

Study taking far-reaching look at developing residences & area

Though still at the early stage, discussions underway on campus could see the U of S take a broader approach to the way it deals with the issue of residences and residential development both on and around the Saskatoon campus.

U of S Director of Planning and Development Colin Tennent says a residence-plans study just underway is looking at a plethora of options and opportunities to create what he terms a "University neighbourhood".

The process builds on the broad ideas presented in the Campus Master Plan and responds to both the U of S Strategic Directions and its Enrolment and Student Success Plan in recognizing that affordable, accessible housing is key to recruitment and retention of students.

At the heart of the study is "a really comprehensive development of McEown Park and the entire corridor" north along Cumberland Avenue to College Drive, says Tennent. Work at McEown Park has long been identified as a priority for the University, most notably in the Core Area Master Plan, "so we are really entering into sub-plan investigations to test the principles and concepts of the Master Plan against the realities of the available opportunities. It's a very exciting departure."

Repeatedly stressing the very tentative nature of the discussions, Tennent says ideas for McEown Park include not only upgrades to the student residence towers but also new low-rise and mid-rise housing developments, commercial outlets and community-based opportunities such as child-care facilities. He says there has also been talk about the University forging "something of a partnership with the city" and strengthening ties with institutions in the area, like Brunskill School on Wiggins Avenue.

Moving down Cumberland Avenue, Tennent says the units involved in the process so far - Consumer Services, Student and Enrolment Services, Facilities Management and the Office of the Provost - envision other residential opportunities all along the way, even at the Williams Building site, and possibly including properties for rent or sale to the public.

"While we're just at the beginning of discussions right now, it's long been recognized in urban planning that residential is key to the vitality of any neighbourhood."

Close to campus, Tennent said the intersection of College and Cumberland Avenues is seen to have potential for special pedestrian-focused redesign. On campus, the group envisions revamping some existing residences to make them more attractive to today's student "and there may even be the opportunity for new residences on the main campus".

"This would increase the housing units on campus to something very respectable. It would confirm us as a member of the big leagues" in terms of housing available to the student body. Tennent adds it will be some time before any firm decisions are made about if, when and how the University will proceed.