

The Nevada SAGEBRUSH

Issue: 8/24/04

Firm selected to design new student union

By Annie Flanzraich

The university selected a Pennsylvania-based architect firm over the summer to design the new student union along with a local firm.

The New Student Union Planning Team chose WTW Architects, as the lead designer for the new student union. The firm has designed student centers around the country for schools such as DePaul University in Chicago and the University of Colorado, Boulder. The committee also chose Lundahl and Associates, a Reno-based company as the secondary firm.

Chuck Price, director of the Jot Travis Student Union, served on the selection committee and said WTW is an experienced firm.

"What's great about WTW is they've done this at many other campuses," Price said. "They understand student unions, they understand students. Sometimes when you get national or local architects they know construction and they might know great design. But do they know how to listen to students? That's one of the key things that this firm was chosen for, was their ability to listen to students."

The new student union has been an ongoing project since December 2002 when proponents assessed the need. The new union, scheduled to be built by fall 2007, will be located near Lombardi Recreation Center on the north side of campus. The new union would move the center of campus farther north, as a new library and the West Campus Parking Complex will be added.

Richard Bamburak, a WTW senior principal, said the new building could transform the face of the campus.

"It has the real advantage of connecting the recreation facility and library and connecting divergent areas of the campus," Bamburak said.

An outside firm, Brailsford & Dunlavey, conducted two surveys in 2003 in order to evaluate the needs of students and different organizations on campus. The first survey was a feasibility study to decide if the students wanted a new union. Results showed 78 percent of students viewed a new union as a moderate to high priority.

A second study was performed to determine the willingness of students to pay a fee for such a building. These results showed that 72 percent of the students surveyed would be willing to pay for the new facility. The fee could be as much as \$97 for undergraduates and will begin in 2006.

Brailsford & Dunlavey also conducted interviews with different organizations on campus to determine their wish list of space. From these interviews they completed a project plan for the new union that would require more than 200,000 square feet of space. More interviews were conducted to reduce the amount of space feasible for the budget.

"The whole idea here is to match project budget with project scope," Bamburak said.

The proposed space for the new union was 190,000 gross square feet. However, due to rising steel and concrete prices the space had to be reduced to 175,000 gross square feet to work within the budget. The current plan has 125,583 square feet of usable space in the facility.

"What we started to see in the spring was that the price of steel has been going up," Price said. "We're not going back to students saying 'Oh by the way steel went up so we need another \$3 or \$10.' We all, the two student government presidents and the administration, said we need to be responsible with this use of students' money."

Jessie Muehlberg, president of the Graduate Student Association, said that efforts were made to cut space by making more areas multifunctional, such as a single conference room instead of separate rooms for different organizations.

Price said that while no hard numbers were set for space allotment for organizations, the previous surveying by Brailsford & Dunlavey could have set expectations.

"Some groups dreamed more than others," Price said. "In some ways because some groups dreamed a lot more dreamier than others, when it comes to cuts it was too much of a dream, which is what they were asked to do by the consultants but then the consultants came back and told reality."

The cut in space will affect groups who use the new union; however student leaders feel that the space will have room for most organizational needs.

"Basically there should be plenty of space for clubs and organizations," said Erin Lankowsky, president of the Associated Students of the University of Nevada. "Probably not as much as we'd like them to have but there's not enough square footage to accommodate them. I'm disappointed personally, because we could be fundraising to increase the square footage. There's definitely money out there."

While Lankowsky acknowledges that money is needed for new academic buildings he feels there are donors who might be interested in contributing to the union's costs. Part of Lankowsky's election platform was to decrease student fees for the union by finding additional money sources.

"I would love another \$1 million, \$2 million, \$10 million, \$20 million to do a total dream union but that's not realistic on this campus," Price said. "It's not realistic for what students are able to pay. (University President John Lilley) made very clear last September at the first meeting at ASUN he said there's not going to be fundraising for this."

"If students want it they're going to have to pay for it. He has been very consistent about that by saying that there are other higher-level priorities on our campus for fundraising. Would I like more money for the project - yes - but that's not a high priority for the university right now."

Price said that what needs to be looked at is the increased amount of space that organizations will have in the union compared to their current allotment.

"Everyone has been very open to communication," Muehlberg said. "Everyone has been willing to listen to ideas. Ultimately, I think in terms of the budget we have and what students wanted, and all the other factors, I think the union is the best it's going to be with those limitations. Everyone is getting more space. Everyone is getting better space suited to their needs."