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# COLLEGE AVENUE CAMPUS

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RENEWAL PROJECT

## June 2016 Public Consultations

**Purpose:** Summarize public consultations conducted in June 2016

**Date prepared:** July 18, 2016

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### VISION

To revitalize and breathe new life into the University of Regina's historic College Avenue Campus by making it the hub of learning and culture for the City of Regina.

### BACKGROUND

The University is in discussions with Wascana Centre Authority (WCA) and the City of Regina on transferring a parcel of city land immediately west of Darke Hall for the express purpose of supporting the renewal of the University's historic College Avenue Campus (CAC).

The University has concluded a request for proposal (RFP) process seeking a development partner able to support the CAC Renewal project. The result is a potential partnership with Conexus Credit Union to create a new head office building that would leverage the proposed city land donation to create up to \$8.25 million in donations and revenue for CAC Renewal. It will also save millions of dollars more through synergies with the proposed Conexus Project. The partnership, however, is contingent on the city donating the land for the purposes of this development.

The following describes the results of the public and stakeholder consultations on the views and opinions regarding the city land donation.

### THE OPEN CONSULTATIONS

A media event was held on Wednesday, June 8<sup>th</sup>, to announce the new partnership with Conexus Credit Union and to provide public notice of the consultation sessions. The announcement received media coverage both on the evening news and online from all three major television broadcasters, CBC, CTV and Global. In addition, it was also covered by the Leader Post and on radio on both CKRM and CBC.

The University also placed advertisements in the Leader Post on June 11<sup>th</sup> and June 18<sup>th</sup> to publicize the two open consultation sessions. It sent direct email invites to the consultations to nearly 25,000 students, alumni, faculty, staff and community members.

The first open consultations session was held June 16<sup>th</sup> to gather feedback about the CAC Renewal Project and the proposed partnership with Conexus Credit Union. Approximately 50 people attended. A second open consultation session held June 23 with slightly greater attendance approximately 60 people. The presentations and video from these consultation sessions are available online at [www.uregina.ca/giving](http://www.uregina.ca/giving).

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## THE TARGETED CONSULTATIONS

To round out the consultations, the University completed targeted engagement and outreach to key groups. The response from these stakeholders was very positive and supportive. Outreach efforts include:

- A briefing and Q&A session on June 6<sup>th</sup> with over 70 donors and key community members.
- A media event on June 8<sup>th</sup> with approximately 40 people in attendance.
- Residents and companies located on the streets immediately adjacent to College Avenue Campus received a pamphlet in the mail on June 11<sup>th</sup> alerting them to the open consultation dates.
- Instructors and other stakeholders at College Avenue Campus received a pamphlet in their office mail box after the June 8<sup>th</sup> announcement.
- A direct invite to all 15 tenants/partners in Wascana Centre Authority to attend the open consultations or to contact the University with any concerns.
- A direct invite to five heritage/architectural interest groups in Saskatchewan to attend the open consultations or to contact the University with any concerns.
- A presentation on June 17<sup>th</sup> to members of the Lifelong Learning Centre was attended by approximately 40 people.
- A presentation on June 22<sup>nd</sup> to the Regina Chamber of Commerce.
- A presentation on June 29<sup>th</sup> to the Regina Downtown Business Improvement District.

## ELECTRONIC FEEDBACK

The University also supplied an email address ([UR.Giving@uregina.ca](mailto:UR.Giving@uregina.ca)) and web address ([www.uregina.ca/giving](http://www.uregina.ca/giving)) in all communications and advertisements to enable interested community members to get more information and provide input. The table below summarizes the electronic input received (as of July 11, 2016):

