



Preliminary East Hall redesign presented by TowerPinkster to WMU, public

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KALAMAZOO, MI — Attendees at Thursday's Western Michigan University Board of Trustees meeting got a first look at preliminary designs for a renovated **East Hall**.

Kalamazoo architecture firm TowerPinkster unveiled some initial concepts at the meeting, which included increased green space atop Prospect Hill, a possible expansion of the plaza in front of East Hall's portico and up to three additions to bring the building up to code.

TowerPinkster firm principal Bjorn Green offers a first look at initial design concepts for the renovation of East Hall at the WMU Board of Trustees meeting July 18.

Steph Anderson Chambers |
MLive.com/Kalamazoo Gazette

"We've spent a great deal of time evaluating all of the buildings, analyzing the site, and assessing all of the materials that can come into play," said Bjorn Green, principal, in a presentation to trustees. "Our firm is truly excited about the potential for the space that we've been asked to design. We're working with our historic preservation consultant to both redevelop East Hall and design a hilltop space that will celebrate and honor the legacy of the entire site."

There will be three public forums scheduled to give the community the opportunity to provide input, he said. The first will be scheduled for late September and will be open to WMU faculty, staff, students and alumni, as well as residents of the Kalamazoo area. A second session will be held in December and then the final design will be presented at a public session in late February or March.

"We're very early in this effort and we do look forward to getting comment and input and feedback from you all," said Green, who added that the firm was four weeks into a 45-week design process.

Construction is expected to begin in the middle of next year and is expected to be complete by the mid-2015. In June, WMU's Board of Trustees approved a \$15 million bond issue to finance the renovation.

"We see this as an opportunity to once again make the top of Prospect Hill a vibrant part of daily life at WMU and an important asset for the community at large," Jan Van Der Kley, vice president of business and finance, told the board. "We expect the next two years to bring new construction jobs into the community and, at the end of the process, there will be an important new resource that can be broadly used for campus and community priorities."

The initial design focused solely on the birthplace of WMU -- the 34,000-square-foot core of East Hall, Green said. WMU said that discussions about the cost and feasibility of preserving the building's wings, which were added later, are still underway.

No matter what design is selected, signature architectural features such as the cupola, pillared portico and the interior central staircase, will be restored and preserved, WMU said.

Green said that the team has been looking at the Olmsted Brothers design for the site from the early 1900s for inspiration.

The designs were unveiled as WMU prepared to move forward with razing two other historic buildings on Prospect Hill. The area around West Hall and the Speech and Hearing Building was fenced off as a construction site this week in preparation for hazardous material abatement and salvaging architectural elements. WMU signed contracts July 8 with Midland-based Bierlein Companies Inc. and notice of intent has been filed with the Department of Environmental Quality. Demolition of those two buildings will begin in three to four weeks and should be completed by late summer, WMU said.

Demolition of North Hall and, potentially, the wings of East Hall will occur after WMU's Archives and Regional History Collections, which are currently housed in East Hall and part of North Hall, move to the new Zhang Legacy Collections Center on Oakland Dr. The move is expected to be complete by mid-fall.

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