

College Bldg. job starts with no fed funding

With the federal government seeming hesitant to contribute one-third of the costs, or \$6.5 million, to the rehabilitation of the College Building, the University has decided to proceed with the project anyway by funding two-thirds of the cost itself.

Paul Becker, Associate Vice-President for Facilities Management, said the original plan was for the federal and provincial governments and the University to divide the \$20 million cost of the project equally.

The provincial government has committed \$6.5 million from its Centenary Fund and the University had set aside its portion, but the infrastructure funding from Ottawa has not materialized "so we'll now be funding the federal portion ourselves," he said.

Although the U of S has not given up on the possibility the federal government will kick in a one-third share, the University will go ahead and borrow the necessary funds internally from its operating budget and the minor capital deferred maintenance budget, said Tony Whitworth, Vice-President Finance and Resources. The money will then be repaid in instalments over a number of years.

The decision to proceed, and to award the construction contract to PCL Construction Management of Saskatoon, was made by the Board of Governors in a recent mail-in ballot, explained Whitworth. The project was discussed at the Board's September meeting but a decision was deferred to give the federal government more time to come up with the money. When that didn't happen, a mail-in ballot was used, a procedure the Board resorts to quite often "when it isn't something out of the blue," Whitworth said. "In this case, all the discussion had already taken place."

Becker said the sense of urgency with proceeding stems from the fact the building is structurally unstable and delays put both the project and the building itself at risk. "We didn't want the College Building to become a liability or a safety issue on campus."

The contractor will begin immediately, he said, putting up hoarding and signage, preparing the site and assembling cranes. The work to be done involves essentially rebuilding the internal structure of the building from the bottom up. It is, said Becker, analogous to "taking a human body, removing the skeleton and putting a new skeleton in". Because of its designation as a heritage site, the renovations require that much attention be paid to preserving the 1912 building's unique character.

The rehabilitation is expected to be completed in 2005.

Parkade construction proceeding

Work is also proceeding on the parking structure located across College Ave. in what was a student parking lot. The University borrowed money to finance this project too, but in this case, it went to an outside lender. To build the five-storey, 866-spot parkade, the University negotiated a long-term, \$14-million loan with its banker, the Royal Bank of Canada, said Whitworth. In this case, the principal and interest payments will be made from revenue generated by the parkade.

The parking structure is to be open for business next year.

Whitworth said borrowing externally for capital projects "has been allowed but not encouraged" by the provincial government, which has to approve all such arrangements. And, the University was only permitted to borrow from an outside source for revenue-generating projects like the parkade and McEown Park. Now, however, the provincial government has loosened the rules making external borrowing for non-revenue generating projects a possibility. Whitworth said the proposed Academic Health Sciences Centre is an example where the University may go to a bank for the money to build.

Discussions with the provincial government about how to proceed with that building have been on hold due to the recent Saskatchewan election but are expected to continue, said Whitworth. "We are talking about borrowing externally but we need assurances from the (provincial) government that they will provide the funds to cover both principal and interest. That's where negotiations stand now."



U of S design elements like greystone and tyndal stone will be used on the new parkade, now under construction.

Photo courtesy U of S Parking Services