

U of S unveils residence plan

BY JEANETTE STEWART, THE STARPHOENIX FEBRUARY 9, 2010



University of Saskatchewan president Peter MacKinnon (left) and Minister of Social Services Donna Harpauer cleave a piece of masonry from a fireplace mantel which will be installed in the new student residence in College Quarter

Photograph by: Greg Pender, The StarPhoenix

Dignitaries donned hard hats Monday at the University of Saskatchewan to chip away at a limestone mantle that will some day adorn the entrance of a new residence building on campus.

Designers unveiled the official plan for two new residences after nearly a year of design and consultations. While officials noted a sod turning is not possible at this time without a torch and a pickaxe, the symbolic gesture Monday officially marks the start of work on the first undergraduate residence constructed in more than 30 years.

“Rental housing is just not something that’s easy to build,” said Richard Florizone, U of S vice-president of finance and resources.

The two new five-storey buildings will hold one- to four-bedroom apartments, with kitchens and living areas.

The 115 units, which will encompass 143,000 square feet, will house up to 400 more students on campus.

Of the \$35.9 million in building costs, \$15 million was provided by Saskatchewan Housing Corp. The City of Saskatoon also contributed \$575,000 and the rest will be mortgaged by the U of S.

Florizone said the business case projects rental rates at around \$500 per student. With a mandatory meal plan, students now pay approximately \$900 per month for a single room in Voyageur Place.

“We have a shortage of space,” said Peter MacKinnon, university president, his speech delivered to the sounds of the hammering of construction workers making progress on Place Riel renovations.

The percentage of students who can be accommodated in residence is far smaller than at other institutions across Canada, affecting the university’s ability to recruit students, he said. In 2008, residences provided 1,190 beds, enough housing for about six per cent of the university’s 18,474 students.

Students wanted apartments, said Florizone, and they wanted access to kitchen space.

“They didn’t want as much as we thought they would. They just wanted some place that was comfortable, warm and that was it. They weren’t asking for a lot,” said Karl Miller, president of Saskatoon’s Meridian Development Corp., the project’s developer.

Company officials toured seven universities across Canada as part of the design process, and Miller said they consciously tried to provide a design that didn’t feel “institutional.”

“We really wanted to push the envelope and do something that wasn’t a typical student residence,” he said.

Student Anne Collins, 21, lives in Voyageur Place at the U of S and said the experience is what she expected.

“I didn’t expect it to be perfect,” she said.

“I think anything new at the U of S would just be an improvement in itself,” she said, though she noted giving students the option to opt out of the meal plan would be better for some people.

“I know there’s a lot of students that don’t really appreciate the meal card plan.”

Students consulted on the project were actually scaling back proposed features, Miller said.

The new residence buildings will contain several “green” features, such as energy efficient windows, faucets and appliances; motion sensor lights in common areas; recycling stations on each floor; bike storage; light-coloured roofing and a storm water retention pond on site. Students will be able to garden in the courtyard area. There will be pedestrian and cyclist access to all areas of campus and the two buildings will be linked by an indoor causeway.

The buildings will be located on university land south of College Drive between Cumberland and

Preston avenues and will represent Phase 1 of the College Quarter project, located on the quarter-section of land between College Drive, 14th Street East, Cumberland and Preston avenues.

Construction is expected to be finished by August 2011.

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