

Coalfield Progress

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Study Documents Student Needs, Wants

By Robert Baird, Staff Writer

UVa-Wise leaders have a valuable resource at their fingertips as they consider development of new housing and retail space - an extensive collection of student opinions and thoughts on local housing options.

The college's proposed Corner Village project should be designed and built to meet the demands and desires of the 325 students who completed a housing survey earlier this year, according to a study by Brailsford & Dunlavey.

Students expressed interest in apartment-style housing that offers private space and private amenities. The Corner Village would be most appropriate for mature and independent students, the study report says.

As part of the Web-based survey, students were asked to evaluate several factors that might be considered when building new on-campus housing. The top priority was keeping room and board affordable, followed by providing housing that would help keep students at University of Virginia's College at Wise.

Other priorities included offering housing suitable to the lifestyles of upperclassmen, providing a highly attractive living environment and providing retail spaces in close proximity to new housing, according to the study.

Students were asked to evaluate amenities that might be included as part of the Corner Village project.

The most popular amenities were in-room Internet access, ample parking for residents, private bedrooms, apartment-style living units, kitchens, washers and dryers in the units, additional storage space and private bathrooms, according to Brailsford & Dunlavey's report.

Others included quiet study areas, nearby retail spaces, a computer lab, fitness center, the option of nine-month leases and an outdoor courtyard.

UVa-Wise hired Brailsford & Dunlavey, of Washington, D.C., to study the feasibility of developing housing and retail space near the edge of campus. The firm's findings were unveiled in late May.

The Corner Village, proposed for college property near the Carl Smith football stadium, would be a mix of apartment-style housing units and retail enterprises such as small restaurants, other eateries, a bookstore and copy center.

OTHER FINDINGS

Here's some other results and conclusions from the online survey of UVa-Wise students:

*** Campus housing is a popular accommodation for many freshmen, the study report says. Close to two-thirds of the survey population indicated the availability of on-campus housing was either "very important" or "important" in the decision to attend UVa-Wise;

*** Twenty-eight percent of the survey population has never lived in campus housing;

*** In the 2005-06 school year, campus housing will retain about 61 percent of students living on campus at the time of the survey;

*** Sixty-three percent of students living in the off-campus market will remain there in 2005-06;

*** Students who have lived on campus say college housing introduced them to new friends, helped them acclimate to life at UVa-Wise, enhanced their overall college experience, provided a sense of community and helped them learn about different people. College housing is a powerful medium for students to meet new friends, adjust to life at UVa-Wise and enhance their college experience, the study says. "Published housing materials from the College should highlight reasons why students enjoy on-campus living;"

*** Overall, Internet access is the most important housing selection factor among responding students. Eighty percent of the total survey population said it was either "very important" or "important" in the decision of where to live in the 2004-05 school year. Other selection criteria topping the list included the "safety/security" of a particular housing accommodation and the total cost of rent and utilities; and

*** Reasons why students live off campus include: the desire for more privacy; lower housing costs; desire for housing that provides a kitchen and washer/dryer; dislike for the college's dining services; to live with friends; and more available parking.