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Conference Capital Construction Budget

Legislature poised to pass record WSU construction budget

The waiting is over. Construction dollars are available in the upcoming budget to finish the Life Sciences Building in Pullman.

And in the end, it was not even a debatable issue.

It was the highlight of a record \$180.6 million WSU construction budget released by Senate and House leaders after completing negotiations on the compromise capital budget. The \$58 million appropriation to complete construction of the WSU Life Sciences Building, \$29 million in new funding for the WSU Vancouver campus including construction of a new classroom building, and \$59 million in critical dollars to improve and preserve existing facilities are in the conference committee version of the 2007-2009 construction budget released late last night.

Release of a compromise capital budget is one of the important hurdles as legislators attempt to adjourn by tomorrow. Still to come is the release of a compromise operating budget which will make many decisions on differences between House, Senate and governor versions. The state House of Representatives today passed the Transportation budget, signaling that lawmakers are still on track for Sunday adjournment.

The four-story Life Sciences Building is the latest in a series of new science research buildings that are the centerpiece of the capital construction strategy during the seven years of President Lane Rawlins' presidency. It will be located next to the Plant Biotechnology Building on the former tennis courts site across from Martin Stadium. Planned for nearby is a federally-funded agricultural research building. The Life Sciences, Plant Biotechnology, and ARS buildings form a new Pullman biotechnology research complex.

When occupied in 2009, the Life Sciences building will bring together academic disciplines in innovative laboratory settings in the life sciences, predominately researchers on National Institute of Health-sponsored projects. These are many of the researchers that will compete for funding in the governor's Life Sciences Discovery Fund proposal.

The Life Sciences Building sailed calmly through the legislative process this year, a marked change from the controversy that surrounded it in previous years. The Life Sciences building was washed out in choppy political waters in 2005 because legislators preferred funding other WSU projects. In 2006, WSU could only achieve a late-session appropriation for the \$10 million foundation of the estimated \$70 million building. But this year, in Lane Rawlins' final legislative session as WSU president, the project moved forward with little debate or controversy.

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It's a budget that will finally put outstanding and productive WSU health science researchers into modern laboratories, build critical additional capacity at WSU Vancouver, continue work to improve and expand major pedestrian walkways in Pullman, and make hundreds of smaller critical repairs and improvements to existing buildings.

For WSU projects specifically, there wasn't much haggling. The House and Senate budget proposals were virtually identical and largely followed the recommendations of Gov. Christine Gregoire.

The Life Sciences building is one of the larger projects in the proposed biennial state budget but WSU budget construction for the coming two years may be more unique for the critical issues it addresses on existing buildings and facilities. In addition to \$59 million for improvement and preservation of existing buildings, the House budget provides \$26.5 million for projects that improve electrical, water and sewer delivery to university facilities.

As WSU had hoped, the Legislature closely followed the priorities of Gov. Christine Gregoire's capital budget released last December.

The only disappointment in the capital budget was that it did not fund the design for the Biomedical Building in Pullman, a research building that was slated to be under construction in 2009-2011 but may now be delayed as it has not been funded by the governor or House.

There was one significant difference between the governor's budget and the legislative budget. The final budget funds \$4.7 million to design a Vancouver Applied Technology Classroom Building, perhaps accelerating construction to 2009-2011.

Highlights of the proposed construction budget now under consideration by both houses in the conference committee report on Proposed Substitute House Bill 1092 include:

- **\$58 million to complete Pullman Life Sciences Building.**
- **Construction of the \$24.4 million WSU Vancouver classroom building** is necessary to provide general classrooms and computer laboratory spaces for delivery of lower division programs and to accommodate enrollment growth. The building is WSU's second highest priority for new building construction.

- **Design funding for an expanded Vancouver Applied Technology Classroom Building**, *the only project in the House budget for WSU that was not recommended by the governor*. This building provides both classrooms and teaching laboratories. The proposed conference budget adds \$1 million to the \$3.7 million requested by WSU to accommodate an expanded building that may also house the Washington Technology Center in Vancouver.
- **WSU's \$38.9 million minor works preservation project and \$17 million minor works program is in the top tier of the Public Baccalaureate Prioritized List, ahead of all major construction projects, and fully funded by the compromise budget.** Minor works program money extends the life of existing facilities and infrastructure, and allows older facilities to be retrofitted for cutting-edge research and education. Likewise, preservation money extends the life of buildings by replacement or repair of elevators, roofs, fire alarms, ventilation, pumps, masonry, windows, flooring, painting, and building network cabling and electronics. The funding covers health, safety and code projects needed to protect the lives of students, faculty, staff and visitors and to comply with occupational/public health, and environmental regulations.
- **The Pullman Campus is experiencing a critical shortfall in electrical capacity and a deficit of chilled water production that is solved with an \$11.5 million utilities extension in the conference budget.** This package is ranked as the fourth project overall by the six public baccalaureate institutions.
- **Extended service life and greater capacity to underground utility lines is provided by the \$15 million Library Road Project. It is the seventh ranked project overall by the institutions.** The corridor project also includes accessibility and safety improvements for enhanced pedestrian movement and decreased vehicular traffic.
- **\$8 million is included for utilities, roadway, pedestrian walkways and other infrastructure issues on WSU campuses.**

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