

Kentucky Kernel: "Board Approves Next Housing Phase"

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With funding challenges in mind, the UK Board of Trustees addressed how to deal with housing on and off campus, a new budget model, research spending and ways to keep up with online learning at its annual retreat.

The board discussed these issues Saturday at Commonwealth Stadium and on a bus tour that highlighted where five new residence halls will be built. The first part of Phase II of UK's privatized housing plan was approved unanimously Sunday at a board meeting, and it will add 2,317 beds for \$133 million.

The bus tour with trustees and UK officials highlighted areas where the five dorms will be built by Education Realty Trust. The first phase of the housing partnership is under way on what was Haggin Field — in the form of construction of New Central Residence Hall, which will open next year.

The next sites are Wildcat Lodge and adjacent parking lots, the parking lot next to Blazer Hall, two buildings in the Cooperstown complex and Haggin Hall. Wildcat Lodge, Cooperstown buildings D and E, and Haggin Hall will be demolished. The lodge and Cooperstown buildings are planned to be torn down next month, while Haggin is set to be demolished in May, along with adjacent K-Lair, according to plans presented at the meeting.

All that translates to approximately 2,900 new beds, out of the 9,000 planned with EdR, a private real-estate firm based in Memphis, Tenn. Wiseman said the other 6,000 beds have not yet been planned.

Rental rates per semester will range from about \$3,400 to \$4,200 in 2014-15, based on the style of room, according to the development plan.

UK is in the process of updating its master plan, which addresses issues including how to best change and grow the university and how UK can be a responsible neighbor, said Bob Wiseman, vice president for facilities management.

UK officials have met with city groups and neighborhood associations to address issues including UK's dry campus, the decline of housing quality in some areas, the public-private housing partnership and parking.

"Some neighborhoods are very cynical. Some are angry. Some are very open," Wiseman said in regard to the meetings.

Wiseman cited the University Avenue and State Street area as one that faces parking, city code and ordinance issues.

He said there's a concern that "these could deteriorate further" if more students are able to live on campus, especially beyond freshman year, and that is part of discussion with the city.

Another area with large student populations are corridors on Red Mile Road and Angliana Avenue, where large complexes with hundreds of units have cropped up in the past few years.

Often these complexes are better than options before, but the city faces issues of having too much student housing in one area without other services, such as grocery stores, Wiseman said.

"We as a community have tended to support housing like this in the past because it protected neighborhoods to the east," he said.

Bilas said the complexes' distance from campus and the fact that they are often divided by railroad tracks poses safety risks for students at night and on weekends, when they venture to social spots. He suggested that providing more on-campus housing for upperclassmen would help.

Other stops on the bus tour included the Linden Walk/Aylesford area, Woodland Avenue and the six-pack, which now includes four fraternity houses. Wiseman said as UK works to develop a "Greek Park" near Rose Lane, that space could be considered for future development.

Trustees at the retreat asked if the Top 20 Business Plan mandated by the Kentucky Legislature is still relevant with funding realities and the university's goals today.

When the plan was approved in 2005, state funding for UK was projected to reach \$452 million by fiscal 2013, up from \$314 million in fiscal 2006. But appropriations for 2013 are at \$284 million, putting state funding at 9 1/2 percent less than the 2006 number, instead of 44 percent more.

The plan has aimed to make UK a top 20 research institution by 2020.

Trustee Terry Mobley asked if a 20-year plan is realistic.

"I agree completely that we need a vision," Mobley said, "but is a 20-year vision realistic in higher education?"

"Is it a five-year vision? I don't know the answer to it. ... The amount of time it takes you to get there has got to be flexible."

Board Vice Chair Pam May, who was on the board when Top 20 started, said the plan created a fervor at the time.

"I don't think as a board we have ever really dreamt huge," May said. "If you dream big

you have no clue what can happen. We've seen it with the medical center. ...

“This board should have stepped in about year three and said ‘We’re not making progress.’ ”

UK President Eli Capilouto said that UK still has a positive bottom line, driven by medical-center changes. The hospital was projected to generate \$590 million for 2013; the actual number for 2013 is \$977 million.

UK is considering a values-based budget model that Interim Provost Tim Tracy said allows a closer alignment of revenues and expenses and that can “match money to mission.”

In some cases, that means units within UK that aren't profitable still will be funded because they align with UK's values, Tracy said.

Capilouto said creating a balance is key. Tracy said determining areas of need is usually based on students.

Capilouto said Tracy has created an engaging process and UK does “not want to rush and compress into a matter of four weeks decisions about our budget.”

“We've made no decision about this budget,” Capilouto said. “The provost and I are meeting with every college ... and we meet with a group of faculty and those are very honest exchanges. They're very helpful.”

He cited advising as one topic brought up through campus conversations. Dialogues also will continue with the faculty senate, particularly at its next meeting, he said.

Jim Tracy, UK's vice president for research, said research at UK is facing two big challenges: government laws and regulations regarding research (“We can argue that research or the NCAA has more rules,” he joked), and potential federal research and development cuts in January to help balance the federal budget. The cuts would reduce the number of new grants from the government by 25 percent nationwide.

Jim Tracy said UK must focus on quality.

“We have to be strategic in our investment,” he said. “The way we do it is to attract the best talent.”

The board spent more than an hour addressing online learning.

UK Chief Information Officer Vince Kellen led a discussion about MOOCs — massive online open courses — which are growing quickly but haven't yet figured out how to make money.

Student Government President Stephen Bilas said he sees online courses as a teaching aid rather than a replacement to getting a degree on campus.

“While we have to adapt to survive, take into consideration how we are adapting and if it’s in the best interest of students,” Bilas said.

“Can we trust students to be accountable to use these as primary sources of education?” he asked. “Do they need that personal interaction with peers and teachers?”

Trustee Bill Britton tasked the president with making a plan.

“What’s going to be here five years from now?” Britton asked Capilouto. “Do we have a plan for the next three years, five years for what we are going to do with online education? It’s here. We can either embrace it or get run over by it. But we’re not going to get more dollars.”

In terms of current options on campus, Capilouto said there are pockets that have been using online learning for a long time. He said any big changes would take much discussion, especially with faculty.

Faculty trustee John Wilson sees many challenges falling on faculty.

“The issue that I see is, in all of our missions it’s taking more and more time to do quality work in this environment,” Wilson said. “As we start to think about what we expect of people, we have to perhaps recalibrate what’s possible in this environment. ... We expect faculty to do everything at a quality level.”

At the meeting, faculty trustee Irina Voro urged board members to read the memo the faculty senate sent to Capilouto on Oct. 4.

She said its contents, which criticized Capilouto regarding budget cuts, were the result of passionate meetings.

University Senate Council Chair Lee Blonder said at the meeting that nearly 100 faculty came to forums, and she has received approximately 25 to 30 emails from faculty, with a lot of them using Gmail or AOL accounts because of “a fear of speaking out.”

Vice Chair May said she wanted an idea of how many faculty were speaking out in comparison with UK’s more than 2,000 faculty members to decide how significant the issue is.