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Students get a sneak peek at Wood facelift

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Sun Star

A new campus report calls for the end of Lola Tilly Commons, the expansion of the bookstore, suite-style student housing, and various other changes in hopes of improving quality of life on campus.

Consultants from Brailsford & Dunlavey, a Washington, D.C.-based consulting firm, surveyed students and university employees last spring on how to improve student services and facilities. A report based on that study and released this week recommends expanding and consolidating dining services in the Wood Center and centralizing student organizations in Constitution Hall.

The Campus Life Master Planning Committee sponsored several forums last week to give students, staff and faculty an opportunity to see the plans are under consideration. Students had several opportunities to comment on the proposals, writing their opinions on sticky-notes and posting them on large, blown-up diagrams.

Students do not use the Wood Center as much as they could because they feel there are few activities, the report says. As a solution, the firm proposes moving both the book store and dining hall to the Center, as well as adding new features such as a coffeehouse, a convenience store and quiet study area.

At a forum at the Hess Rec, Charlotte Beck, 20, felt the current Wood Center does not provide an amiable student environment. "It needs a student feel

to it, a student atmosphere," she said, "which this seems to supply."

John Rowley, 21, said he liked the idea of adding a coffee shop to the Wood Center. "On Friday nights and stuff, people go down to the coffee shop off-campus," he said. "Younger kids on campus always complain that there's a pub on campus but nothing for them."

The report calls for doubling the bookstore's space, allowing students to choose their own textbooks rather than making them wait in line for counter service in a crowded room on a different floor.

"The current bookstore is not working," said Tim Miller, a senior associate at B&D. "The way you buy textbooks is crazy. No other campus does that."

The bookstore's manager, Becky Phillips, agreed. "Currently we have to have clerk service because we're so crammed in the back there," she said.

The new location would also provide an opportunity to add a drug store and expand retail books and electronics. "So hopefully it could be a real retail store," Miller said.

Students would eat all meals at the Wood Center, allowing the food services to finally escape the over 40-year-old Lola Tilly Commons.

"Lola Tilly needs a lot of work," Miller said, "and sooner or later a lot of money will have to go to improve it and renovate it."

The university has made many improvements to the food service at the Commons over the past several years, according to Jeremiah Stampiano, assistant dining services director. But in food surveys conducted by dining services, breakfasts at the Wood Center receive higher ratings than lunch and dinner at the commons, which Stampiano attributes to location.

Not only that, but current plans also feature more retail dining space, bringing the possibility of franchises, Miller said.

Constitution Hall would get new tenants, with

most student organizations moving in. ASUAF would take over most of the second floor, with the Alumni Association and other student organizations sharing the rest. The Sun Star would join KSUA on the third floor in order to consolidate student media. The Master Planning Committee has not approached KSUA for official comment, according to H.B. Telling, the general manager.

Moving ASUAF to Constitution Hall makes sense, said ASUAF President Thom Walker. "There is some concern that we're moving students out of the student center, and I can appreciate that," he said. "I don't oppose that just because it'd centralize us and we could work better."

Plumbing would also allow ASUAF to provide better support for its hot chocolate and coffee service. The current offices lack water.

For housing, the firm proposes adding 100 four-room suites measuring 910 square feet. Current designs feature four bedrooms surrounding a common living room, with a bathroom in the back. Miller said students have since indicated they would like two bathrooms instead of one, a separate vanity and a kitchenette.

According to the study, students see the most important function of university housing as a way to meet new people and make new friends. But although housing fulfills the needs of younger students, students 20 and older have different needs with more independent lifestyles.

Most students move off-campus for additional privacy and single bedrooms, the report says, and adding more housing opportunities may entice them to stay on-campus. Many move off-campus to apartments and cabins, which the report finds cost more than university housing on average.

Consultants presented three possible designs for the actual housing buildings. Each featured four to seven connected buildings with a central courtyard. Miller said he was surprised to find many students questioning the necessity of a courtyard, indicating the firm may reconsider that idea.

Current estimates place the Wood Center

expansion costs at about \$41 million, while new housing units could cost around \$45 million. UAF would probably pay for about half of the costs, said project analyst Michael Berger, with help from the state legislature and private grants.

Students would pay the rest of the bill, with a fee similar to the current \$75 fee paying for the Student Recreation Center. Under the current plan, the fee would not go into effect until after construction completes, Walker said.

"This doesn't happen with magic money from magic trees," Walker said. "We're paying for what we get, not the idea."

Revenue from the expanded bookstore could also cover some costs, Berger said.

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