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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA STUDENTS' UNION

SUB RENOVATION PROJECT

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR THE FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

This document outlines how the current SUB renovation project came into being, the driving principles behind it, and discusses the process proposed for moving forward. The Students' Union looks forward to your feedback.

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“the key program driver of this renovation project is student engagement.”

ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF SUB

2012 marks the 45th anniversary of the Students' Union Building (SUB), a building originally conceived as a shared project between the University and the Students' Union. That productive collaboration has continued through to today, and has been a driver of an unprecedented level of cooperation between students and administration in the provision of student services.

Despite extensive changes to the campus around it, SUB has remained a contemporary and vibrant part of the campus mosaic. It is still the foremost hub of service and social life on campus, a place where old friends can meet and new connections be made.

This continued vibrancy did not occur by accident, but rather as the result of conscious choices made by the University and the Students' Union to maintain and upgrade the building as the needs of the campus have evolved. Since 1993, SUB has undergone two renovations and one expansion, which together have resulted in greatly increased usage, the cementing of SUB as a key meeting point for the entire University community, and enhanced service provision through the creation of a 'one-stop' facility for non-academic student services.

The work done to maintain and enhance SUB has also continued to reflect the originating collaborative spirit behind the building. The Students' Union led the first renovation project, the University the second, and our expansion project was a joint effort. In all of these projects, both the University and the Students' Union have pursued the common cause of creating a great place for students.

SUB RENOVATION PROJECT HISTORY

SUB remains a solid, well-run and heavily-used facility that, in some ways, is a victim of its own success.

Over the last few years, demands for more and better-quality space of various types have grown louder, as evidenced in the 2010 General Space Programme for SUB. The Students' Union has also committed itself to a series of strategic initiatives, aligned with the University's own strategic documents, that require a reconsideration of how space is utilized in SUB.

The Students' Union has explored and discussed a wide range of potential solutions to these space needs with the University, from expansion opportunities to reconfigurations of the existing building. Immediate expansion of the building, the Students' Union's initially-preferred option, was not found to be currently feasible, though it remains a possibility in the longer term.

“...creating the spaces and facilities required to allow students to come together”

After determining that expansion would not be possible at this time, the Students' Union turned its attention to what could be done to ameliorate the space issues identified in the General Space Programme. The SU began reviewing other alternatives to improve utilization of space, and to create the kinds of space required by its strategic initiatives, within the general footprint of the building and its immediate environs. It was also critical to assess what these changes might cost, so that the affordability of any project could be assessed. The Students' Union elected to conduct a feasibility study to address these questions.

To do this analysis, the Students' Union retained the services of the project manager who managed the 1993 renovation and the 2003 expansion as a consultant. Bids were then solicited from a number of architectural firms to assist in a preliminary renovation feasibility study, and Dialog was selected to be the consultant on the feasibility study. The costs of the Feasibility Study were borne by the Students' Union through an allocation from capital reserve funds.

After several months of consultations and discussions with stakeholders, the team completed a formal Feasibility Study in January of 2012. This defined the general parameters of a renovation that would address many of the issues the Students' Union was seeking to resolve, and provided an estimate of the financial scale of such a project. The Feasibility Study was not definitive in all aspects; certain scope was intentionally omitted, and the design represents only an initial concept.

Using the information from the Feasibility Study, the Students' Union assessed the financial viability of the project, conservatively extrapolating costs for any scope expected to be added, and determined a likely project scale of \$10-12 million. While the Students' Union could self-finance a significant portion of that, it was also determined that self-financing the whole project would be fiscally reckless. To help bridge the gap, Students' Council approved a referendum for a \$9 per term fee for Students' Union facility development. The referendum passed in March of 2012.

With a general approach for renovations outlined in the Feasibility Study and financing capability assured, the Students' Union now seeks to begin the formal design process. In terms of the University's outline of the Capital Projects Process, we are moving from the Project Assessment phase to the Project Definition stage.

Key Project Goals and Strategic Alignments

THE ROLE OF STUDENT CENTRES

Before discussing the specific strategic goals of the project, it is important to review and understand the place of student centres (or college unions, in more traditional parlance) in the modern campus.

You simply cannot have a vibrant campus community without a strong student community and culture. The heartbeat of that student community is the student centre.

The union is the community center of the college, serving students, faculty, staff, alumni, and guests. By whatever form or name, a college union is an organization offering a variety of programs, activities, services, and facilities that, when taken together, represent a well-considered plan for the community life of the college.

The union is an integral part of the educational mission of the college.

As the center of the college community life, the union complements the academic experience through an extensive variety of cultural, educational, social, and recreational programs...

The union is a student-centered organization that values participatory decision-making. Through volunteerism, its boards, committees, and student employment, the union offers first-hand experience in citizenship and educates students in leadership, social responsibility, and values.

...[T]he union encourages self-directed activity, giving maximum opportunity for self-realization and for growth in individual social competency and group effectiveness.

The union's goal is the development of persons as well as intellects.

Traditionally considered the "hearthstone" or "living room" of the campus, today's union is the gathering place of the college. The union provides services and conveniences that members of the college community need in their daily lives and creates an environment for getting to know and understand others through formal and informal associations.

