University Connections

Cofrin Library as seen from the Arboretum (UWGB Master Plan Update 2004).

UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN
GREEN BAY

Aerial photography of the University of Wisconsin - Green Bay campus (*http://www.uwgb.edu/biodiversity*).

University Connections

Introduction

One of the major objectives for the project was to assess the "University Connection". With the development situated in close proximity to the University of Wisconsin - Green Bay (UWGB) campus, both students and developers wanted to incorporate the University's perspective on the area. The administration, Biodiversity Center, and student body were identified as vital in assessing the campus's wishes for the proposed development.

The Administration and the Biodiversity Center were addressed via semi-structured interviews for selected representatives. To assess student response, a student poll was used. Due to time limitations, it was not possible to randomly sample the 5,420 student enrollment.

Though different methods were used to assess each group, similar baseline questions were asked regarding the potential for a new business center in the area, isolation of the campus from the community, and the opportunity for future student housing. It was found that, overall, the general campus opinion towards the development was positive. The potential benefits associated with connecting the campus to the new development not only serve the campus, but also the community as a whole.

Figure 4.1. UWGB slogan (*http://www.uwgb.edu/connect/*).

UWGB Administration and their Perspective on the Potential Development

As part of the assessment of the campus perspective, Chancellor Bruce Shepard and Assistant Chancellor for Planning and Budget Dean Rodeheaver were interviewed to obtain an administrative perspective on the development. Both the Chancellor and Assistant Chancellor were delighted to be included in this conversation. They think that it is important for the University to create and maintain connections within the Green Bay community. Teaming with developers in local planning efforts may help dispel the perception that the campus is isolated from the community.

Strengthened connectivity between the campus and the development can come through Green Bay Public Transit. With a new sizeable development in the area, Green Bay Public Transit may find it profitable to add additional bus lines. According to the Assistant Chancellor, additional bus lines combined with green buildings, such as Mary Ann Cofrin Hall, could help the campus receive a designation of a LEED Community. Promotion of expanded bus service could also help alleviate the perceived parking problem on campus. Although there is sufficient parking available on campus, a recent survey indicated that students frequently complain that adequate parking is simply not available.

The Chancellor feels that one of the largest resources for the community on campus is the Cofrin Arboretum with its natural areas and integrated trail system. He believes that, through "protecting and connecting people and the environment," the community can be served by the arboretum's mission. Connecting the trail system to surrounding community trails would allow easier access to the campus resources. By providing a connection to the surrounding development and its proposed retail services, the University could help promote bicycle use on campus.

A main interest for both developers and the administration is the potential market for student housing. The Chancellor and Assistant Chancellor were asked a series

of questions regarding the outlook for campus enrollment and student housing. The projected future enrollment for the campus is approximately 7,500, or a 50% increase of current numbers. Currently, 75% of students are considered residential, meaning that they do not live with their parents or spouse. Of those 75%, half live in campus housing.

This possible student population size increase will likely create a demand for housing, both on and off campus. The University has a unique approach to housing. Campus living is non-traditional where the students live in an apartment style setting, as opposed to standard dormitories. The variety of housing choices creates retention of students on campus and even a waiting list to live in campus housing. There is no current need for the University to have mandatory campus living beyond freshman year.

Figure 4.2. One of three alternatives for updating the UWGB Campus Master Plan (2004).

Working with 501(c)(3) financing, the University has more options to create apartments. 501(c)(3) financing is a type of bond issued to create multi-family housing, or, in this case, multi-student housing, for a nonprofit or government entity (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development). Because of the options available with 501(c)(3) funding, UWGB faces fewer obstacles to financing housing if enrollments decline. The flexibility in the funding allows the University more options when creating student living. They can work with a non-profit developer to incorporate classrooms into the designs, as well as areas that could be used for retail space.

501(c)(3) removes the land and existing property limitations that restrict building to the campus boundaries. If the University so chooses, developers may build student housing off campus in areas that are easily accessible to campus. This provides the option for the University to actually build a dorm or community learning center with combined student housing within the JPA.

