

Major new residences project a 'go'

For Cumberland Ave.

By Colleen MacPherson

The University's plans for a major student residence construction project along Cumberland Avenue are moving ahead, but the devil is in the details when it comes to exactly what to build.

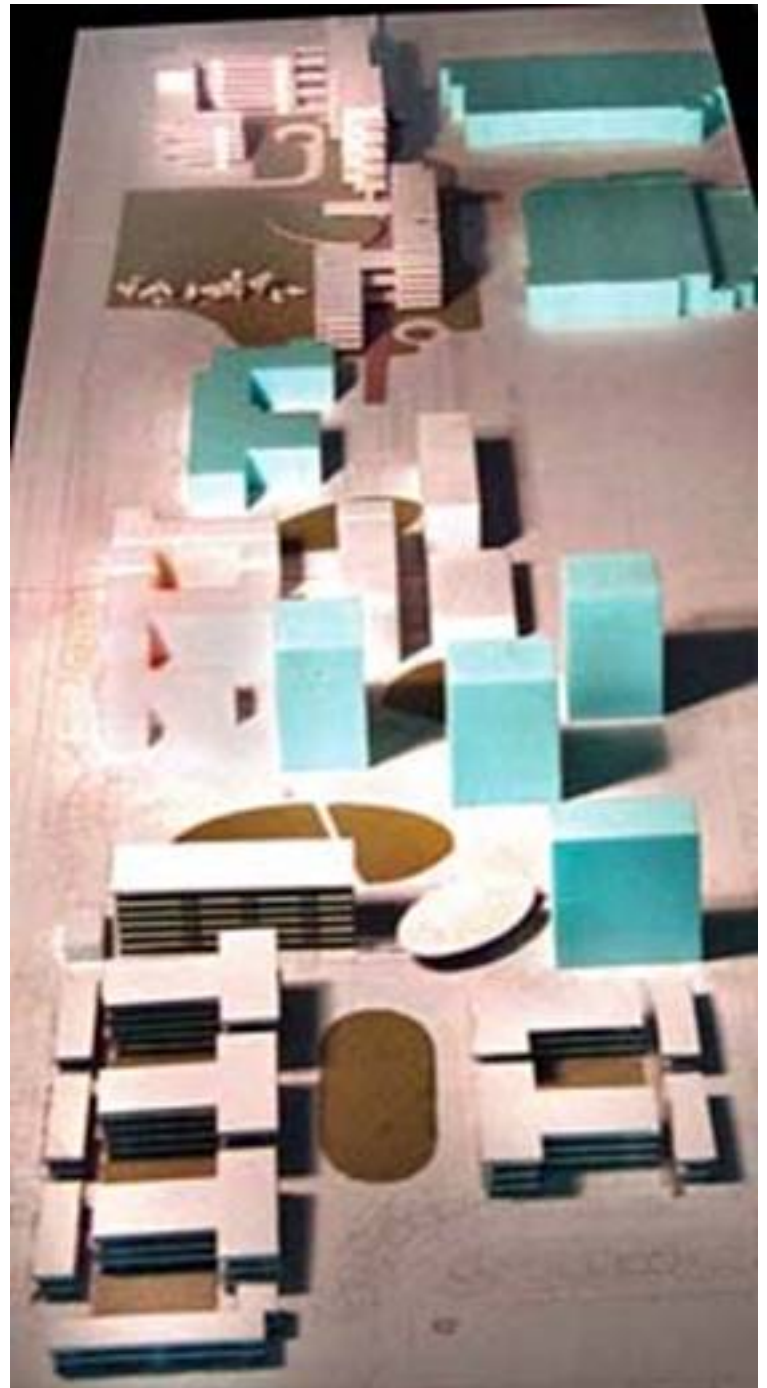


Tennent

The project steering committee, comprised of people from various units like Student and Enrolment Services, Consumer Services, Financial Services and

Facilities Management, is currently pulling together as much information as it can about what works and what doesn't in terms of residences. The time and effort is well spent because "we have to make really intelligent decisions," according to the University architect and director of planning and development. "Failure isn't an option."

Colin Tennent said senior administration is committed to a major residence development that, ideally,



will include dormitory and suite-style housing for undergraduates, and townhouse or row-house development for students with families. The project will stretch along the east side of

Cumberland from College Avenue all the way to 14th Street and “we’re potentially looking at 3,000 beds, including McEown Park”. The concept also includes a complete food services operation and retail space along with other amenities to enhance residence life.

This model shows planned residence locations along Cumberland Avenue, left, and College Drive, top.

Facilities Management Division photo

The current timeline would see the first building, with 500-700 beds, opening in the fall of 2007 – and students themselves will have a lot of influence on how that building is configured, Tennent said. The voice of students, the end users, will be sought as part of the research that Student and Enrolment Services Division (SESD) is now undertaking.

There can be no doubt that a university’s ability to accommodate students in suitable housing on campus affects its reputation, he said. For the U of S, “just to maintain our position, or gain it, or regain it on the Canadian scene, we need more housing”.

He added that students who live on campus are known to develop a deeper affinity for their school than their off-campus counterparts, a fact clearly illustrated on his recent visit to Princeton University. There, the majority of undergraduates live on its beautiful campus, and when those students go on “to make a big pile of money, they invariably throw some of it back at the institution”.

The big difference between that university and the U of S is that “we can’t afford to have a residence that doesn’t work. If they (Princeton) don’t get it just right, they can knock it down and build something new. We only have one chance to build what students want.”

With so many questions still unanswered – whether or not to close the food operation in Marquis Hall and relocate it near the new residences, how much parking to provide, where to relocate the sports fields that will be displaced by the new construction, how students will cross College Drive safely, how the development will be financed – Tennent said planning for this project is taking

place “on the edge of chaos, and I say that in the most positive sense”. One change always brings about another. For example, moving Food Services out of Marquis Hall and converting existing residences to office and teaching space “would contribute so much in terms of revitalizing the core area around the Bowl”.

The process is exciting, he said, but it leaves the University in “what most institutions refer to as ‘churn’. We’re constantly renovating, moving, back-filling, and that is costly because it’s inefficient.”

Tennent expects firm decisions about the residence project will have to be made by Christmas to meet the opening-date target of 2007. Until then, site and schematic work will proceed based on broad assumptions. “We’ll go with what we know.”