The union serves as a unifying force that honors each individual and values diversity. The union fosters a sense of community that cultivates enduring loyalty to the college.

"Role of the College Union", Association of College Unions International, 1996

The college union idea is about cultivating the growth of the members of our community; we must carefully steward the development and adaptation of the college union to meet our ever-changing environment. We must actively

choose to make and maintain a place for the community to come together outside the classroom.

The importance of developing the whole person and helping them connect to the campus community has taken on added significance in a more competitive world where rounded graduates are more valued and where long-term alumni support will be an increasingly essential part of the University's core viability.

South of the border, student centres are viewed as absolutely vital to the campus community, and are often featured selling points in attracting new students. Furthermore, the necessity of a strong student centre is an idea that is seeing renewed attention in Western Canada. From the University of Saskatchewan's recently renovated and expanded Place Riel student centre, to UBC's ambitious plans to build an entirely new SUB, and to the University of Calgary's recent commissioning of redesign concepts for the MacEwan Student Centre, there is a renewed emphasis on ensuring that student community has a strong place on western campuses.

ENGAGEMENT

In 2011, the Students' Union approved a new Strategic Plan that laid out the parameters for how it would pursue fulfilling its mission over the following four years. Two of the key themes of the document are enhancing service provision and creating opportunities for engagement.

The Students' Union, in its conduct of business, strives to provide students with an experience of engaged involvement that demonstrates the power of individuals, working together, to promote real change. In this, we directly align with the University's thematic goal of creating better citizens.

The SU believes that true engagement, the driver of both student success and long-term connection to the institution, requires both curricular and extracurricular components. Cultivating the extracurricular component of engagement is, in the SU's view, one of its key responsibilities, a duty under the PSLA, and the most effective way for it to support the University's academic plan and to create the kinds of school bonds upon which long-term alumni support rests.

With that in mind, the key program driver of this renovation project is the question of how we can adapt the building to improve service delivery and, in particular, foster greater student engagement. In our vision, this entails creating the spaces and facilities required to allow students to come together: social and study space, as well as much-improved facilities to support our over 400 student groups. Part of this vision includes the creation of an

“ *this vision includes the creation of an involvement centre that connects students with volunteer and student group opportunities* ”

involvement centre that connects students with volunteer and student group opportunities, and works with the University to promote the many academically-oriented involvement options available to students.

(It must be noted that, from the Students' Union perspective, fully realizing common goals for student engagement will require additional projects to fill in the gaps that a renovation—as opposed to a full expansion—will not be able to address. In this, the SU considers PowerPlant redevelopment an essential element to building a more vibrant student community.)

The Students' Union's engagement-related goals for the renovation are in alignment with and in direct support of three of the four *Dare to Discover* cornerstones:

- **Talented People:** Specifically, supporting leadership development and diversity. The 'involvement centre' idea is also akin, conceptually, to the principles behind welcome centres.
- **Learning, Discovery, and Citizenship:** The SU's focus on supporting student groups, and providing additional related services and leadership programming, is an effort to create the best possible leadership and citizenship experiences for our students. This is what the Students' Union, in the abstract, is about. It is a key driver in our engagement efforts.
- **Connecting Communities:** Global and local engagement are outcomes of the increased effort to support the incredibly diverse range of student groups and activities that this renovation represents. The renovation also seeks to develop more of the kind of social spaces that foster interaction and a sense of community.

ENHANCING THE LONG-TERM VIABILITY OF SUB

SUB, as a key facility on campus, needs to be kept current and relevant if it is to fulfill the college union role. This renovation project is intended to address current weak spots in how the building has been stacked and developed over time.

SUB also plays a key role in the long-term financial viability and operational capability of the Students' Union. From providing consistent, significant long-term business and lease revenue to ensuring that there are unique programming capacities that both the Students' Union and student groups can use, SUB plays a central role in the Students' Union's daily activities.

In order to ensure the continued ability of the facility to meet changing campus needs, there are a number of specific priorities that need to be addressed:

- **Space utilization** needs to improve. Since expansion is not currently a viable option, better use must be made of existing space.

- The permeability of the building to foot traffic needs to be improved, including direct access to the lower level. Currently, SUB is surrounded by a green moat—shrubbery ensconced in large concrete planters that serves to isolate the building from the street. Developing cohesive, more walking-friendly frontage can help draw people into the building. It could also work, with the new PAW developments, to create a more unified and user-friendly space between the buildings.
- The lower level is underutilized and, while not hard to access, is somewhat hidden: There are no clear sightlines into the lower level, and access points are not always obvious to building users. Better access to and visibility of the lower level will greatly increase the usefulness of lower level space and increase usage of the building.
- Certain tower floors need reconfiguration, updating, and environmental amelioration to be fully usable at an appropriate comfort standard. Additionally, any possible improvements to tower access must be investigated.
- The overall arrangement of operating units in the building needs to be reviewed, with an eye to minimizing the usage conflicts inherent in a multi-purpose facility.
- The allocation of space to various functions should be reviewed in light of the findings of the General Space Programme.

