

Williams Record

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2005

USPS 684-6801

Costs are still a concern, but project gains support

Re-evaluation of Stetson-Sawyer leads to a validation of committee's vision

By **CHRIS RICHARDSON**
NEWS EDITOR

Costs for the upcoming Stetson-Sawyer project have risen over \$10 million since preliminary estimates, but the College remains committed to completing all key elements imagined at the project's inception. Following a review to scale back costs, the new plan eliminates excess detail and still calls for constructing an entirely new library complex instead of simply renovating Sawyer Library.

With projections reaching \$132 million earlier this fall, up from an initial price tag of \$105 million, the trustees

encouraged campus planners to reconsider which elements were absolutely essential and to revisit the idea of simply renovating Sawyer in its current location. A new estimate earlier this month came back at \$119 million, with a simplified design and consolidated spaces, according to Provost Cappy Hill. The new design managed to save all of the key program elements.

"The \$132 million plan seemed to have some real problems with it," Hill said. "There seemed to be a good amount of duplication of spaces, with the possibility that they would end up being underutilized."

Beyond cost, finding the most appropriate design for the new complex has been a major factor in the equation. Original plans from years ago called for renovating Sawyer and faculty offices

in Stetson, but it was later decided that simply revamping the library would not result in a truly functional building with long-term use. The new plan calls for creating two entirely new academic buildings with faculty offices and classrooms, demolishing the current Stetson Annex offices and Sawyer Library, and adding a new unified library and IT center to the rear of Stetson Hall.

The trustees have yet to reach a final decision on either the new plan or the new estimate, but Paul Neely '68, chair of the Board Facilities Committee, said the board is "committed to doing the right library."

Expenses are still very much an issue and Neely said he is concerned that the final design be the best one for

SEE COSTS, PAGE 5

Stetson



Trustees encourage value engineering

FROM COSTS, PAGE 1

the campus — and for a reasonable price. “When we determine the right scope for the library project, we’ll work to make the [capital campaign] provide the necessary resources,” he said.

Thus far, the capital campaign has secured sizeable donations earmarked for the academic buildings, but not the library component, according to President Schapiro. “We have been a bit hesitant to raise money for the library until our plans are finalized,” he said. “I anticipate that the entire project will be attractive to our donors, not just the academic buildings.”

Despite the delays that come with re-evaluating preliminary costs and designs, Neely said such reconsiderations are a necessary and constructive part of planning. “Often what you wind up with is a better result than what would happen if you went with [your] first wish list,” he said.

As an example, the second analysis of the Sawyer renovation revealed that it

would actually be about 5 percent more expensive in the long run to renovate the building than to build a completely new facility, said Dave Pilachowski, College librarian and Stetson-Sawyer committee co-chair.

“Intuitively it’s hard to understand that it’s less expensive to tear down a building rather than fix it up, but the math has been done twice by two cost estimators,” said Michael Brown, professor of anthropology and committee co-chair.

The necessity of making the building compliant with accessibility standards and the labor expense of renovating a functional building during what would likely be a four-year timetable added to the cost estimate for a renovation. Moreover, there are additional, less tangible factors associated with such a plan: “None of that attaches a price tag to the cost to students who have to work in a library constantly under construction,” Brown said.

With the trustees’ encouragement, the planning committee is still working with architects to scale back costs without losing any of the functionality of the broader vision. Much of this process is focused on avoiding redundant spaces and utilizing space as efficiently as possible.

“Every major building project has this moment where people push back against the price and make you look very hard at key elements,” Brown said.

Neely cited the science center as a project that underwent massive revisions and emerged a better finished product.

If the trustees reach a decision in the next few months to go ahead with the new proposal, it is hoped that architects can then move quickly to finalize design schematics and program details, Neely said.

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Faculty focus on Stetson-Sawyer

By ERIKA HAYDU
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As plans for the Stetson-Sawyer project take shape, faculty input is becoming increasingly important in the design of the two new academic buildings and ambitious Stetson Library. Guiding the work of architects Bohlin Cywinski Jackson is a planning committee that includes several faculty members, all of whom are generally staunch advocates of the project goals. Approximately two-thirds of the faculty will somehow be affected directly, with either their teaching or office spaces reworked as part of the project.

"[The project] addresses a long-standing issue of faculty offices, teaching spaces, Chapin Library and the College Archives and a library designed with good intentions but not adaptive to our current situation," said Hank Art, professor of biology, who currently serves on the committee as a representative of the Center for Environmental Science.

Faculty members involved with Stetson-Sawyer are looking forward to changes the project will make to the academic environment. Peter Just, professor of anthropology and committee member of four years, emphasized that the new faculty offices will place "the bulk of the faculty at the heart of the campus," accommodate for the recent 15 percent increase in faculty size, and provide more adequate meeting spaces for tutorial sessions.

The creation of a quad where Sawyer currently stands – between Stetson, two new academic buildings and Chapin lawn – is designed to encourage a new east-west campus axis apart from Route 2. According to David Pilachowski, College librarian and committee co-chair, faculty offices would thus be situated between two "destination buildings," the new library and new student center.

Just hopes that Stetson-Sawyer will do for divisions I and II what the Unified Science Center did for Division III by creating "a space that makes teaching and learning better, easier, and more effective," he said.

"The library is the intellectual heart

of the campus, not just a place where people come to get books but also a place where they want to gather ... a beacon on campus," said Darra Goldstein, professor of Russian and current chair of the library committee.

According to Art, a library is "the heart and soul of the institution" and this new one should be a priority because "the functions that are provided in the library are really what we're all about." Sawyer, which most faculty say is currently cramped, overcrowded, and poorly designed, does not seem to accomplish these goals in the way that the new library is intended to.

Recent changes to the library plans have been necessary to reduce costs, but planners hope to keep most of the functional program elements desired in the new library in whatever final design is chosen. With too many program reductions, the library "just becomes a repository for books, and we want it to be a place for the community," Goldstein said.

The new integration of Chapin Library and the college archives with the general collection are also highly anticipated. Wayne Hammond, assistant librarian at Chapin Library, explained that "this library is used to a considerable extent in support of ... course offerings" and will be more effective with the sufficient space and updated technology promised by the Stetson-Sawyer project. Hammond said the Chapin Library would best be served with three distinct spaces: one for tourists, one for students and one for the special rare books and materials collections.

A new office for Information Technology is also included in the plan and, as Just points out, "could better serve students and faculty with a presence on this side of Route 2."

Art said that the longer the College waits to start this project, the more the price tag will increase, given "the realities of the costs of building materials, which are part of the global market." He said that the College should take a longer-term view of the costs and also incorporate energy-saving techniques that will provide paybacks in the future.