501(c)(3) does not limit UWGB to working only with the developer to build

University Connections

Figure 4.3. Campus residence halls (*http://www.uwgb.edu/housing/housing/index.htm*).

dorms. Community connections could include building senior housing as well. Incorporating a senior citizen complex into campus or the project area would give senior citizens easier access to the resources that the campus provides, such as the Shorewood Golf Course, Phoenix Sports Center, Cofrin Arboretum, and Weidner Center.

If the demand for housing moves away from campus, the Chancellor does not view it as competition. However, it needs to be coordinated with planned university housing expansion. The University doesn't want to create a "lose-lose situation" for developers and the school. If the area were to have more options for housing (i.e. townhouses, duplexes, apartments) and employment opportunities, it could be an incentive to live off campus for students. Creating quality housing, not "student ghettos" or sub-par housing, off campus could create a neighborhood sense that non-traditional students and graduate students would welcome. Another factor to consider regarding housing is that the University is a major employer in the area. With a different "feel" to the area, along with its proximity to campus, the development could also become a residential housing option for faculty and staff.

The Chancellor expressed concern that UWGB is perceived to be rather isolated from the city center as compared to other campuses around the country. When new residential developments come to the area, the campus would not be considered as far "out there" anymore. The project area could create a University Center, an area where students could work and socialize. The Chancellor and Assistant Chancellor both see the importance of such an area. Students currently need to drive miles off campus to go to the movies or visit with friends in a social setting. If the area were to include a business sector with shops and restaurants, students, could work and socialize without a far commute. The Assistant Chancellor was asked about the possible expansion of the University passpoint system to the area. His response was optimistic. With agreements between the school and retailers, the passpoint system could easily be expanded to include places frequented by students, such as coffee shops and restaurants. The only obstacle to the expansion would be a conflict with the current food service contract.

While discussing the potential business types in the area, the Assistant Chancellor recommended that the area not have "Big Box" retailers. Through the school's research for the University Master Plan, they learned that the University community is not looking for more chain retailers. The Assistant Chancellor advised that "consistent architecture makes better character." It brings a better sense of community and connection. When asked about the possibility of a hotel being located in the development the Chancellor thought it would be an asset to the community. He discussed the benefits for families visiting students, visiting sports teams, and visiting faculty interviewees.

The Chancellor and Assistant Chancellor offered interesting insight to the development area. They would like the area to benefit the campus community, and also hope that the new development will benefit from campus resources. Finally, they were interested in how the Capstone class is "connecting learning to life." Using a community-based project as a highlight of the graduate program allows students to utilize their expertise and to learn from the community.

Recommendations from the Cofrin Center for Biodiversity

The environmental aspects of development are the focus of these recommendations; thus, Dr. Robert Howe, a UWGB professor in Natural and Applied Science and director of the Campus Center for Biodiversity, was interviewed. The Biodiversity Center promotes education, research, and community services that contribute to conservation of natural landscapes. The broad objective is to "develop a model regional biodiversity center that will help guide conservation efforts elsewhere." (UWGB 2004). The Biodiversity Center staff consists of other University professors, staff, and students, who maintain and manage the Richter Museum, Herbarium, and Cofrin Arboretum. The Cofrin Arboretum encompasses the 290 acres encircling the UWGB campus, and contains a system of trails to give the public opportunity to enjoy the aesthetic and ecological features of the Arboretum. As director of the Biodiversity Center, Dr. Howe has been involved in restoration and management efforts concerning the Arboretum features including the bike system.

Dr. Howe believes that a connection to the campus trail system for pedestrian and bike traffic would be possible, but that there are limitations. Providing an alternative for transportation is important. However, the design of the volume capacity of the trail system plays a key role in its viability. Currently, the arboretum trail is comprised of two types of trails, a main paved and gravel circle trail and a system of smaller bark trails. Structurally, the only trail designated a viable bicycle trail is the paved and gravel circle trail. The bark trails contour to the natural landscape and are designated for hiking and walking. Due to these limitations, when it comes to connecting this smaller trail system to a larger system, the University does not have the infrastructure to handle the traffic volume that the Fox River Trail gets. Connecting the campus to local trails is feasible, but trying to establish a Brown County system connection would not be a feasible option. A cause for concern is controlling invasive species in the arboretum if a trail connection was opened. Dr. Howe claims he probably holds more of a pessimistic view that it is going to happen regardless of a trail or not. However, he expressed that he does not think bikes are going to be an issue.

