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## Progress continues on freshmen 'village' at WKU

By AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com) Apr 20, 2019

Progress continues on a project to replace two residence halls at Western Kentucky University, but the first building will likely open later than originally expected and include fewer beds.

“Basically what we’re trying to do is we’re trying to create smaller communities,” said Mike Reagle, WKU’s assistant vice president for student affairs, who also directs housing and dining on campus.

Over the next two years, officials want to spend \$50 million to demolish Bemis Lawrence Hall and Barnes-Campbell Hall at the bottom of WKU’s hill and replace them with two high-end residence halls that feature a “pod-style” concept.

Through the concept, about 25 rooms would share common amenities like bathrooms and lounges, unlike a typical residence hall that has a larger number of rooms sharing those spaces, Reagle said.

Within the same project, campus leaders want to also convert the large Pearce-Ford Tower parking lot into green space enclosed by the two new, more elongated residence halls.

The result would create what campus leaders have billed as a “first-year village” for freshmen that emphasizes living-learning communities formed around shared student interests.

The plan is to demolish Bemis Lawrence Hall first this summer to make room for the work to begin. However, Reagle told the Daily News that the opening of the first building will likely take longer than the original planned opening of fall 2020.

“I think it’s a really, really aggressive timeline to think that we would get building one up in about a 14-month span,” he said, adding that officials are still working on finalizing financing documents for the project.

Assuming the first building doesn’t open in the fall of 2020, Reagle said both buildings could open the following fall in 2021.

“I think that’s probably the most realistic scenario, is that we would open both in fall of 2021,” Reagle said.

Reagle said the first building will also have fewer beds than the 400 that were initially anticipated. The current plan is to lose 125 beds by shaving off one wing from the building, Reagle said.

The green space, which Reagle has previously described as bringing a second South Lawn to campus, will likely come last. Reagle described the space as being more than big enough to contain the length of a football field, and it will feature a walkway that loops around its perimeter.

The resulting loss of parking will move to a parking lot developed on land previously owned by the Student Life Foundation on the 1400 block of Park and High streets. Commuter student parking will be moved to the Park and High streets lot, and residential parking in the Pearce-Ford Tower lot will be moved across the street to the University Boulevard lot, according to a previous Daily News article.

All of this is meant to promote what campus officials have described as a greater community atmosphere at the bottom of WKU's hill.

Reagle said designing the buildings with shared amenities will hopefully allow students to make friends more easily, helping them feel more at home on the Hill.

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## Aaron Mudd

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