

Regents dismiss growth concerns

UCSC biomedical center moves ahead despite opposition

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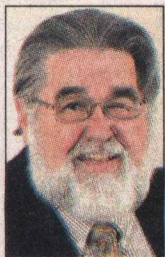
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SAN FRANCISCO — Despite seven outstanding lawsuits challenging expansion at UC Santa Cruz and the threat of more, a key UC regents committee on Tuesday approved the first major construction project under the campus' new growth plan.

The unanimous decision by the Regents Committee on Grounds and Buildings came moments after government leaders, lawyers and planners from Santa Cruz pleaded to delay a decision on the \$80 million lab building known as the Biomedical Science Facility. Their fear is that approval, without further environmental review, would set a precedent for more development on campus as well as continue to erode relations with the community.

"If you go forward today, you will seriously undermine your assertion that you want to work with the city, and we will challenge it," Santa Cruz Mayor Emily Reilly told UC officials at the UCSF Mission Bay campus, where Tuesday's meeting was held.

The city and a neighborhood group, the Coalition for Limiting University Expansion, are likely to file suits if the full Board of Regents grants final approval for the



COONERTY

Says proposed campus building would violate state law



BLUMENTHAL

Says center would be boon for city

UCSC

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project, expected Thursday.

The local critics claim the university illegally took shortcuts when addressing impacts of the five-story research building, which is slated to break ground in November. For example, instead of assessing new burdens on traffic and water supplies, they say university officials pushed the plan through on the coattails of "flawed" impact studies from their long-range growth plan. Since the court has yet to weigh in on challenges to the growth plan — a process that could last years — the critics say it should not be used to justify new projects.

University officials listened to the appeals of local leaders but said they felt obligated to stick to the university's mission to expand educational opportunities.

The proposed building is designed to be the campus' most environmentally sound, being the first to comply with a new "green" building policy that imposes water and energy efficiency standards, according to campus architect Frank Zwart. Beyond that, the building will ultimately benefit the city, acting UCSC Chancellor George Blumenthal told the regents.

"(The new labs) will serve as an incubator for the spin-off companies that the local community is looking for and will spur the local economy," Blumenthal said.

The facility, at 92,300 square feet, would serve 1,000 undergraduate and 350 graduate students in the emerging interdisciplinary fields of study that include biology, chemistry, nanotechnology and bioinformatics, Blumenthal said. A new generation of stem cell researchers would also be housed in the labs, which would accommodate a total of 24 new faculty from various departments.

Newly elected county Supervisor Neal Coonerty, whose district includes UCSC, told the regents at the meeting that his opposition to the project does not go without appreciation for its merits.

"In my view, it will provide many benefits," he said. "However, this does not justify violating (requirements under the California Environmental Quality Act)."

The city and county are challenging the university's method of streamlining environmental review, a process called "tiering." It allows UCSC's growth plan and its environmental impact study to cover individual projects.

Blumenthal said the process is not unusual for UC.

Even if there is precedent, no private developer would move forward with construction while lawsuits are pending, county attorney Chris Cheleden said. City and county lawyers have not ruled out whether they will seek a court injunction to halt ground-breaking.

The university's Long-Range Development Plan, approved by regents in September, calls for expanding enrollment from 15,000 to 19,500 students and the addition of 3.8 million square feet of new facilities by 2020.

City Attorney John Barisone said the facility had become a major obstacle to continuing negotiations with UCSC at a December meeting between lawyers representing both sides. Barisone had asked UCSC to hold off on pursuing the project as a condition for moving forward with talks.

The university had already been accelerating its construction to save money. With the building's cost ballooning at 10 percent per year, the university estimated it would save \$1.5 million by moving up its target to break ground, from February 2008 to November.

City and university officials have not met since their December meeting.

Tuesday's approval by the committee comes on the heels of a state audit released last week calling for the UC and California State University systems to be more sensitive to community concerns about development. A public hearing on the audit could be held as early as next week in Sacramento.

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