



Progress Made on Plans for URI Arena

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Plans for a new arena at the University of Rhode Island, which have been quietly moving forward over the past several months, are now being unveiled by school officials.

Plans call for a facility to be built just west of the current athletic buildings and seat 7,500-8,000 people, according to The Providence Journal. The arena would replace 45-year-old Keaney Gymnasium and cost an estimated \$ 43.6 million.

It would host athletic contests, university-wide events, concerts and conferences.

The current schedule calls for groundbreaking in March 2000 and the first event to be held in November 2001. But organizers concede that might be a bit ambitious. More likely, the facility will be a year behind schedule, university spokesman Linda Acciaro said.

Plans for the arena are moving ahead on two fronts: fund raising and construction planning.

Construction is dependent on the school raising \$ 15 million through private donations. School officials already have started sounding out potential donors and said they came away encouraged.

The state has pledged to match all money raised, dollar for dollar, up to \$ 15 million.

The university recently announced the hiring of Robert Turcotte, the former director of athletic development at Northeastern University, to head the fund-raising program. He starts work Jan. 4.

In October, 72 percent of students who voted in a referendum said they would favor a \$ 50 per semester assessment to help pay for the arena.

On the construction planning front, a consultant, Brailsford & Dunlavey of Washington, D.C., researched a market, architectural and financial feasibility study.

The school plans to hire an architectural firm next month.

University officials have met with representatives of the town of South Kingstown and the state Department of Transportation to review how they will handle traffic to the arena.