

## Student referendum is sought on proposed wellness center

*By Mike Sherwin*

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A campus-wide referendum on a proposed \$21 million recreation and wellness center will take place in early November, according to a plan by facilities planning firm Brailsford & Dunlavey.

Paul Brailsford, CEO of Brailsford & Dunlavey, unveiled details of the wellness center and the process of forming a student-led referendum committee during a meeting Wednesday afternoon in the Millennium Student Center. With around 20 students and administrators attending, Brailsford, and project manager Ann Drummie laid out the steps being taken in the "phased planning" for the new building, including the preliminary assessments, feasibility study, pre-implementation, and implementation if the center is approved.



*Media Credit: Mike Sherwin*

Paul Brailsford, CEO of Brailsford & Dunlavey, a Washington D.C. based facilities planning firm, points to the former site of Garage D as the most likely spot for a proposed Wellness Center. A student referendum on the center is being planned for November.

"The concept," Brailsford said, "is for all students, faculty, staff and alumni to have a place for recreational play, fitness, group exercise and wellness activities." Plans for the center currently include a two-court gym, a jogging track, a 6,000 square foot pool, 12,000 square feet of weight fitness areas, a climbing wall, a juice bar and game and activity rooms.

Brailsford said the proposed location for the wellness center is near the south end of the MSC, on the former site of Garage D, which was torn down in May 2004. Although no specific architectural design has been presented, Brailsford said, "The wellness center and the Millennium Student Center would communicate with each other quite actively...matching glass with glass."

Drummie said from talking with students, she sees a demand for a new campus facility. "From the sound bytes I've heard on campus," Drummie said, "people are saying 'there is nothing to do on campus,' and '[Mark Twain] is too crowded.' The wellness center would give a greater sense of campus life."

The proposal set forth by Brailsford & Dunlavey would request that student recreational fees increase to a total of \$100-120 per semester for a full-time student in order to pay off capital and operating costs for the wellness center, which would cost \$21.5-22 million to build. Student recreational facility fees are currently at \$2.73, according to the UM-St. Louis Cashier's Office website. The proposal also calls for revenue from staff and employee memberships, fees from "value added services" that would be offered, and possibly from outside-campus memberships.

Brailsford and Drummie also outlined plans for forming a student referendum committee that would organize and promote a campus-wide referendum on building a new wellness center. Brailsford said he would like to see a committee representing "all classes, both undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, with gender and ethnic diversity," headed by two co-chairpersons - one undergrad and one graduate student.

The committee would submit a budget, likely between \$6,000 and \$12,000 to administrative services, Brailsford said. When approved, the committee could begin to campaign. Although Brailsford said he hopes that a referendum would pass, he advised potential committee members that, "This would be run best as a 'Get Out the Vote' campaign, and not a 'Vote Yes' campaign."

Brailsford said that on previous projects he has worked on, his firm has typically seen voter turnout approximately double or triple the turnout in a general student government election. UM-St. Louis had approximately 1,000 students out of a total enrollment of around 15,000 students that voted in the 2004 student government election. When a similar referendum was held in the spring of 1995 on the construction of the Millennium Student Center, twice as many votes were cast compared to previous SGA elections. The MSC referendum passed by over 70 percent of student voters.

Some students attending the meeting expressed concerns about the increased student fees the new building would require. D'Andre Braddix, SGA vice chairperson, asked whether student fees would decrease over time. Brailsford responded that after the approximately 30-year debt service was paid off, fee changes would depend on enrollment growth and changes in operating costs.

Annette Crymes, graduate, English, said that she would not support raising student fees considerably for a wellness center. "Do I think it is worth it and would I use it? Absolutely not."

Other students voiced approval for the proposed wellness center. Joe Garavaglia, senior, accounting, said "I think it would bring a sense of community, it would be a good recruitment tool, a retention tool. Especially being by the Millennium Center, it would give more places for students to hang out."

Garavaglia, who plans to take part in the student referendum committee, said that although he worries that the student fee increase may be a tough sell to students, he would vote for the new center. "I think if they could bring the fees down, it would be a great idea. I think most students would vote for it then. You have to have good student life on a campus. Students can't just come to class. They need a sense of community."

Reinhard Schuster, vice chancellor for administrative services, said that a new recreation center "would really have a multi-pronged benefit to students. As more and more students become aware of health issues, physical exercise is of prime importance. It would also be a great way for students to socialize and meet people."

Schuster also acknowledged that some students might be wary of the projected increase in student fees. "If I was a student, I'd also be concerned with the cost," said Schuster "but I never envisioned students paying 100 percent of it."

Schuster said that "While fees have probably doubled in the past few years, on the other hand, we have the lowest interest rates in 40 years. If you wait until income catches up with cost increases, the interest rates may go up."

A committee on the student referendum is still being formed, and chairpersons have not been named. Garavaglia said it will be up to SGA president Scott Bopp to announce the committee's next meeting.