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NEWS ▶			METRO ▶
ARTS ▶			BUSINESS ▶
SPORTS ▶			OPINION ▶
LIFESTYLE ▶			MAGAZINE ▶
INSIDERS ▶			TODAY'S PAPER ▶
LOTTERY ▶			OBITUARIES ▶
GLOBE NORTH ▶			GLOBE SOUTH ▶
GLOBE WEST ▶			TERROR AT THE MARATHON ▶
68 BLOCKS ▶			

Metro

Science, engineering center is latest Northeastern project

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE STAFF DECEMBER 05, 2013

 ARTICLE	 GRAPHIC	 COMMENTS (7)
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NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Northeastern University plans to build the \$225 million science and engineering center on a site now used for parking.

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Northeastern University hopes to break ground next month on a \$225 million science and engineering research building, joining a growing list of Boston-area colleges and universities making major investments in those fields.

Joseph E. Aoun, Northeastern's president, said the facility will help to meet a surging demand among students attracted to the majors and to accommodate a growing faculty.

Over the past seven years, the university has recruited 387 tenured and tenure-track faculty, and its annual research funding has more than doubled, he said. With plans to recruit another 300 faculty over the next five years, the school needs more research space.

"We look at problems and opportunities in our society and ask, 'How can we make an impact?'" Aoun said in an interview.

Most of the impending hires will work in the new science and engineering facility and will research the fields of health, security, and sustainability, which Aoun described as “national imperatives.”

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 **Graphic: Northeastern's new science center**

“Society needs to focus on these domains,” he said.

The 220,000-square-foot facility would be built on a 3.5-acre parcel, currently a parking lot along Columbus Avenue next to the Ruggles MBTA Station in Roxbury.

The six-story building is scheduled to open in fall 2016 and will feature labs with cutting-edge scientific equipment, classrooms, offices for faculty and graduate students, a 280-seat auditorium, and a large atrium.

The building is the latest such research facility going up or being planned on campuses in the region:

- Boston University plans to build two science and engineering buildings in the coming decade: a seven-story, 150,000-square-foot building and another that would be as tall as 11 stories and as large as 165,000 square feet.
- MIT is designing a 200,000-square-foot nanomaterials lab and research facility for its science and engineering schools that the institute hopes to open by 2018.
- Harvard University plans to resume construction soon on a massive science complex on its Allston campus. Although scaled back from original plans, the facility will measure between 500,000 and 600,000 square feet, and Harvard plans to move much of its engineering school there when the science complex opens in 2017.
- The University of Massachusetts Boston plans to open a \$182-million, 220,000-square-foot integrated sciences complex next fall.
- UMass Amherst recently finished half of a \$160 million, 175,000-square-foot life sciences complex. The other half is slated to open in early 2016.
- Wentworth Institute of Technology and Wellesley College each have smaller-scale plans to construct science learning and research space.

Science and engineering are increasingly attractive fields of study. A report last month from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center said that the number of bachelor's degrees earned over the last five years in the fields grew by 19 percent, while bachelor's degrees in other fields grew by 9 percent.

"Students have been gravitating toward science and engineering because of the perception that these fields provide more job security than other fields," said Jason DeWitt, lead researcher for the report.

Boston officials say new facilities not only help the institutions building them, but also benefit neighboring communities.

Aoun said Northeastern's science and engineering building, one of several projects the university expects to build over the next decade as part of its master plan, will be "the first private research development in Roxbury."

University officials said the project will create 630 construction jobs, plus 700 permanent faculty and staff jobs when the building opens.

A community-benefits agreement tied to Northeastern's master plan calls for the school to meet certain thresholds for hiring area residents, minorities, and women and for buying goods and services from locally owned businesses.

Northeastern has also committed to giving more scholarships to youths from surrounding neighborhoods, build more on-campus student housing, construct a neighborhood center, rebuild a neighborhood playground, and give \$2.5 million to start an economic development fund.

"What we see from Northeastern is a model for what we should see from every college and institution, but also our hospitals and medical centers," said Councilor Tito Jackson, who represents Roxbury and who worked with other elected officials and residents to hash out the agreement.

Northeastern faces one final regulatory hurdle for the project: the city's zoning board on Dec. 18. But no major opposition has surfaced.

Aoun said the boom in local campus construction is about working with, not competing against, nearby higher education institutions, hospitals, and research centers.

"We think of Boston as one large campus," he said. "It's an ecosystem that is mutually beneficial."

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