

September 11, 2009

The University of New Mexico Board of Regents  
MSC05 3200  
1 University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, NM 87131

President David Schmidly  
MSC05 3300  
1 University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, NM 87131

Re: 2009 Campus Master Plan Update

Dear Regents and President Schmidly:

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to comment on the University of New Mexico Draft Master Plan. The issues listed below represent just some of the many concerns and questions that we have about the 2009 Master Plan Update. We plan to submit a complete list of our concerns, questions, and recommendations to you at your September 29, 2009, meeting. However, we hope that you will conclude, even based on the select issues we are bringing to your attention now, that while the 2009 Master Plan Update contains some laudable goals, it is not ready to be considered for adoption at this time.

**Key issues that have not been adequately addressed in the 2009 Master Plan Update:**

1. **Neighborhood/Stakeholder Communication and Involvement:** The impact that UNM has on surrounding neighborhoods cannot be overstated, and as the largest institution of higher education in the state and one of the largest employers in Albuquerque, UNM has a significant daily impact on city facilities and services, such as roads and the transit system. We feel that the greatest oversight of this Master Plan update process was a failure to engage the City of Albuquerque and the neighborhoods, including neighborhood businesses, which stand to be most affected by UNM's long-term development plans in a meaningful way.
  - The City of Albuquerque is not listed and was not engaged as a partner/stakeholder in the 2009 Master Plan Update process (Draft Master Plan (DMP), 7), yet numerous proposals and concepts, specifically those related to transportation and transit, will require the cooperation of City agencies. For example, "Proposed Road Network and Circulation Improvements" for each of the campuses in the Land Use Districts chapter of the Plan will require City of Albuquerque cooperation, approval, and, very likely, capital. However, without formal consultation with and agreement from the City to construct these improvements, the university cannot simply assume that they will happen, which may impact the university's own plans for development in certain areas.
  - The neighborhoods that surround the North, Central, and South Campuses are not listed and were not engaged as partners/stakeholders in the 2009 Master Plan Update process (DMP, 7), but they stand to be most impacted by UNM's long-term development plans.
    - The measures to improve communication with the greater community listed on page 77 of the Plan are all good ideas; however, why were they not used as part of the Master Plan Update process itself?
  - The 1996 "Campus Development Plan" by Barton Myers Associates lists four City of Albuquerque representatives, including then-City Councilor Angela Robbins, and twenty-two neighborhood representatives as "Study Participants." The 2009 Plan contains no mention of

specific City and neighborhood participants. Why were representatives from these groups not invited to participate as they were in 1996?

- **RECOMMENDATIONS:** Engage City and neighborhood representatives in discussions about UNM's plans for future development. Invite the District 3 City Councilor, other City representatives (e.g., Planning Department, Municipal Development, Transit), and at least one official representative from each neighborhood to attend official meetings regarding the Master Plan Update and specific projects. View the City of Albuquerque and neighborhoods as partners and resources, not adversaries, in planning for the future of UNM.

2. **Transportation/Traffic Issues:** Numerous concerns arise with respect to assumptions and recommendations contained in the "Transportation Strategic Plan (June 2009)" (TSP).

- The TSP contains the statement, "*The Central/Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Interchange provides access to the south and west sides of the Central Campus. Central Ave. is a city arterial with 6 lanes and raised median islands. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Blvd. is a 2 lane collector street owned by City of Albuquerque*" (TSP, 9). As has previously been discussed at length with the university, MLK Blvd. should not be viewed or promoted as a primary access point to Central Campus. The redesign of the Big-I and the access from I-25 to MLK has had lasting, negative impacts on the Sycamore and Spruce Park neighborhoods. There was significant discussion during the facilitated meetings between UNM, the City, and the Spruce Park and Sycamore neighborhoods regarding the proposed Lot C parking structure about needing to work with NMDOT to have signage installed along and improvements made to I-25 to direct people to access Central Campus via Lomas rather than MLK.
- With regard to the City of Albuquerque Transit System, the TSP states, "*There is currently no formal coordination between ABQ Ride buses, and PATS or UNMH shuttle services*" (TSP, 17). It is also noted in this section that the \$65,000 that is provided by PATS and the legislature for student bus passes is "*less than what would be generated through the fare box and individual pass sales*" (TSP, 19). In order to expect cooperation, not to mention ongoing subsidies, from the City of Albuquerque with respect to transit coordination and services, UNM should have engaged ABQ Ride management and planning staff at the onset of the Master Plan Update process and should do so in the future.
- Under "Suggestions for Further Study" in the TSP, the first bullet reads, "*Perform a transportation study of UNM to identify the existing conditions of the surrounding roadways, analyze the impact of the proposed campus growth on the local roadway network, and determine possible solutions. . . . Analyze the impact of campus expansion on the surrounding neighborhoods*" (TSP, 45). These analyses should take place *prior to* making decisions about where to locate and develop projects, such as parking structures, so as to help inform those decisions.
- **RECOMMENDATIONS:** Perform transportation studies, analyze impacts, and develop solutions **on the front end, rather than the back end**, of developing capital projects, **BEFORE finalizing plans and seeking funding**. Work with neighborhood leaders and the City to understand the impacts that certain development proposals will have on existing street networks before finalizing plans.

