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Sac State construction plans still on track despite economy

Recreation center set to be finished in 2010; new dorm will add 608 beds

Sacramento Business Journal - by [Robert Celaschi](#) Correspondent

California State University Sacramento isn't letting a weak economy get in the way of its construction plans — not most of them, at least.



Noel Neuburger | Sacramento Business Journal
 Ron Richardson oversees facility services for Sacramento State, including the new housing under construction on campus.

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The campus is moving ahead with a host of buildings, has just completed a pair of high-profile projects and still intends eventually to build one major development that has been put on hold until the housing market comes back to life.

The one stalled project is Ramona Village, originally dubbed University Village when the school bought the 25-acre property near the Power Inn light-rail station. The goal was to build a neighborhood targeted at university faculty and staff, offering affordable housing in a market that was considered beyond their reach. But with the housing market much weaker today, the university is keeping the village on ice.

All that has been done so far is preliminary engineering work, and no building has been scheduled.

"We have to wait for the economy to recover and analyze whether that is the proper thing to do in a year or two," said Marti Gray, executive director of [University Enterprises Inc.](#), formerly known as the [California State University Sacramento Foundation](#). "We couldn't compete with the existing housing prices in Sacramento."

Attention-getter

The project most visible to people passing near the campus is the new digital sign installed this past August off Highway 50 near Folsom Boulevard. Measuring 14 feet by 48 feet, the two-sided sign sits 85 feet above the ground next to the freeway.

It didn't cost the school a penny as it's owned and operated by advertising company [Clear Channel](#) Outdoors through a 25-year lease agreement. Sacramento State gets to program one of the eight messages the sign displays in a 64-second cycle. The sign also can be used to alert drivers to road conditions and for the Amber Alert program to help find abducted children.

In addition to the free ad, the university stands to earn a portion of the revenue that Clear Channel Outdoors collects. Clear Channel already has set aside \$750,000 for the university. University president Alexander Gonzalez earlier announced plans to use \$300,000 of it for faculty to attend conferences and conduct research.

So that the digital sign won't distract drivers, it's programmed to adjust itself every 30 seconds to be no brighter than a standard billboard in the ambient light.

Recreation and wellness

The largest project under way on campus just went to the board of trustees for approval in late September: a \$77 million recreation and wellness center.

"We split that project up into three segments," said Ron Richardson, associate vice president of facility services for Sacramento State. An old fieldhouse already has been demolished at the north end of Hornet Stadium, and the university went out to bid on some site work with funding from student union fees. Board approval makes the funding available for construction of the 151,000-square-foot center.

Part of Sacramento State's effort to become more of a residential campus, the 123,000-square-foot recreation portion will have free weights, exercise machines, an indoor track, racquetball courts, basketball courts and a climbing wall. The 28,000-square-foot health and wellness portion will have an urgent care center, a pharmacy, dental services and health-education rooms.

General contractor McCarthy Building Cos. Inc. is already on board, and completion is slated for the summer of 2010. The university got McCarthy involved before architects Hornberger+Worstell finished the drawings in order to help fix costs and keep the project on budget, Richardson said. When about 40 subcontractor bids went out in July, Sacramento State kept a list of options ready to cut costs, such as not finishing out all the racquetball courts right away.

"As it turns out, the sub bids came in under our budget, so we are able to finish those as part of the project," Richardson said.

The health and wellness center dovetails with the Broad Athletic Facility completed earlier this year. The \$11 million Broad project replaced the old Hornet field house.

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Also part of the residential scene is a new dorm started last year and expected to be ready by next summer for the start of the 2009 school year.

Instead of the traditional separate dorm rooms, the new building has suites of two to five bedrooms and two bathrooms. Each suite has shared kitchen space with microwave ovens and refrigerators.

The first new dorm since 1990, it will add 608 beds to the campus, expanding the current capacity by more than half. The school also leases lofts off campus at 65th Street and Folsom Boulevard for student housing.

The four-story building will encompass 209,000 square feet and cost a projected \$61.6 million. In addition to the apartment-style dorms, it also will have retail food areas and several areas for studying and meetings.

Sacramento architectural firm [Mogavero Notestine Associates](#) designed it, and Brown Construction in West Sacramento is building it.

Replacing CalSTRS

As more students move onto campus, more university services are moving off. In the summer of 2007, University Enterprises bought the old headquarters of the California State Teachers' Retirement System, which is building anew along the riverfront in West Sacramento.

The \$35.3 million deal gives Sacramento State an extra 188,000 square feet on Folsom Boulevard not far from campus. At the time of the purchase, the university estimated it would have cost about twice as much to buy land and build the same amount of space.

CalSTRS isn't scheduled to move into its new building until this summer, having leased back most of the old building. Sacramento State did take over about 6,000 square feet in the old building soon after the purchase, however, moving University Transportation and Parking Services into the space.

After CalSTRS moves out and Sacramento State makes tenant improvements, the university will use about half the total square footage, possibly for research operations. The university plans to rent out the rest. That gives it the potential to be a moneymaker, but it's not a sure thing in this market.

"We have to preface everything today with 'in this market,' but it's a good, long-term solution to the campus," Gray said.

Sweet dreams

Sacramento State has no lack of ideas for future construction.

"We have a lot of hopes, desires, wishes, needs," Richardson said. But not much money. Financing for capital projects traditionally has come through general obligation bonds. There are none in the 2008 budget, and none are expected before 2010, he said. That will slow down plans to replace old science labs and add lecture space.

The Science II Complex, an estimated \$97 million project, was originally supposed to start construction in 2010. Plans call for two phases. First comes a one-story building with lecture space, a science museum and a planetarium. Second is a multistory building for labs and offices.

A timeline also has yet to be worked out for a new event center to seat 6,000 to 8,000 people. Cost estimates run \$50 million to \$60 million.

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