Dr. Howe also gave advice on creating a "walkable" community in the development. He believes that it is important to "break out of the mold" and "think outside the box." Streets and sidewalks are not the only possible avenues for transportation within a community. Incorporating a trail system would provide children a safe area to ride their bicycles. Creating a recreational circle to link homes and businesses would create a more walkable community. He gave the suggestion to "Think of what people are going to do after dinner. Families can walk to the ice cream place or ride bikes." Design the area so that it holds community character. Placing businesses that are commonly "quick trips" closer to trails encourages bicycles as transportation, instead of only recreation. Even think as far as connecting the trail loop to other trail systems, such as the proposed trail near Red Smith School and athletic fields. For those interested in more scenic trails, expand from the larger loop to the natural areas with smaller unpaved trails providing a more challenging trek.

Communities could have residents own, maintain, and light segments of the trail

Figure 4.4. A trail in the UWGB Cofrin Arboretum (*http://www.uwgb.edu/biodiversity*).

that traverse their property. Dr. Howe feels that in order to make such a system work, there needs to be a neighborhood association. Having association standards for upkeep and design would create stronger regulations and enforcement, making everyone "pull their own weight." To accompany the association, covenants could be used to solidify the agreement between the homeowner and the community. Dr. Howe believes that although this is an option, it may not be the best option for the development. He suggests that public ownership of the trail system should be considered. This would alleviate potential problems with upkeep, create a uniform appearance throughout the system, and lower property taxes for parcels that would otherwise include trail easements.

When asked about the possibility of incorporating a community garden into the development area, Dr. Howe suggested looking at why past projects involving community gardens have been successful. Success of a garden not only depends on the immediate community, but on the involvement of surrounding communities. People in urban areas do not always have room to plant gardens in multi-family areas. The large number of private homeowners in the City of Green Bay may limit a community garden's success. Locally, the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Holy Cross have overcome the community involvement obstacle and found success in developing a community garden. They broadened the invitation to residents outside the immediate neighborhood.

Figure 4.5. A trail in the UWGB Cofrin Arboretum (*http://www.uwgb.edu/biodiversity*).

Preservation of green space is viewed as an important aspect to incorporate into the development. Dr. Howe was asked his opinion on the importance of considering the natural setting of a development area. He confirmed that preserving the existing natural areas and buffering around them should be a high priority. Areas like Minneapolis with a larger percentage of attractive green space have increased property values, which developers and homeowners will see as a direct benefit. Designing housing and businesses with larger distances from environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs) as well as routing roads around ESAs would help increase the functionality of habitat. Where home and businesses are built, planting native shrubs and creating a lawn of native grasses requiring minimal maintenance could help promote greater biodiversity. According to Dr. Howe, the key is to "work with what you've got and you'll get the biggest bang for your buck." Providing a listing of plants that are native and attractive could help the residents and developers make environmentally conscious decisions. He stresses that "native plants are really important. People mostly need direction."

In discussing orientation of buildings and streets with respect to ESAs, another important aspect of the development design was addressed. Dr. Howe stressed the need for there to be an evaluation of the drainage patterns, so that placement of rain gardens and retention ponds are optimized for infiltration. Proper stormwater management can offset the impermeable surfaces that are standard in developments. Attempting to use more porous street material is not a viable option due to snow removal, but he suggests that standards be used in designing streets. He emphasized the importance of manipulating streets around wetlands and ponds. Dr. Howe stressed that design not be "business as usual." Designing a system that collects stormwater and treats it properly could offset some of the impacts of impermeable streets. To build on the idea of proving a "community character," he suggests that

some of the nicest neighborhoods have curved streets. It not only adds to the quality of the community, but also slows traffic.