3. **Sustainability/Preservation Issues:** While the 2009 Master Plan contains the laudable goal of attaining carbon neutrality by 2030, it stops short of making the type of commitments that are necessary to achieve that goal. Preservation, an issue related to sustainability, is also not adequately addressed in this plan.

- There is no commitment to permanent preservation of the North Golf Course and Barren Fairways. The plan seems to intentionally leave the door open for future development of the golf course by saying, “*For the time frame of this master plan, the North Golf Course will remain as reserve lands for UNM*” (DMP, 34).
  - With regard to landscape developments, one proposed “improvement” is to introduce “*some formal geometry and patterning to the [path’s surrounding the Duck Pond]*” (DMP, 26). However, the UNM campus landscape is the vision of Landscape Architect Garrett Eckbo. The curves and delineated diagonals match the buildings’ traditional Southwestern style. Eckbo incorporated studies of pedestrian traffic in order to provide fluid walkways for students. He worked to move vehicular circulation and parking out toward the edge of campus, leaving the campus center as a student safe zone. He also worked to balance beauty with an arid climate and urban growth by researching comparative studies of weather conditions with native plant biology. The landscape architecture of the university is part of the historic character of the place and should be considered carefully before changes are proposed. Improvements that are made to the Duck Pond area should be consistent with and employ Eckbo’s techniques and design principles.
  - **RECOMMENDATIONS:** Designate the North Golf Course and Barren Fairways as permanent open space lands. Reclaim the Barren Fairways for educational and environmentally sustainable uses. Honor and preserve the traditional landscape design principles of Garrett Eckbo and the historically significant structures on campus.
4. **Student Housing:** We fully concur with and support the university’s desire to develop on-campus student housing. However, we do not feel that the issue of student housing – both on- and off-campus – has been adequately fleshed out in this Master Plan update.
- The plan does not provide enough information about the location, and quantity by location, of new on-campus housing that is proposed.
  - One of the “Proposed Facilities Improvements” in South Campus includes, “*developing upperclassmen and graduate[sic] student housing in the area between the Pit and I-25*” (MP 46). We question whether this is really the most appropriate location for student housing given the amount of noise from the interstate and the Pit that residents would have to deal with. We feel that a more appropriate and beneficial use for that area would be structure parking with improved shuttle service to Central Campus.
  - During the facilitated meetings between UNM, the City, and the Spruce Park and Sycamore neighborhoods, the idea of “approved off-campus housing” was discussed. The idea is that the university, working with the City of Albuquerque and landlords/property managers, could provide parents with a list of approved, quality housing in the neighborhoods, thus making the university a partner in the provision of safe, near-campus housing. This would ultimately further the common goal of the university and the community to provide convenient, quality housing supply for UNM students.
  - **RECOMMENDATIONS:** Reconsider building housing between I-25 and the Pit. Provide a greater level of detail of proposals for developing on-campus housing on Central Campus. Work with the City, neighborhoods, and landlords/property managers to develop an “approved housing” program that can be incorporated into the overall Master Plan strategy for addressing student housing needs.

**Our Goal: Working together to create a healthy, safe, sustainable community.**

There is no doubt that UNM is an essential part of the Albuquerque community, as a center of knowledge and learning as well as a major contributor to the local economy. But there can also be no doubt that UNM's North, Central, and South Campuses have a significant and daily impact on the surrounding neighborhoods. This impact will continue to grow, especially if UNM's prediction about student population increasing by over 30% in the next nine years is accurate. UNM needs to take an active role in addressing the impacts that it creates – impacts such as traffic, noise, crime, and parking – and that a calculation of these impacts must be factored into the 2009 Master Plan Update. We feel that the Regents have an opportunity to model for UNM students a real collaborative engagement with all stakeholders in building a sustainable environment for the university, the heart of Albuquerque. Rushing approval of an incomplete plan would be a poor example to set.


While we understand the need for a master plan to have flexibility in order to adapt to changing conditions, we implore the university to understand that the residents of the city – specifically those in neighborhoods adjacent to UNM's campuses, but also all taxpaying citizens of Albuquerque – need to know that there will be predictability and order in how the university continues to grow and impact the entire community. We respectfully request that the Regents not approve the 2009 Master Plan at this time but rather direct that this planning effort continue and that input from all stakeholders, namely the City of Albuquerque and neighborhoods adjacent to UNM, be gathered and incorporated in a revised draft.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to having an opportunity to address you at your September 29, 2009, meeting.

Sincerely,

  
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Albuquerque City Council, District 6

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 P.M. for Laurel Schillke  
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Federation of University Neighborhoods


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Karl Schwerin  
Netherwood Park Neighborhood Association


 P.M. for Sara Koplik  
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North Campus Neighborhood Association

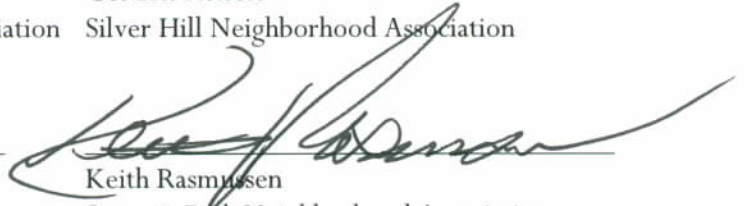
  
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Cc: Governor Bill Richardson  
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Steve Beffort, Vice President of Institutional Support Services, UNM  
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