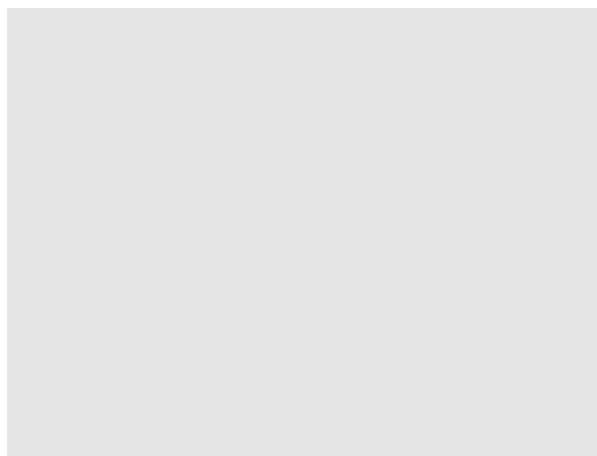


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WKU's six-year capital projects plan tops \$810 million

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com May 17, 2019



Timothy Caboni

A new business college, campus parking structure and demolishing Tate Page Hall top a list of facility priorities laid out in a six-year capital plan recently approved by Western Kentucky University's Board of Regents.

Described as a "needs assessment," the list represents a total of \$810,900,000 in construction and renovation projects between 2020 and 2026. However, despite a lengthy list of 38 projects for the 2020-22 biennium, one campus leader isn't feeling optimistic about getting any support from the state.

"I don't really expect any funding from the state of Kentucky," said Bryan Russell, WKU's chief facilities officer. Typically, Russell said, it takes about 10 years before the state will support a new capital construction project.

In the meantime, the university makes do with equipment repairs, Russell said, adding that even then “it really is on borrowed time.”

“A lot of these buildings we have, especially our academic buildings, they’re in need of full renovation,” he said, rattling off a list of facilities including WKU’s Academic Complex, Gordon Wilson Hall and Environmental Sciences and Technology Building.

WKU isn’t alone in managing these “deferred maintenance” issues.

“There is a real need for the state of Kentucky in not just higher education but all state facilities to invest more in their existing deferred maintenance,” he said.

In comments made to WKU’s Board of Regents, President Timothy Caboni described the plan as “not as things we’re going to do in the next six years, but a wish list that creates flexibility in case there is an opportunity to pursue a project.”

Russell echoed those statements in speaking to the Daily News, adding that any construction project with a budget of more than \$1 million needs prior authorization from the state and board approval.

“This gives you that document to start the process,” Russell said. “It doesn’t give you the approval to do the project from a board perspective.”

When it comes to the plan, priority No. 1 is the construction of a new Gordon Ford College of Business, a project that WKU estimates would cost more than \$65 million. If completed, Russell said the building would be located where a campus parking lot on Adams Street currently exists and face Van Meter Hall at the top of WKU’s hill.

Other projects listed within the university’s top five priorities, such as a \$32.2 million Grise Hall renovation and the \$25 million construction of a fourth parking garage on campus, are related to the business college project. Those projects were previously listed as one project, Russell said, but were broken up into separate projects as an “institutional strategy.”



Another top priority is the development of WKU’s Innovation Campus at its current Center for Research and Development on Nashville Road. According to the plan, it’s a project totaling \$80 million.

Previously, Caboni has described his plan for an Innovation Campus as a place that would bring investors, venture capital and businesses together to develop innovations. Such a place could potentially keep young people in Bowling Green with attractive jobs, Caboni has said.

Another project, ranked as priority No. 4, is a \$6 million project to demolish Tate Page Hall and improve its site near the South Lawn.

The building is well past its useful life with an electrical switchgear that is no longer manufactured. If a failure occurs, it’s impossible to get replacement parts, Russell said. The building is down to just a few occupants, but even “With nobody in there, it’s expensive,” Russell said.

Speaking to reporters recently, Caboni called on the state to help shoulder the burden of maintaining campus facilities.

“These are state assets and the state has some obligation to work together with us to protect them, and I think that’s going to be an important part of the conversation as we move forward,” he said.

Aaron Mudd

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