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Cal Poly to Continue With Student Housing Project at Grand Avenue Entrance

Consideration of Additional Potential Sites Prompts Recirculation of Project EIR

SAN LUIS OBISPO — Cal Poly President Jeffrey D. Armstrong has announced the university will continue to pursue approval from the CSU Board of Trustees to build an approximately 1,430-bed student housing project at the campus's Grand Avenue entrance.

Cal Poly initially announced the project in May of 2013, with an eye toward CSU approval early this year, groundbreaking in 2015 and a fall 2018 opening.

Two public forums were held in late 2013, where some residents raised concerns about the project's location and possible impacts on nearby neighborhoods. In response, Cal Poly thoroughly reconsidered several potential sites for student housing and examined two new sites before concluding that Grand Avenue remains the preferred location.

"Grand Avenue is the only site that will allow us to build the number of new first-year residences that we need under our current enrollment and the only site that will allow us to keep these new freshman residences near existing first-year housing," Armstrong said.

"We understand the concerns we've heard from some of our closest neighbors. But we also understand that delaying this project or not building at this site will mean more students living in non-university housing — in the city's neighborhoods.

"This site is good for Cal Poly students, and I believe it will ultimately be good for the community as well, given there will be fewer students living in area neighborhoods."

The Grand Avenue site presents many benefits for students and the community, including:

- * Increasing the university's housing capacity from 36 percent of undergraduate students to nearly 45 percent.
- * About 1,400 fewer students living in nearby neighborhoods — and a corresponding decrease in traffic from those students no longer commuting;
- * Lower per-bed construction costs, which will translate to lower housing costs and thus higher potential for demand among students;
- * Adjacency to existing dining facilities, roads and other services; and
- * Clustering of new first-year housing with Cal Poly's existing freshmen dorms across the street on Grand Avenue.

"Research clearly shows that students who live on campus perform better inside and outside of the classroom," said Keith Humphrey, Cal Poly's vice president for student affairs. "As well, our statistics show that students who live on campus are less likely to engage in negative behavior off campus. This will help our students succeed and become better members of the community."

The university initially looked at more than half a dozen other potential sites on campus before settling on the Grand Avenue site, which is now an underutilized parking lot. None of the sites could match the Grand Avenue site for capacity, and while the combined capacity of all the sites would total 1,400, all of the sites presented higher per-bed construction costs compared to Grand Avenue.

In addition, following the two community forums, the university looked at two additional potential housing locations on campus and found both to be unsuitable for first-year student housing:

- * An 8.6-acre site along Via Carta, between the sports complex and the Poly Canyon Village housing complex; and
- * A site along California Boulevard east of the railroad tracks, south of Highland Drive and just north of Spanos stadium.

In addition to being inappropriate for first-year housing, the two sites presented higher construction costs than Grand Avenue. The Via Carta site carries additional expenses because it is now the site of existing academic programs that would need to be moved. The California Boulevard site would require extensive improvements to resolve safety concerns due to the railroad tracks.

Both sites would take more money and time to prepare. Both of these sites as well as the others initially considered are likely to be examined again as Cal Poly plans for even more on-campus housing in the future.

"None of these sites were rejected as unfit for student housing, just not appropriate for first-year housing," said Stan Nosek, Cal Poly's interim vice president for Administration and Finance. "Cal Poly wants to reach a point where at least half, possibly as many as two-thirds of our students live in university housing. As we plan for how to reach that goal, we absolutely will need to consider these sites again, along with others not yet identified."

The Grand Avenue project's draft environmental impact report is being amended to include the two additional sites considered and the reasons they were passed over. The amendment will trigger a new 45-day period for public comment. The new deadlines for public comment will be announced shortly, once the amendment of the draft report is complete.

The report will be available online at http://afd.calpoly.edu/facilities/facp_index.asp and at the Kennedy Library on campus and the City/County Library in San Luis Obispo. Written comments may be sent to environmental consultant Nicole Carter at ncarter@swca.com or SWCA Environmental Consultants, 1422 Monterey St., C200, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401.

Cal Poly is now scheduled to present the proposed project and its final EIR at the CSU trustees' May meeting.

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