Limestone and Euclid corridors, if they're going to survive they have to work for neighborhoods and students," Paulsen said. "That's not in UK's expertise, and that's what we want to get Omar to talk about."

Neighborhood tension

Given constant tensions between UK and its nearby neighborhoods, UK administrators have tried in recent months to include a wide variety of perspectives in the master plan process. They have held 50 meetings so far with neighborhood associations and other interested groups, in addition to conducting a survey of the UK community.

"UK is making an unprecedented effort to reach out to the public and incorporate public opinion," said Dan Rowland, a retired UK faculty member and longtime neighborhood activist. "That's a step forward."

City officials also have played an active role in the process.

"I am at least happy they've given us a seat at the table," Paulsen said. "We're so close together, there's a lot of potential that hasn't been tapped."

Regarding ideas within the plan, Paulsen said any road closures would have to be studied and discussed by city traffic engineers before they could be enacted.

"I think closing Rose makes a lot of sense, it's so heavily trafficked with students," Paulsen said. "The one that would be more interesting would be Woodland," which many people use as a cut-through across UK's campus.

As for a new road around Cooperstown, "it's a big jog around, and a bigger discussion, but we will be happy to talk."

Hollywood Terrace resident Amy Clark is not so sanguine.

She said the university should not approve a "massive increase" in the number of students living along Cooperstown without first working with city traffic planners to make the area safer for pedestrians.

"My neighbors and I are very concerned about the Cooperstown Bypass," said Clark, noting that the road would empty onto Woodland near an existing stoplight at Columbia.

It is "hard to picture how you could safely have two intersections and all their turning options there with the many pedestrians and cyclists," she said.

Clark and others also are concerned about student housing in general, which has always been a big issue at UK. With limited student housing on campus, many surrounding neighborhoods have transformed as student renters replace families.

UK is trying to address that issue by increasing the number of beds on campus from 5,000 to 9,000. But Clark is concerned that newly built dorms will be too expensive, sending more students into neighborhoods.

"Tearing down our older dorms to build new is too expensive," she said. "Only affordable campus housing will relieve overcrowding in the neighborhoods nearest UK."

Next school year, a room in a newly built dorm will cost from \$3,325 to \$4,988 per semester, the same as other "premium" dorms. Annual rate increases in the new dorms would be limited to 3 percent.

Wiseman said community meetings on the plan will continue through the spring and summer; for example, he's doing a walking tour of campus with a group of historic preservationists next week.

Learn more

Information on the process and the plan can be found at www.uky.edu/EVPFA/Facilities/MasterPlan/

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UK's future campus?

This map from the University of Kentucky's proposed master plan shows one possible future for the campus.



- ① **New student center:** The proposed building would provide student amenities on the south campus. Fraternities now located on the Hilltop Drive site would move.
- ② **Greek Park:** A proposed area along Rose Lane for fraternity and sorority buildings.
- ③ **New residence halls:** Dorms are under construction on Huguelet Drive, Euclid Ave. and Cooperstown Drive; dorms are proposed for North Limestone, near the Kirwan-Blanding complex and possibly Maxwell and High streets.
- ④ **Business school:** The \$34 million expansion and renovation project is being designed.
- ⑤ **Science building:** The \$100 million science building will replace Donovan Hall on Rose Street. It is being designed.
- ⑥ **Retail and housing:** Housing and retail spaces might eventually line North Limestone north of Maxwell Street.
- ⑦ **High School:** A proposed joint UK-Fayette County Public Schools High School might locate in the area of Upper and Scott streets.

