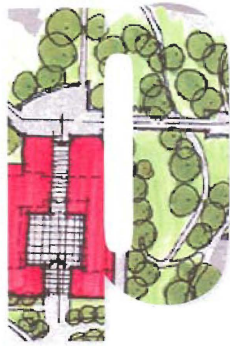
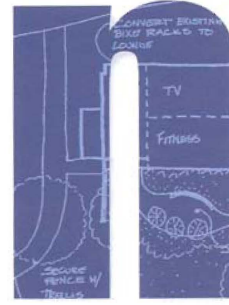
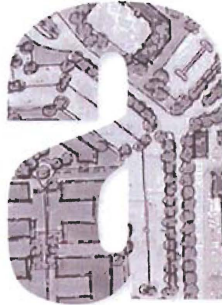


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nstr. Cost	
	941,500
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create master plans to help plot their course. destination.

In 2002, the Norfolk, Virginia, design firm Hanbury Evans Wright Vlattas + Company conducted a survey of more than 50 chief housing officers, asking them what they foresaw as the major issues they would face over the next five years. Leading the list was the need to upgrade existing space, costs to students, budget cuts affecting maintenance and operations, and staffing. Other items on the list included competition from private housing complexes, adding technology, vandalism, and providing additional amenities. In short, many dollars and cents issues. These issues held a commanding lead over more esoteric concerns such as drug and alcohol use, banning smoking, and security. Therefore, while housing departments must create plans that meet the educational high road, no one can forget the bottom line.

effectiveness that many times translates into cost savings. “We hired a consultant because we recognized that it was much more cost effective to have a consultant collect the data, meet the people and get the information that we wanted, which allowed for smaller projects to move forward simultaneously,” says Danny Armitage, director of housing at the University of Memphis in Tennessee.

Depending on the size of the firm, consultants should have deeper resources from which to draw. Besides understanding housing operations, they should have design, planning, architectural, and financial experience that can be brought to bear on the project.

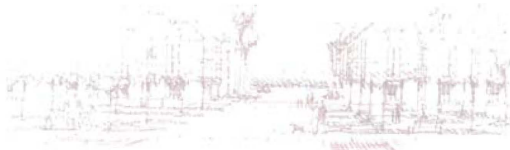
“Institutions have flexibility in their relationship with consultants. They can bring them in as needed, when needed. By having consultants manage the planning process, an institution’s administration can stick to managing its core business,” says Kevin Keegan, vice president of Brailsford and Dunlavey in Washington, D.C., a firm specializing in master planning.

Consultants can also lend credibility and validation to the entire process by offering specialized knowledge and experience not usually found at colleges and universities. “Master planning is specialized work that requires appropriate experience. Additionally, consultants should have broader exposure at multiple institutions. This wealth of experience should then be applied to the institution’s planning process. They should know what works and what doesn’t,” explains Keegan.

“Consultants bring a wide range of experience and choices to the mix, having tried and tested more housing models. They will look at how different systems and components relate to housing such as academics and dining and whether there should be more or less integration. Often times housing and academics are like oil and water. Consultants can be the

When assuming the task of crafting a master plan, often times a consultant is hired to help lead the school throughout the development while others choose to develop the plan on their own. The choice on how to pursue the project depends on several key factors including the level of in-house expertise and the available staff, time, and money. Many institutions have limited staff numbers, so hiring a consultant can be cost effective, saving time and money. Consultants are generally more experienced in the process, lending needed credibility and validation to the entire process. However, some institutions may prefer to keep the process in-house avoiding the added cost involved with hiring a consultant. It also eliminates the learning curve required as the consultant works to overcome his or her unfamiliarity with the institution’s mission, values and culture.

The decision to hire a consultant normally comes down to concerns of time and expertise. Developing a quality housing master plan requires much time and effort. Consultants can be hired for specific, highly specialized tasks for a defined period of time. This kind of control creates efficiency and



much-needed common ground between the two," says Jane Wright, AIA, CEO and president of Hanbury Evans Wright Vlattas + Company

"A consultant also lends credibility with all your stakeholders, this being your students and administration all the way up to the governing board. Objectivity is the key, in addition to the expertise someone outside the culture of the institution brings, but who is also savvy enough to understand and appreciate the culture as well", says Auburn's Trupp.

Working side-by-side with consultants also gives in-house staff the opportunity to gain valuable insights and knowledge. "When you hire a consultant you are getting someone who is an expert in the field who will offer a total fresh look of where you are and where you are going, and a totally objective assessment of what it will take to get you there," says Trupp.

"If you choose the right consultants they can lend a vast degree of knowledge, expertise and collaboration skills to the

process, this is all they do. This includes knowing what's happening on other campuses around the country," says Schreiber.