Enhancing the long-term viability of SUB aligns directly to the Students' Union's Strategic Plan (specifically, the SU's goals of providing relevant programs and services, and ensuring sufficient and sustainable capital resources). A renovation would serve the University's strategy by adding one more key element that appeals to prospective students—an active and vibrant centre for student life—and by supporting a key infrastructure component of the engagement puzzle.

The Development Process

“the SU seeks to create a design process that is inclusive of all stakeholders, respectful and mindful of stakeholder and user priorities, and fundamentally collaborative in character”

TARGET TIMELINE

The Students' Union intends to follow the same general process as other University projects—Project Assessment, Project Definition, Documentation, Implementation, and Feedback—as outlined in University governance documents.

The Feasibility Study and related work represented the Project Assessment stage. With financial resources now assured, the SUB renovation project can move forward to the next stage, the Project Definition phase.

The Project Definition phase is expected to be complete in January 2013. It is hoped that, barring any technical difficulties and smooth passage through University governance, construction would begin in mid-2013, with a target completion date of August 2014.

PRINCIPLES AND PARTICIPANTS

The Students' Union intends that the process followed in the development of this project manifest the SU's core values. To that end, the SU seeks to create a design process that is inclusive of all stakeholders, respectful and mindful of stakeholder and user priorities, and fundamentally collaborative in character. Throughout this process, the Students' Union is committing to be open, frank, and direct in its approach, and will expect all stakeholders to adhere to the same standard. Everyone, after all, shares the same end goal of better serving students.

Overall guidance of the project will rest with a Project Steering Committee, with the detailed design/consultation process overseen by a Design Subcommittee of that Steering Committee. The Students' Union invites the Dean of Students and Facilities and Operations to each provide up to two representatives to sit on the Steering Committee.

The most immediate development task will be the preparation of the Schematic Design Report, a task the Students' Union hopes to complete by the end of September 2012. From May through July, the SU will host a series of stakeholder meetings to discuss the renovation and its purpose, assess the needs of stakeholders, and identify risks, conflicts, and opportunities that arise. In August and September, the project architect will bring this together and prepare a Schematic Design Report that will then be brought back to stakeholders and students for further feedback.

In terms of project management and architectural work, the Students' Union intends to work with R. C. Steffes Management Ltd. as the Project Management consultant, and with Dialog as the project Architect. The SU is open to University feedback on these selections.

R. C. Steffes was the Project Manager on the 1993 renovation and 2003

expansion projects. He knows the facility and our needs, and has a demonstrated record of success. R. C. Steffes has worked with the Students' Union on the Feasibility Study, and is up-to-speed on the project.

Dialog was originally selected by the Students' Union to assist in developing the Feasibility Study after a competitive RFP process. The Feasibility Study ended up serving, in effect, as an extended 'interview': The SU has been very pleased with the work, attitude, and approach taken by Dialog on this project. Dialog has U of A alumni working on the project, and is receiving advice on the project from their Vancouver lead on the new UBC SUB.

The SU has found Dialog to be highly responsive to feedback. When initial interior designs were adequate but not inspiring, Dialog took the initiative to start over and create an innovative option that immediately resonated with the entire project team and with Students' Council.

COLLABORATION WITH UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION

As noted earlier, the Students' Union views collaboration and collegiality as key to the success of any SUB renovation. With that in mind, there are a number of things that the Students' Union would appreciate the University's assistance with:

1. Active involvement in the design process: This is a shared building and the renovation needs to be a collaborative process.
2. General feedback on the proposal and whether the University agrees that the project will contribute to the goals outlined in the Academic Plan.
3. Advice on any process-related concerns that the University has and advice as to the approval path this project will need to follow.
4. Advice and support from Financial Services in exploring government-based capital loans.
5. Assistance in identifying any 'showstoppers' that the Students' Union may not be currently aware of.
6. Related to the above, more information as to the University's long-term capital plans, particularly in regards to Dentistry/Pharmacy redevelopment that may impact the short- or long-term occupancy and stacking of SUB.
7. Continued work on defining the future role of the PowerPlant on campus, a key element of the Students' Union's extracurricular engagement strategy and a development that may have implications for the future of the Dinwoodie space.

Concluding Comments

“ *this project revitalizes
a critical piece of the
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to pursue the University’s
stated strategic directions* ”

A SUB renovation—particularly with the goals as outlined here and in the Feasibility Study—is about more than just the maintenance of an already-excellent facility.

As the Students’ Union views it, this project revitalizes a critical piece of the infrastructure necessary to pursue the University’s stated strategic directions: Expanding student engagement, building and connecting diverse communities, and helping to create better citizens. These goals cannot be achieved solely by the academic program of the University, and nor can they be achieved without the active, vital, and self-directed involvement of students themselves. It is precisely the promotion of that kind of engagement that the various strategic, programmatic, and architectural elements of this project have been designed to foster.

The process of getting from here to there will be challenging. It will present many obstacles and many new opportunities. The history of SUB, however, repeatedly shows that the uniquely collaborative relationship between the Students’ Union and the University can create great things.

We look forward to working as a community on this project and making it a standout feature of our campus.