

Pace to begin Pleasantville campus expansion leading to Briarcliff campus closure

In a major milestone for Westchester County's largest university, the Town of Mount Pleasant Planning Board last week voted to approve the site plan for "Phase 1A" of Pace University's \$100 million construction project to "transform and reposition" its Pleasantville campus.

In May, Pace University's Board of Trustees voted to move forward with the project. The trustees' green light for implementation of the Master Plan comes as Pace prepares to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its Pleasantville campus. A groundbreaking ceremony for the first phase of construction is scheduled for September.

"The capital improvements in Pleasantville, together with new academic programs and related enhancements, represent a significant investment in and commitment to the future of the Pleasantville campus," said Pace University President Stephen J. Friedman.

The Master Plan is designed to enhance the quality of the Pleasantville campus experience. The first phase includes new residence halls, expanding and upgrading the student center, relocating and expanding the environmental center, adding new athletic facilities, upgrading existing buildings and infrastructure and improving pedestrian accessibility. The environmentally-focused plan will incorporate extensive "green" building designs and technologies while staying within the existing campus core, according to university officials.

The five-year multi-phase project will enable Pace to consolidate functions that are now split between campuses in Pleasantville and Briarcliff Manor. Currently, 690 students reside on the 200-plus-acre Pleasantville campus and 590 at Briarcliff.

The 37-acre Briarcliff campus off Elm Road, which Pace took over in

1977 after merging with financially ailing Briarcliff College—which dated back to 1904—contains nine low-rise buildings, most of them dormitory facilities.

Late in 2010 Pace announced it had engaged New York City realty firm Newmark Knight Frank to head the marketing campaign for the campus. There had already been several discussions between Briarcliff Manor and Pace officials to help determine what uses the village might be receptive to and make use of the existing buildings.

Despite its longstanding institutional use, the property remains zoned for single-family homes on minimum one acre lots. Pace's use is allowed under the Village of Briarcliff Manor's zoning code by a special permit that is not transferrable.

It was early in 2010 that Pace announced its long-term "vision" to renovate and expand the Pleasantville campus and divest itself of the Briarcliff property. Pace also has campuses in White Plains and Manhattan.

While no classes are taught in Briarcliff, the plan will allow athletic and certain administration functions that are now there to be relocated to Pleasantville.

The unified campus will bring multiple benefits including enhancing the overall quality of student life and experience and eliminating approximately 3,000 annual bus trips that are now required to shuttle students between campuses that are 2.5 miles apart, according to the Master Plan.

The Master Plan envisions creation of "a sustainable campus" that reduces dependence on cars and encourages pedestrian activity, including new and enhanced landscaped pathways and a new central campus green. Approximately 60 percent of the property, access for which

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is from Bedford Road (Route 117), will remain as green space.

The planned improvements will have minimal visible impact on the surrounding area and the 115-acre internal wooded buffer that wraps around the north, east and southeast portions of the campus will remain undisturbed, according to university officials.

Highlights of the "Phase 1A" of the Master Plan include:

--Two new four-story residence halls that will house a small dining facility, classrooms, study lounges and faculty apartments.

--Creation of a new campus green at the center linked by pedestrian paths and reconfiguration and relocation of parking out of the campus core.

--Construction of a new multipurpose field for football, soccer and lacrosse with artificial turf. Improve the existing baseball field with artificial turf and lighting. Construction of a new field house at the south end of multipurpose field and creation of a grass softball field at southwest corner of campus.

--Renovation and expansion of the Kessel Student Center to provide for students relocating from Briarcliff.

--Relocation of the environmental center buildings, animal shelters and a paddock to space north of the Goldstein Health & Fitness Center and construction of a new nature walk connecting to the environmental center facilities.

The first phase of work will entail creation of the residential buildings and athletic facilities necessary to replace those to be vacated at the Briarcliff campus. Subsequent phasing is planned so as to minimize impacts on campus activities as well as the adjacent neighborhood.

Pace, which is Westchester's 13th largest employer, reportedly contributes approximately \$64 million annually to the county's economy in direct and indirect spending. Of its total workforce, 934 live and work in Westchester; of that total, 205 reside in the Town of Mount Pleasant. Additionally, some 18,384 Pace alumni live in the county, with 1,900 residing in Mount Pleasant.