Response	# of Email Responses	Views Expressed
Completely Supportive	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More of these innovative private partnerships are needed to reduce reliance on public funds or supplement them</li> <li>• RFP process extremely transparent</li> <li>• Cooperatives make great community partners and Conexus is an excellent organization</li> <li>• Several comments about the important history and education and artistic functions of College Ave Campus</li> <li>• Darke Hall renovations badly needed</li> <li>• Improvements will make facilities more accessible, particularly important given increase seniors population</li> </ul>
Conditionally Supportive	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive, but not on the exact site chosen</li> <li>• Supportive, but process going forward needs to be transparent</li> <li>• Supportive overall, but business incubator not needed</li> <li>• Supportive of project, but wanted assurance that the project will not be a P3</li> <li>• Supportive but worried about any potential impact on Wascana</li> </ul>

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Opposed	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One concern expressed about having any banking institution on campus at all</li> <li>• Two concerns expressed about corporate office being an inappropriate use of park space</li> <li>• One critical comment indicating that a corporation should not dictate University direction</li> </ul>
Other comments	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two concerns were expressed about impact on parking, particularly given the seniors who use the College Ave Campus, though neither provided overall comment for or against the project</li> <li>• One completely unrelated email</li> <li>• Email requesting slide decks from public presentations, which were posted online</li> </ul>

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### Support for the Project Outweighed Opposition

Feedback received through email, through questions and comments at the open consultation sessions and through targeted consultations was generally positive. Stakeholders felt that the partnership with Conexus justified an exemption to WCA land use policy based on the positive impacts in stimulating College Avenue Campus Renewal. It was also widely agreed that such creative financing partnerships are needed given the current fiscal conditions facing Saskatchewan.

### Concerns were mitigated by the strong reputation of Conexus

Concerns expressed about the project were largely mitigated by the proposed partner. For example, while some questioned any commercial development in the park, the University received positive feedback from these opponents that partnering with a co-operative was an ideal path if it helped advance the CAC Renewal Project.

The University and Conexus also made the case that the development of non-retail office space will integrate into the character of CAC and be largely indistinguishable from most typical tenants in the park, such as the plethora of Government and University offices and other entities like CBC, CNIB, the Canada Saskatchewan Production Studio and Innovation Place that occupy buildings in the park.

### Few options left for saving College Avenue Campus

Most participants in this process expressed support for, and in many cases, considerable emotional attachment to, College Avenue Campus.

While some expressed concerns, there was widespread understanding that the alternative to a partnership with Conexus may be losing College Avenue Campus altogether. News about the poor condition of the Conservatory and Gallery Buildings underlined this point for many

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participants. Those who expressed a desire for the project to be completely publicly funded understood that the consequence of waiting for such public funding presents a risk to the ongoing survival of the historic campus.

## ISSUES IDENTIFIED AND HOW THEY ARE BEING ADDRESSED

### Concerns about demolition of the Gallery Building and majority of the Conservatory Building

Questions rose over the need to demolish the Gallery Building and portions of the Conservatory Building as part of the project on current University land.

#### Response:

Demolishing the Gallery Building and most of the Conservatory Building (excluding the front facade) is not our preferred choice; however, a report by JC Kenyon Engineering indicates these buildings are damaged beyond what could reasonably be considered restorable. We are concerned that failure to move forward with the renewal of Darke Hall and the College Building now will result in these buildings also becoming unsalvageable in the next decade or so.

We understand the loss of these historic properties will require ongoing communication with key stakeholders. To ensure communications with interested stakeholders on this issue, the University is also developing a Heritage Preservation and Commemoration Committee made up of stakeholders from heritage, architectural and artistic groups. A meeting was held July 14 to kick this process off. Invites to this meeting went out to representatives from:

- Heritage Regina
- Architectural Heritage Society of Saskatchewan
- Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport
- Heritage Saskatchewan
- Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation
- Saskatchewan Association of Architects
- Wascana Centre Authority Heritage Committee
- Municipal Heritage Advisory Council
- Faculty of Media Art and Performance, U of R
- Mackenzie Art Gallery
- Conservatory of Performing Arts

### Concerns about the location of the proposed Conexus building

A number of people questioned why Conexus proposed the development of their new building on site A, which is on the west side of Darke Hall, rather than sites B or C.

