

UCSC - Growth
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Suit to halt UC expansion 'disappoints' chancellor

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SANTA CRUZ — UCSC Chancellor Robert Stevens was "surprised and disappointed" to learn the city of Santa Cruz had filed suit Wednesday, challenging university plans to build new housing and offices for College Eight.

The lawsuit alleges that the environmental-impact report for the project is defective.

Stevens defended the proposed project at a press conference Wednesday, saying the new facilities

would be built in an environmentally sensitive way and "more than meet" minimum state environmental standards.

Stevens also said that 360 new dormitory bed spaces planned for the first phase of the project would ease pressure on the city's rental-housing market and on crowded city streets.

"The traffic problems on the campus and in the community that are associated with College Eight will persist until the new college is

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built," Stevens said. "If we are unable to provide residences on the campus for students, they have no alternative to but to commute from their residences in the community."

More than 800 College Eight students and faculty now occupy borrowed space in UCSC's Kerr Hall. Stevens said the new buildings would be used for current students, and not to increase overall university enrollment.

"We are not seeking to add more students," Stevens said. "We are seeking to house the students that are here."

University planners initially hoped the new facilities would open in the fall of 1989, but the city lawsuit may well delay that schedule.

"If the project is delayed ... it will cost more to build," Stevens said. "And these costs will have to be borne by all of our students in the forms of increased dorm fees."

City officials decided to file the suit after the UC Regents approved the College Eight environmental-impact report last month. City Councilwoman Mardi Wormhoudt said once the Regents accepted the report, the city had 30 days to respond before losing the right to challenge the report.

The lawsuit lists more than a dozen areas in which the project's environmental-impact report is alleged to be deficient, including sections that address traffic, water and sewer impacts, and overall university growth.

"The city has been expressing its concerns about this project since Jan. 13, when the university first gave notice that they were planning this project," Wormhoudt said. "Our contention is that these concerns were never addressed. At this point,

the only way to keep these concerns alive was to file the lawsuit."

City officials claim the university's plans do not measure up to state environmental standards, and say that the College Eight construction is just the first step in plans to greatly expand the size of the university.

One passage in the environmental-impact report reads: "The campus enrollment plan anticipates steadily increasing student enrollment over the next 20 years to a size of 12,000 to 15,000 students and 600 to 800 faculty by the year 2005. Development of College Eight is proposed in direct response to this planned growth."

Nearly 9,000 students are enrolled at UCSC.

"Their own EIR says (the College Eight project) is part of the larger growth plans," Wormhoudt said. "And that project has never been subject to an environmental review. You cannot break a large project into small parts and not deal with the cumulative impacts."

"The university is not subject to local law," she added. "But the state Legislature makes the university liable to (environmental) guidelines. Under state law they are responsible to speak to the significant and substantial impacts of this project."

Stevens expressed hope that the lawsuit would not damage relations between the city and the university, which are beginning to thaw under his administration.

He said that university officials will meet with city officials during the 45-day period before the suit goes to court, but — if negotiations fail — he indicated that the university would fight the lawsuit.

"We shall negotiate in a bona fide way," he said. "But we cannot lie down and let the steamrollers go over us."