

Staten Island Advance

CSI eyes campus housing

Proposal in early stages, but school officials are conducting online, fact-finding poll among staff, students

Staten Island Advance - September 28, 2004

The College of Staten Island may become the second of the City University of New York's 19 academic institutions to have on-campus housing for students and faculty.

It could happen by fall 2006.

CSI began polling students and staff online Wednesday about housing preferences, family obligations and commuting routines to and from the Willowbrook campus.

About 30 percent of the college's 12,550 full and part-time students come from the four other city boroughs, and a small portion commutes from New Jersey.

With the exception of Hunter College in Manhattan, which has a limited number of student apartments, dormitory space is not available within the CUNY system.

"We're so different in terms of the way our campus is laid out," said Angelo Aponte, vice president for finance and administration at CSI. "We're a horizontal campus and virtually all of CUNY is vertical, they don't have the kind of land areas that we do."

CSI's bucolic 204-acre park-like property is the largest college campus in the city.

"It makes a very logical choice," said Aponte about on-site housing.

Although the proposal is still in the early stages, college officials have looked at a wooded piece of property adjacent to CSI's Center for the Arts building as the site for construction of a dormitory, likely a three or four-story facility.

"We've come a long way since the merger of Richmond College and Staten Island Community College," Aponte said.

So far, nearly 1,200 CSI students and 200 staff members have answered the online poll, which will end Friday.

Along with a series of ranked questions, the college's Web site survey, conducted by Washington, D.C.-based Brailsford & Dunlavey, features diagrams of six proposed layouts of dormitory suites at various rental costs.

A two-bedroom unit to be shared by four students with a private bathroom could go for \$545 per month, while a two-bedroom dorm, designated specifically for students with families, could fetch \$1,450.

"The purpose of this demand survey is purely fact-finding," said Aponte. "We're exploring the possibility of residential living on the campus of CSI."

Responses to the questions on the survey will be tallied and analyzed over the next several weeks with a report due by early November, said Greg Wachalski, an associate of Brailsford & Dunlavey.

Interest in the project began about nine months ago, when a number of students the college wanted to recruit decided to study elsewhere because of the lack of housing, said Aponte.

"It takes me two hours and 15 minutes in the morning. Going home, depending on if it's at night, it can take up to two and a half to three hours," said senior Satesh Somwar, 21, as he waited for the first of several buses that will take him home to the East New York section of Brooklyn. "It's a hard commute," he added.

If the survey results warrant enough demand for housing, the college would present the findings and a proposal to the CUNY board of trustees. In accordance with a board mandate that dates back to the 1980s, all proposals for student housing are required to be self-sustaining.

According to Aponte, the college would look to finance dormitory construction through the sale of public and private bonds.

The rental income would then be used to pay back the debt service on the bonds or construction loans, he said.

Based on a national average for building student housing, the costs for construction could range from \$50,000 to \$70,000 per resident. That means a 500-bed dorm may go for upwards of \$25 million to build.

The CSI dorm would be built in the same architectural design of the surrounding campus buildings.

"We don't want anything that would be an odd fit. We want it to blend in with the college setting," said Aponte.



By Diane O'Donnell
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