

UMass Boston builds support for on-campus housing

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At UMass Boston, support for on-campus dorms is growing, according to preliminary data released by the university. A survey, conducted by the firm Brailsford and Dunlavey, showed 75 percent of students who responded said they were very interested or interested in student housing, up from 67 percent in 2010.

The university has been steadily building support for a 2,000-bed plan, and held a pair of meetings last week on the preliminary results of the survey.

“It reaffirms our students’ desire to have housing on campus,” Patrick Day, vice chancellor of student affairs, said. “What you see is a fairly significant increase.”

About 800 students completed the survey, though 603 students made it all the way through the lengthy poll.

Since its inception, UMass Boston has been a commuter campus, and university officials say it plans to stay that way, even with the advent of dorms, possibly as soon as 2015. That’s the year the campus could see the first phase: 1,000 beds.

The dormitories are part of a 25-year master plan for the campus, which includes new and renovated academic facilities, overhauled roadways and new green space, known as a “quad.” Approval from the UMass Board of Trustees is unnecessary, because dorms were baked into the master plan when trustees signed off on it years ago.

The first 10 years of the master plan include \$500 million in spending on new facilities. A new Integrated Sciences Complex is expected to open in fall 2014, while university officials broke ground on a general academic building in February.

The design portion of dorms could come later this year, and construction could start in May 2014, according to the preliminary timeline from a presentation that included the survey.

“This information is still in draft form, and it is our hope that in the fall we will be ready to host and attend public meetings to update the external community on the status of our plans,” university spokesman DeWayne Lehman said in an email.

The survey was similar to the one students took in 2010, which included 97 questions, was conducted by the same firm, and carried a price tag of \$10,500.

The dorms are expected to be located in the northern part of the campus, with two areas adjacent to the Columbia Point apartment buildings, some of which already function as de facto dorms. More could be on the way, as Corcoran Jennison seeks to build a 184-unit building on Mt. Vernon St., named "University Place." The company has said they do not have an agreement on the "University Place" building with UMass and does not consider the apartments as dorms.

Separately, UMass Boston officials will be leasing space for eight classrooms and an administrative office in the basement of the 150 Mt. Vernon St., according to Lehman.

"The space will be used primarily for overflow needs from our College of Advancing and Professional Studies, which is growing rapidly," he said. "We expect the classes to be held there will be English language, test preparatory, and professional development classes, which will be held five days a week between the hours of 9 a.m. and 9 p.m."

The building is connected to the former Bayside Exposition Center, which UMass Boston bought in 2010.

The 150 Mt. Vernon St. building is home to Corcoran Jennison, SEIU 1199, a healthcare workers union, the Dorchester Reporter, and the state Registry of Vital Records and Statistics.

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