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Wellesley College maps course for upgrades to campus

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT NOVEMBER 21, 2013

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Wellesley College officials are in the early stages of drafting a development plan that calls for spending up to \$550 million to renovate and expand existing campus buildings over the next 12 to 15 years.

“This is probably the most significant renewal of the campus since it was rebuilt” about 85 years ago, said Andrew Shennan, the college’s provost and dean.

The newly released “Wellesley 2025 Consolidated Program Plan” considers four proposals, starting with a “base plan” that would cover the most urgently needed projects; the budget has been set at \$365 million, an amount that administrators said they believe the school could afford even under the most conservative financial outlook.

An “expanded plan,” budgeted at about \$450 million, would include several additional projects, according to the report. And two options for a \$550 million “comprehensive plan” — one with an academic emphasis and the other with an integrated approach — would include several more projects.

The planning process began in the fall of 2010, when the college conducted a study that “suggested a lot of our impressive, beautiful old buildings really need attention and haven’t been significantly renovated for a long time,” Shennan said.

Working groups were established representing five aspects of the college: arts and media, the humanities, science and the environment, student residences, and wellness and sports. Each group was asked to identify long-term priorities for not only buildings but also programming.

“We thought it was important to ask these five groups to think big,” Shennan said. “It was a chance for the college to ask ourselves what would be the ideal scenario for buildings and programs for the years ahead for Wellesley’s students and faculty.”

The groups came up with a combination of plans that would have increased the building space by more than 370,000 square feet, or about 14 percent, and would have cost an estimated \$1.38 billion, compared with the maximum figure anticipated by administrators, \$550 million.

Wellesley then hired a Philadelphia-based architecture firm, VSBA LLC, to help consolidate those plans.

Shennan said the college expects to pay for the plans through its operating budgets, fund-raising, and loans.

The college will decide as it moves along — based largely on its financial resources — whether to take on projects in the expanded and comprehensive plans.

“We really hope we’re able to go beyond the base plan, but we’re not sure how far beyond it we’ll be able to go,” he said.

Shennan said the college hopes to complete many of the projects within 10 years.

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The plan will not expand the footprint of Wellesley's campus, and the school does not plan to increase the size of its student body, Shennan said.

Projects within the base plan would include a complete overhaul of Pendleton West and a 12,000-square-foot addition featuring classroom, studio, and rehearsal space for visual and musical arts; and the conversion of now-vacant space in the Schneider campus center and physical-plant buildings for student services and administrative uses.

There would also be projects within the college's four-building Science Center complex, including renovating the laboratory wing; repairing infrastructure in Sage Hall; improving infrastructure in the east wing; and replacing the complex's greenhouses.

The base plan also calls for renovating the Cazenove, Beebe, and Munger residency halls, the dining area within the Bates Hall dorm, and the field house athletic complex; building an 11,900-square-foot dining facility addition to Munger; upgrading infrastructure for Hazard Quad residence halls; and making "quality-of-life and programmatic improvements" at other student housing facilities.

There would also be improvements made to two academics buildings, Founders and Green halls, and the Stone and Simpson buildings for health and counseling services, the potential for an academic commons in Clapp Library; and projects to upgrade utility infrastructure.

The expanded plan would include those projects plus renovations to the Tower Court East and West dormitories, and the Tower Court dining hall, along with some additional infrastructure upgrades.

The "academic emphasis" comprehensive plan would include those projects plus a 25,000-square-foot addition to the Science Center that would feature new classrooms, laboratory space, and an environmental center, as well as completing other projects.

The "integrated approach" comprehensive plan also calls for renovating Founders and Green halls, and completing other projects; but instead of the Science Center addition, a three-story addition to the Keohane Sports Center, including a new fitness center, would be built.

Some projects are already moving forward. The rest would require approval by the college's board of trustees.

"With a framework set for the W2025 projects, the college can now begin the important work necessary to renew and reinvest in our buildings — our lovely, iconic, essential spaces — enabling us to achieve our educational goals," the college's president, H. Kim Bottomly, said in a statement accompanying the report.

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