

RGRTA, UR eye new plan

Goal is a transportation blueprint for UR and the College Town project

By NATE DOUGHERTY

Plans for a transit center at the University of Rochester's College Town project were dropped this summer because of funding complications, but the Rochester Genesee Regional Transportation Authority and UR remain committed to making a transportation center part of the project and the university.

University officials have been working with RGRTA to come up with a new overall plan that would encourage more employees and students to use public transportation, UR officials said.

This is part of a greater effort on the



Rendering courtesy of the city of Rochester
UR officials envision College Town as a gateway between the university and neighboring city community.

part of the university to organize and improve transportation. The university has added the position of transportation di-

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rector and is now filling it.

"We want to encourage our employees to use public transportation, and now it's just a question of making convenient points of access and giving information to help get them using it," said Ronald Paprocki, senior vice president for administration and finance.

RGRTA CEO William Carpenter said the organization and the university had been in talks to put a transfer station at College Town, but the additional cost created a hitch in the planning.

The transfer station would have added \$2.7 million to the cost of the project, and developers asked RGRTA if it could seek federal funding to cover the cost, Carpenter noted. To do so, RGRTA would need to have an agreement with the developer, then a federal environmental review and a Federal Transit Administration review as well.

"We couldn't speak on those agencies' behalf, but we believed it would have been approved," Carpenter said. "But it would have taken six to nine months to complete the whole process, and they needed to stay

on schedule."

RGRTA also could not advance the money to developers while waiting for FTA approval, since it would have made the agency biased during the review process, Carpenter noted.

Since reaching the decision that the transit center as planned would not work in the College Town plans, RGRTA has been working with UR and developers to come up with an alternative.

"The commitment I made to the university and University of Rochester Medical Center is that we'll have a significant transportation center, but we don't know what it will look like just yet," Carpenter said.

One strong possibility is a system modeled after what the University of Washington in Seattle uses for transportation, Carpenter said. The university there uses a system that circulates transportation around the block of the large urban university center.

RGRTA officials have met with representatives from the University of Washington and toured the campus, and they plan to work this month to come up with a more formal proposal for what it would look like.

"The university's campus is the second-largest destination in our system, and we

will need to do something to improve transportation as it grows," Carpenter said. "Now it's just about finding a concept that minimizes traffic instead of adds to it."

Paprocki said UR's system would not be exactly like the University of Washington's, which has a much more elaborate integration of public transportation into academic programs.

While UR and RGRTA work on transportation, plans for College Town itself move forward. The university secured a \$20 million Housing and Urban Development loan for the project last month.

In total the project is expected to cost \$100 million, and university officials have said they hope to break ground this month.

Included as part of the university's 2008 master plan, College Town would bring a mixed-use development to the Mount Hope neighborhood. UR officials see this as a way to establish a gateway between the university and neighboring city community.

Paprocki noted that transportation plans for College Town and the university as a whole are a work in progress. A final plan will need to address access to buses as well as a way for bicyclists to easily access the university and URM, he said.

"We want to make this a more bike-friendly campus and integrate it with bike paths that are in the area and the town of Brighton," Paprocki said.

Plans should become firmer as the year goes on, Paprocki said. A search committee is looking into candidates for director of transportation, and Paprocki said he hopes to find someone by the end of the calendar year. The university also must determine how to provide better incentives for employees to use public transportation.

Neighbors in the Mount Hope Avenue area will stay closely involved in the process, he noted.

"There are some legitimate concerns about transportation, and we want to continue to work with them and get their input on what is needed in the area," he said.

Ultimately, the physical system of transportation the university selects for College Town and for the university as a whole is not as important as the construction of the system itself, he added.

"Success for a transportation system is not dependent on structures or terminals, but the setup and how the plan is executed," Paprocki said.

natedougherty@rbj.net / 585-546-8303