Dr. Howe provided wonderful insight on the experiences and methods he has seen work well in communities. He has realistic expectations when it comes to development and the environment. He emphasized that it needs to be done in a way that it is a "win-win" situation for everyone involved.

Opinions from the UWGB Student Community

A student poll was conducted to gather opinions of the UWGB student body on the proposed development and its impact on the University. Several specific questions involving the potential for connections between the university and the proposed development were presented to students. A group of 138 students participated in the three-day poll. This section summarizes the results.

Each student was asked whether or not they felt most students would support a mixed residential/commercial development close to campus. Of the 138 students polled, 89% indicated that they felt most students would support this type of development. When asked if they thought the proposed development would contribute to the quality of life on and around campus, 81% of students indicated they thought it would, while 18% felt it would not be beneficial. 84% of the students polled also viewed the possibility of more options for housing near campus, but outside the control of resident life, appealing. 59% indicated that they would consider living within the proposed development if it were approved.

When asked if they would like to see some connectivity between the development and campus, 82% of the students indicated they would like to see a connection. 82% also indicated that they would utilize a trail system linking the development to the existing UWGB trail system. When asked if whether the Green Bay Metro bus system should be extended to the site, 75% of the students indicated that they thought extending the bus system to the new development was a good idea. However, only about 30% of the students polled indicated that they would ride the bus. 83% of the students who said they would ride the bus indicated that a smaller shuttle would be more appropriate. Approximately 10% of the students who said they would not ride the bus also indicated that a smaller shuttle would be more appropriate.

Of the 41 students who stated they would ride the bus, 25 students commented on what price they would be willing to pay. The average daily fare that these students

Figure 4.6. A trail in the UWGB Cofrin Arboretum (*http://www.uwgb.edu/biodiversity*).

were willing to pay was $1.10. The fares suggested ranged from $0.25 – $2.00. Several students commented that a yearly or semester rate would be more convenient than a daily fare. One student commented that a price equivalent to a parking pass on campus would be ideal.

When asked if they prefer that the UWGB campus remain isolated from the development area, 30% of the students indicated they would like campus to remain isolated. 68% indicated that they like to see some connectivity. Approximately 2% of students polled did not comment on the subject.

When asked to select their preferences from a list of four features that could be included in the proposed development, 59% of the students indicated they would like to see a trail system between UWGB

and the development. 59% of the students also indicated they would like to see off campus student housing. 60% indicated they would like to see a downtown area with retail stores and restaurants and 46% of the students indicated they would like to see bus service between UWGB and the development. Only 13% of the students polled indicated they would not like to see a development close to campus.

As part of the poll, students were also asked to provide any comments or suggestions they had about the project. Several students indicated they would like to see environmental conservation design incorporated into the development. Other students indicated they would like to see a grocery store, various department stores and shopping centers, video rental stores, and a laundromat incorporated into the development. Many students also indicated their desire for commercial entertainment and recreation facilities, the most popular being bars closer to campus.

The subject that most students commented on, however, was the issue of campus isolation. Most of the students commenting on campus isolation felt that campus was too secluded from the rest of the Green Bay community. Some of the comments were as follows:

"I do not like the fact that campus is so isolated from "the outside world", so any connections and development would be appreciated!"

"I really don't like how we (campus) are secluded from EVERYTHING – this is one of the reasons why I am thinking of transferring to a different school".

"We need more activity around campus. We are in the middle of nowhere!!!!"

One student however, voiced their opinion in favor of a secluded campus. The student commented:

"I chose UWGB because it was isolated. I grew up in an isolated community and I like it that way. Cities are not my style, but I had to move to one for college. UWGB was the best choice for me because it has a small town feel with plenty of peace and quiet away from the main city."

Conclusions

The administration, Dr. Howe, and UWGB students were enthusiastic to be incorporated into the project. Many of the students were happy that they were able to express their opinions. Obtaining input from members in the community is important when designing a development. Success of a development hinges on the ability of the area to provide a community with something that is needed. This feedback will hopefully provide insight to the municipalities and developers when making decisions for the Joint Planning Area.