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ASUC Hires Consultant to Analyze Lower Sproul Renovation Efforts

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Contributing Writer

The ASUC and UC Berkeley administration selected a private consultant Monday that will help efforts to raise student fees to fund the renovation of Lower Sproul Plaza and the surrounding student union complex.

Washington, D.C.-based Brailsford & Dunlavey will determine the feasibility of adding a referendum to the spring ASUC General Election ballot. The referendum would increase fees in order to fund the renovation that could cost \$300 million, according to Graduate Assembly President Miguel Daal.

"They're going to give us advice from their experience having to deal with referenda at other schools and help us decide if we're go or no go on the project," Daal said. "If we do go, (they will) give us advice and information on how to run a successful referendum campaign."

The consultant's services could cost up to \$50,000, Daal said. Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Harry Le Grande said this would be in addition to more than \$750,000 the campus has spent on renovation plans over the past year and a half.

The consultant plans to commence the assessment by Sept. 30, according to Jim Carruthers, a senior project manager for the firm.

"What we want to do is take a broad look and talk to students both individually and collectively in groups and just get their sense of the project," Carruthers said.

The firm has experience assisting universities with referenda and conducted a retail assessment of the student union's revenue potential last year, Daal said.

"They were an obvious choice for us, especially since they already know a great deal about this campaign since they were our retail consultant," Daal said.

The ASUC Store Operations Board has agreed to allocate \$20,000 to pay for the firm's services, but Daal said the full amount may not be used. Instead, he has proposed that the campus pay three-quarters of the consultant costs.

In addition, Le Grande said his office has allocated \$33,255 to help pay for the firm's services and other assessments needed for the project.

ASUC President Will Smelko said that although students are facing other fee increases, renovation efforts have been in the works for the past 20 years and should move forward.

"The referendum consultant is an absolute necessity if this project has a hope of succeeding," he said. "And beyond that, this is our last year for a very, very long time where this project is a possibility. Things are bad now, but things are only going to get worse."

UC students may face a 32 percent student fee increase by next fall if the UC Board of Regents approves a plan in November.

Junior Manny Diaz, a social welfare major, said he thinks there are other campus issues that should be focused on rather than the renovation project.

"I don't see why they should increase our fees if they're already being increased," Diaz said. "(The renovation) doesn't sound like a bad idea, but I'm not going to be here 10 years from now. I'm not going to see it happen."

Joseph Guzman, the graduate student co-chair of the Lower Sproul Student Council, said student leaders have been careful to do as much as possible on their own and pay for private advice only when needed.

"When you're doing a big project like this, you need to bring in professionals who have done it before and have a track record rather than leaving it to students to figure it out on their own," he said.

Smelko said he wants students to recognize the need for the renovation and that he hopes the referendum will pass.

"I really hope it does ... because it is so necessary and vital that we have a functioning student union, and all the plans that have been drafted up so far are incredible," he said. "Miguel (Daal) and I are really hard at work trying to minimize the cost as much as possible ... but given the impact that it'll have, it'll be worth it."

The consultant will make its recommendation whether to conduct the referendum by Oct. 15, Daal said.

The deadline to submit a referendum in time for next year's election is Nov. 1.