"What I liked about our consultant was that they were able to review our existing residence life plan and determine how it fit into the plan based on our culture and community, having their input drastically changed what we thought we were going to build," says Carol Casey, associate dean of students at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee.

There are some disadvantages to hiring a consultant, mainly the cost and the fact that a consultant will be less familiar with an institution and will need to spend some time understanding it's mission, values, needs, culture and people.

"Part of the challenge of hiring a consultant is that they do lend a great deal of expertise and wisdom to the process, however it is sometimes difficult

to make sure that they fully understand the housing environment, the campus and where you are going. You want some validation that what the consultant considers a trend today will still be accurate five years from now, " says Armitage.

The costs of hiring a consultant vary greatly depending upon several factors including the institution's size and complexity, the scope of work being requested, the number and complexity of deliverables, number and experience of consultants being utilized, and expectations for the planning process. The selection process is typically qualifications based, and if the focus is financial feasibility only, the study may be fee based. The fees range from \$60,000 to \$250,000, depending on the scope of work, but can be much higher depending on the work required in each category.

"Smaller colleges interested in doing modest master planning activities might see costs of \$40,000. Large institutions

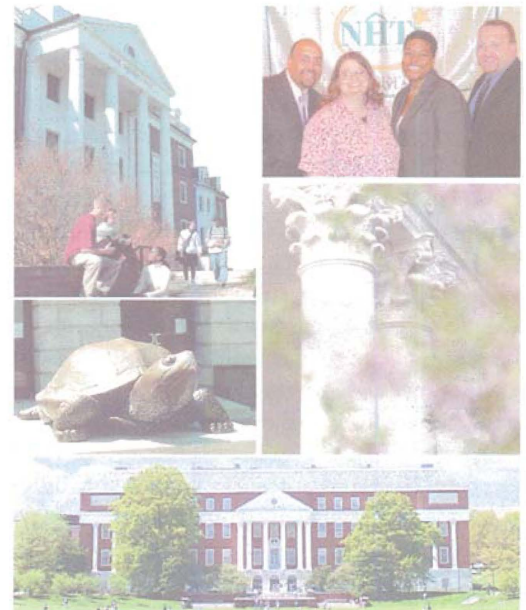


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with complex structures and facilities that desire comprehensive assessments might spend \$500,000. Typically, however, costs range between \$100,000 and \$200,000 for comprehensive master planning efforts," says Keegan.

It's not at all unusual for schools to spend somewhere in the \$200,000 range. "[The cost] really depends on what you want to accomplish," says Casey. "We decided to look ahead into the future and make the investment and get what we wanted. For example we didn't have floorplans of our existing housing so that was one aspect we included. Some schools may have smaller needs or may find that they want to add elements to the project, it's a good idea to at least price it out to see if it's even feasible."

Some schools do decide to develop a housing master plan in-house. Benefits of this include the intimate knowledge of the institution's mission, values, vision and needs. "Who else knows your clientele and product any better?" explains Pat Dixon, Director of Residence Life at Arkansas State University. In-house staff members understand the human dynamics of the institution, who the decision makers are, and where the potential hot spots are, what's been discussed and discarded before. It may be more cost effective as well.

One of the challenges ASU faced early on in the process was providing adequate family housing on campus. In 2000, there were mobile homes on campus, and this was one of facets that needed to be changed. "We were dedicated to changing this and we set out to involve everyone including the surrounding community in the process," says Dixon.

To be done right, stakeholders from the entire campus community should be involved to varying degrees. This would include representatives from housing and student affairs, enrollment personnel, senior campus executives, up to and including the president, board members, current students (both on and off campus), prospective students, student leaders, board members, campus neighbors, and alumni.

"Early in our process we brought together a steering committee which included members of the president's staff, student affairs, and the physical plant. From this meeting grew other meetings with students, residential life staff and other invested groups. In many ways we were testing some of the ideas that each group brought forward and getting an understanding of the culture and where needs were and how they matched," says Casey.

Casey added there was a lot of interaction between the firm and the

college, "They just didn't present us with a final document, there were a lot of discussions, a lot of visits, as well as interviews with engineers and residence life staff to find out what worked well and what didn't."

Broad engagement is necessary to get buy-in, ownership and support for the planning process. "Leaving key decision makers out of the process, or bringing them in too late, will kill the planning effort," says Keegan.

CONTINUES ► (52)

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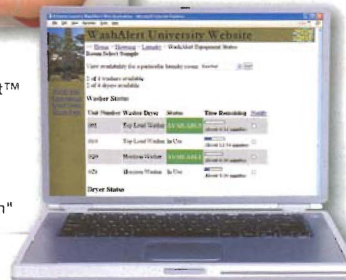
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The approval process will likely depend upon the institution and how it is governed. Plans are generally reviewed and approved at various levels to include the director of residence life, vice president of student affairs, executive vice president or provost, followed by the president and/or board of trustees. Often times the plan is also presented to a governing board for final approval.