#### Response:

All three sites are identified in the University's and Wascana Centre Authority's Master Plans. However, site A offered the greatest flexibility for Conexus and allowed it to directly support the

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renewal of Darke Hall through the development of a shared atrium, which would include a crush area for events at Darke Hall, provide an accessible entrance and shared utilities/mechanical systems.

Conexus has indicated it chose site A in response to the University's request for proposals, which indicated proposals should support the renewal of Darke Hall. Site C, which is to the east of the College Building, offered virtually no opportunity to integrate the new proposed building, utilities and services with Darke Hall. Site B, which is between Darke Hall and the Conservatory Building, would be extremely difficult to build on, especially if incorporating underground parking. This would significantly increase the cost of construction and limit Conexus' frontage and profile on College Avenue.

Most importantly, there is currently no viable partner for the other sites at CAC owned by the University; despite that the other parcels were part of the RFP. Therefore there is currently no ability for these sites to be leveraged to contribute to CAC Renewal. The site as chosen is currently the only one that will yield any contribution to College Avenue Campus Renewal in terms of direct financial contribution (up to \$8.25 million) and cost avoidance (also expected to be millions of dollars).

### **Concerns about parking**

A small minority of participants in the consultation process expressed concern about the impact the new development would have on parking on the site.

### **Response:**

The University committed that there would be no new surface parking developed as a result of the Conexus development. The University cited parking analysis highlighting excess capacity at College Avenue Campus and noted that any excess demand created by Conexus would be accommodated through the development of an underground parkade. This underground parkade has the potential to enhance parking during off hours for users of the park and users of College Avenue Campus and Darke Hall. In addition, the excess parking the University does have could be leveraged as another revenue stream from Conexus to help fund CAC Renewal.

The University is confident that a combination of existing surface and underground parking can meet the current and expected demand for parking at the campus.

### **The design process should be inclusive**

There were several questions and comments related to the design of the Conexus building, with stakeholders interested in ensuring the design fit with the existing heritage buildings that make up CAC.

### **Response:**

The partners highlighted that the development will go through design requirements with WCA and its Heritage and Architectural Advisory committees. In addition, Conexus committed to sharing its design with the public once the project moves into the design phase, also indicating

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they will work with heritage experts to understand the best approach to designing a new building adjacent to heritage buildings. The new advisory committee noted above will also be part of the ongoing process for getting feedback on the next stage of the various components of the CAC Renewal Project.

## **Transfer of city land**

The new Conexus building is being proposed for development on city land. Questions arose as to the final ownership of the land if the development proceeds?

### **Response:**

The intent is for the University to own the land and to provide a long-term lease to Conexus. In order for this to happen the University is requesting the city donate the land to the University as its contribution towards the College Avenue Campus Renewal project.

When the University first approached the city seeking a contribution towards the College Avenue Campus Renewal Project the city indicated it was unable to provide a direct financial contribution at the time, but would consider the transfer of some of its land towards the project.

The project partners believe they will be able to demonstrate significant value to Council through a full proposal requesting the land transfer. For example:

- Through the Centre for Continuing Education (including the Lifelong Learning Centre and the Conservatory for Performing Arts), each year the College Avenue Campus serves 8,000 learners from Regina, southern Saskatchewan, and around the world via distance learning.
- It directly contributes \$18 million to the provincial GDP, and supports nearly 500 full- and part-time jobs.
- It is a hub of cultural activity and Darke Hall is an important performance venue used by numerous community groups.
- Achieving our goal will allow us to preserve the College Building and Darke Hall and bring them up to modern standards for accessibility, functionality and performance.
- It will keep Conexus headquartered at the heart of the city, bringing more economic activity to the city's downtown.

The piece of land chosen by Conexus was identified and accepted for development during the master planning processes for both the University and WCA.

## **Downtown Office Space Policy Exemption**

The proposed Conexus office building development does not comply with the city's Official Community Plan (OCP) as it will be located just outside of the downtown office zone. Questions arose regarding Conexus being allowed to build a head office outside of the downtown area.

