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A new vision for the College Avenue campus

Greenway, high-rise building first steps in dramatic redevelopment

By Ashanti M. Alvarez

Emphasizing feedback and communication, President Richard L. McCormick announced a multiyear project to transform the College Avenue campus into a greener, walker-friendly expanse that would make Rutgers' most historic campus comparable to the finest public universities in the nation.

"At the heart of every great university is a beautiful green space, where students and faculty commingle, share ideas and socialize," McCormick said. "If we are going to attract the top students and professors, we need to lift Rutgers in stature not only academically but also in a physical sense."

Dialogue with the Rutgers community and New Brunswick residents will be an integral part of the ambitious vision. The multilayered program for the redevelopment of College Avenue includes:

- College Avenue Greenway College Avenue will be transformed, in phases, into a sweeping landscaped greenway, enhancing pedestrian safety and encouraging interaction. The street would eventually be closed to all vehicular traffic.
- Gateway Center A high-rise building at Easton Avenue and Somerset Street will connect to the train station and be a link between "town" and "gown." The building will house the Rutgers University Bookstore, Rutgers University Press, the Rutgers University Visitor Center and the Rutgers Club.
- A Transportation Center A central transportation hub, in the area where Records Hall now stands, will serve as point of entry for all major bus traffic.
- A new academic and campus services building at College Avenue and Hamilton Street The new building would be devoted primarily to teaching facilities such as classrooms, moderately-sized lecture halls, offices for academic departments and common areas.
- Updated student facilities A one-stop spot for students to conduct university business would be located in Brower Commons. The river dorms will be refurbished and a new dining hall would be placed in that area.
- Mixed-use building The land bordered by College Avenue, Route 18 and Huntington Street would be the site of mixed-use development.

Although the administration and city officials have an initial concept of how the College Avenue area could change in the coming years, they will not act without hearing the opinions of community members.

"We want to start a dialogue with those in the Rutgers community, as well as New Brunswick residents. It is the only way for us to know what the city's and the university's needs are," McCormick said. The president already has established an alumni advisory committee and plans to create an advisory committee of faculty, staff and students as the project goes forward. A Web site has been established through which to contribute comment [collegeavenue.campus.rutgers.edu], and in the future there will be several opportunities for public discussion.

The administration will present the proposal to established groups at the university, such as the University Senate, the New Brunswick Faculty Council, and student government and alumni associations. Upon returning to his hometown of New Brunswick in 2002, McCormick noted that the city is already ripe with eclectic restaurants, nightspots and a thriving theater district. "We need to transform the campus to complement these assets. This project will benefit both Rutgers and the City of New Brunswick," McCormick said.

A planned academic building at the corner of College Avenue and Hamilton Street will provide much-needed space for academic departments. "We envision an academic facility that builds on the history of the campus and provides a full range of classroom spaces that the College Avenue campus sorely needs," said Philip Furmanski, executive vice president for academic affairs. "The facility will seamlessly connect the historic architecture of Old Queen's and Voorhees Mall to the promise of future enhancements in and around the campus."

Administrators also see benefits from expected improvements in safety and transportation. The pedestrian bridge over George Street will safeguard pedestrians and allow motor vehicles to move more freely, said Karen Kavanagh, executive vice president for

administrative affairs. Kavanagh said that the university will work with the city on improving traffic flow on local streets. Such modifications could include the retiming of traffic signals, reconfiguring of intersections, eliminating some on-street parking and rerouting campus buses. The impact of these initiatives on parking is still being assessed. More details will become available when university officials complete a comprehensive transportation master plan, currently under way, which includes a detailed analysis of parking needs and policies, Kavanagh said.

"We want to create a public space that is inviting and shows off our campus," Kavanagh said. "These projects will help make the College Avenue campus a livelier, friendlier place where people will congregate and connect with each other and move about freely, walking and biking to different destinations." An important part of the vision is the inclusion of several Rutgers units in the new Gateway Center at the end of College Avenue near the New Brunswick train station.

"A significant Rutgers presence in the Gateway Center will define it as a clear and welcoming entry to the campus, as well as reinforce our strong connection to the City of New Brunswick," McCormick said. "We have long been seeking a way to bridge our communities, and this is a great opportunity to do this."

"Being near the train station is a dream come true," said Rutgers University Press Director Marlie Wasserman. "Accessing New York City will shave valuable time off the process of meeting with authors and publishers. "It will make us much more effective." Wasserman said there will be many opportunities for the units to interact, noting that the press could hold book events and author signings in the bookstore and go there to research trends in publishing.

Matthew Weismantel, senior director of campus information services, said that the proposed location of the Rutgers University Visitor Center near the city's center would make the center visible and prominent. He said that in a typical year Rutgers is a principal destination for more than 500,000 visitors, who range from perspective students to people attending seminars, meetings and cultural events.

"The visitor center will provide a comprehensive, full-service 'front door' – a welcoming gateway that can inspire institutional pride for Rutgers and its contributions to the state," Weismantel said.

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