The president or vice president of an institution plays a vital role in the housing master plan process. "Our president and vice chancellor were advisors and very supportive, they were very involved and hands on during the entire process," says Dixon.

It's imperative for the president to provide early endorsement and support for the project by communicating its importance to all stakeholders. "He has been a champion all along, very supportive," says Burchett.

Still, Keegan advises that the president should also allow the planning team (whether done in-house or by a consultant) to come to its own, independent, thoughtfully discovered observations and conclusions. No pre-determined outcomes should be developed.

There are also potential pitfalls to consider. For example, in-house staff might be too close to the housing operation, as was the case at Arkansas State University. "We became too involved, it was harder for us to let go, where a consultant can be more objective," says Dixon.

Then there's the potential for lack of credibility. "The value of findings determined by in-house staff may be discounted due to internal institutional bias. Campus leadership often views consultants as more credible so their recommendations may be taken more seriously," says Keegan.

Finally, he adds that depending on the project's campus leadership, the planning effort may not be taken seriously if led by in-house staff. Employees may adopt a "this too shall pass" attitude if previous planning efforts have been ineffective.

And, as we know, a master plan is far too important for that to be allowed to happen. ^{ts}

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Deborah Dowd

is the Director of Marketing and Business Development for University Housing Services, Inc., in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Images used for this article courtesy of: Hanbury Evans Wright Vlattas + Company, Architects and Planners, Norfolk, VA.

VILLAGE AT 115 STUDENT RESIDENCES

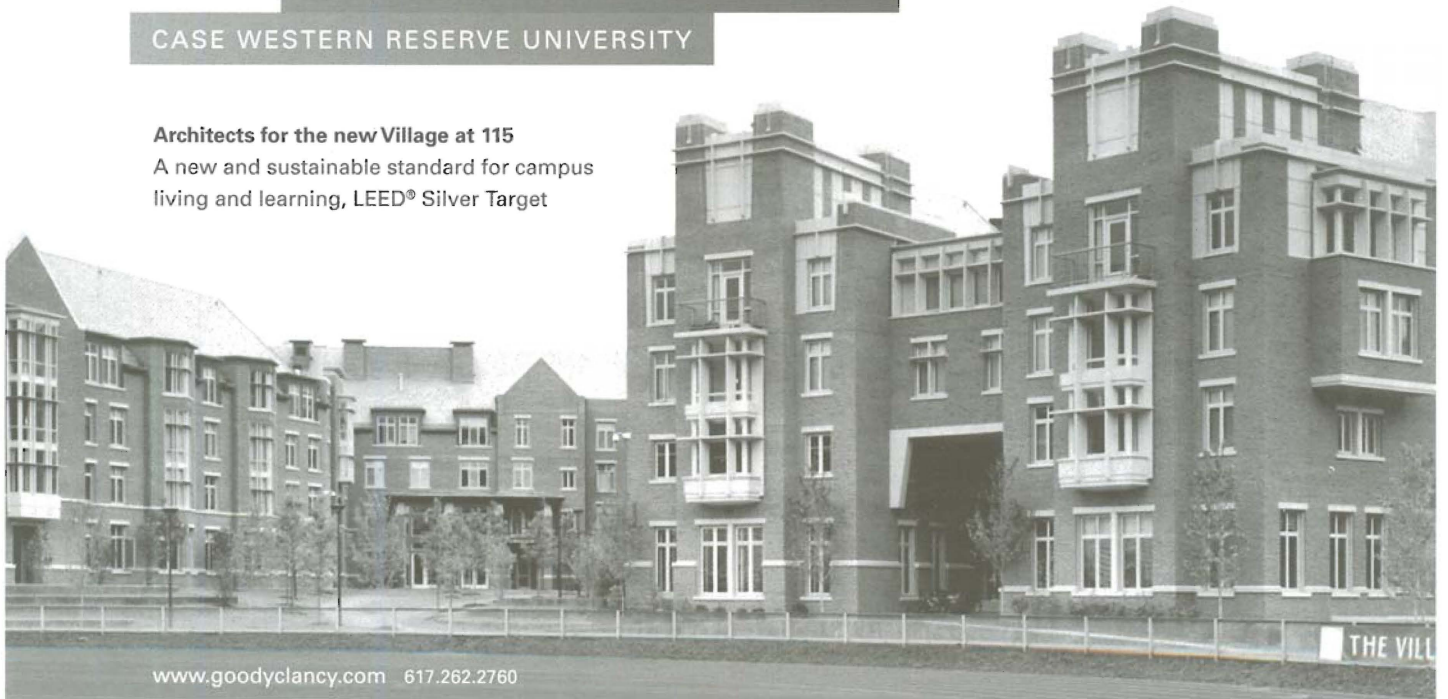
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