### **Response:**

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The project partners believe they will be able to demonstrate significant value to Council through a full proposal requesting the land transfer. The proposed development aligns with many of the city's Vision and Community Priorities, most notably to *Embrace built heritage, and invest in arts, culture, sport and recreation.*

The location of the CAC Renewal project is just at the edge of the city centre area on the south side of College Avenue and the Conexus office development fits with similar-sized offices located on the north side of College Avenue.

There are no existing vacancies in Regina that could accommodate the 80,000 sq. ft. needed by Conexus and Conexus requires a new building.

“Goal 5 – Office Development” is a critical aspect of the OCP for consideration as it addresses the specific land use of the project. There are several relevant clauses for consideration:

- **7.28** *Endeavour to ensure, over the life of the Plan, that at least 80% of the total office floor area in the city, pertaining to medium office and major office development, is located in the DOWNTOWN/CENTRAL CITY OFFICE AREA, as identified on Map 6 – Office Areas.*

As noted, the College Avenue Campus and land transfer area are at the South edge of the Central City Office Area. Based on this location and the similar +50,000 sq. ft. office developments on the north side of College Avenue, the University and Conexus believe the development is in the spirit of keeping 80% of total office floor area in the *DOWNTOWN/CENTRAL CITY OFFICE AREA*. Regardless of where this office building is built, the city would maintain 80% of total office floor area in the downtown, based on existing market conditions.<sup>1</sup>

- **7.29** *Require medium office and major office to locate inside the DOWNTOWN, except for in the following contexts:*
  - **7.29.3** *The development of medium office and major office buildings in the Centre Square Neighbourhood, in accordance with a Neighbourhood Plan;*
  - **7.29.4** *The development of medium office and major office buildings associated with and located adjacent to a major institutional area. (e.g. university, hospital or civic use)*
  - **7.29.5** *The development of medium office and major office buildings within the identified OFFICE AREA and URBAN CENTRES that are conceptually located on Map 6 – Office areas.*

While 7.28 provides broad direction for office in the *DOWNTOWN/CENTRAL CITY OFFICE AREA*, 7.29 seeks to more narrowly push office development to Downtown specifically, with a variety of notable exceptions. 7.29.3 highlights the exception for office development in the Centre Square Neighbourhood, which is relevant since it is directly across the street from the proposed development, which although not specifically related supports the location. 7.29.4 highlights an exception for developments adjacent to a major institutional area, including a

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<sup>1</sup> Avison Young – Regina Office Market Report, January 2016

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University, which is the exact development being proposed. The proposed Conexus office development will be physically integrated with the College Avenue Campus creating the cost avoidance and programming benefits detailed throughout this proposal.

## **Wascana Centre Authority approval**

Questions arose as to how the Conexus proposal, which is to develop a head office building, aligns with WCA's core mandate?

### **Response:**

The Conexus proposal fits within WCA's core mandate by supporting the enlargement of educational, research and development opportunities through the renewal of the College Avenue Campus, which houses the Lifelong Learning Centre, Continuing Education and Conservatory programs; by providing the Johnson Shoyama School of Business appropriate space to operate within the College Avenue Campus; and, through the establishment of the Business Incubator space which will support the University's business programs.

It supports the city's cultural development through the renewal of Darke Hall as one of the premier performing arts facilities in Western Canada.

It will provide additional amenities for recreation including an atrium and promenade connected with Darke Hall that will provide accessibility and space for public functions.

## **Alignment with the WCA Master Plan**

Concerns arose that the WCA Master Plan restricts commercial development in the park, which is what Conexus is proposing to develop.

### **Response:**

The Conexus development fits within the approved WCA Master Plan, which identifies areas of the park including the location at the College Avenue Campus, for future buildings.

While the development of a corporate head office would not generally be allowed under the Master Plan, there are provisions for exemptions to be made that allow for the development to be approved outside of the plan. Part of the WCA requirements for the exemption is the stipulation that public consultations be held, such as the ones outlined in this document.

The project partners believe the direct and ancillary benefits of the Conexus partnership to the College Avenue Campus Renewal Project will support the required exemption.