

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

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St. Charles Community College May Add Student Housing

By Mark Schlinkmann

COTTLEVILLE • On-campus housing could be coming to St. Charles Community College.

A consulting firm says demand justifies a \$19 million building housing 284 students.

“There is potentially a market there,” said school president Ronald Chesbrough, adding that no decision has been made yet by the school’s board on the idea.

Chesbrough said if the school goes ahead with housing, the most likely scenario would be to put together a partnership with a private developer to build the facility.

The developer would sell tax-exempt bonds to raise the money. Then either the school or the developer could operate it, he said.

“I’m not interested in borrowing, I’m not interested in issuing a bond” by the school to pay for construction, he said.

The school paid the consulting firm, Brailsford and Dunlavey of Chicago, \$35,000 to study the idea.

The college, which began offering classes in 1987 and moved to its campus in 1992, has about 6,500 students enrolled this semester, including about 4,200 full time.

Chesbrough estimated that 20 percent of the students come from neighboring counties, mainly Lincoln and Warren.

Some of those students might be among the likely users of student housing.

The consulting firm’s study said more than three- fourths of students drive 30 minutes or less to get to campus. Sixteen percent have a 30-to-45-minute commute and about 5 percent one that’s longer.

The consulting firm recommended building 71 units with four, two or one bedrooms. However, Chesbrough said if the school decides to go ahead, it would likely decide on one unit type and build just that type. That would be more economical, he said.

The school would be the second community college in the metro area to build on-campus housing, following Jefferson College, which did so in 2001.

Roger Barrentine, a spokesman for the Hillsboro-based school, said the Viking Woods apartment complex opened in 2001 and has about 215 student residents.

Pat Metreci, a spokeswoman for the St. Louis Community College system, said it has no plans to build any dormitories or apartments on its four campuses — Forest Park, Florissant Valley, Meramec and Wildwood.

“There really isn’t any demand,” she said.

Community colleges in the Metro East are barred by Illinois law from erecting on-campus housing.

However, Southwestern Illinois College in Belleville has 48 students who stay in off-campus apartments run by a property management company under an agreement with the school, a college official said. Student athletes are among those living there.

In Godfrey, a company has requested municipal approval to build off-campus apartments aimed at students at Lewis and Clark Community College.

Laura Dixon, Godfrey’s building and zoning administrator, said the first phase would include 12 two-bedroom apartments and six four-bedroom apartments. More apartments would be built later, she said.

Lori Artis, a college spokeswoman, said a feasibility study and market analysis conducted for the school last year concluded that a majority of students believed housing should be a priority for the school.

The study was done by Brailsford and Dunlavey, the same consultant that assisted the St. Charles County college.

“We put this information out in the community for private contractors to consider building,” Artis said.