

Antioch spending \$81 million to build leaner campus

NEWS

By Sharahn D Boykin

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Antioch College is almost halfway through \$81 million worth of campus capital improvement projects aimed at making the campus sustainable and energy efficient with a smaller carbon footprint — critical components of the campus' revival strategy.

Four years after the historic private college reopened its doors in 2011, the school has completed about \$37.1 million in improvements to the campus which includes the completion of the first phase of a central geothermal plant, a new wellness center and more recently the second phase of renovations to the Arts & Science building in January.

Another \$44 million in improvements are planned through 2022.

"I don't think it's all that elaborate or all that sophisticated, said Antioch College President Mark Roosevelt. "It's just taking advantage of the disadvantage and the disadvantage was that we had decayed and decrepit infrastructure."

Campus infrastructure and renovations are a critical component to the future of the campus, he said.

Antioch closed in 2008 saying the upkeep and maintenance of the school's deteriorating buildings were too costly and contributed to the schools financial struggles.

Since the college reopened, Roosevelt and the Antioch College's Board of Trustees have focused on redesigning the campus to focus on carbon neutrality and sustainable living. The college made sizable investments in the campus shortly after reopening to eliminate wasted space and develop buildings that can be efficiently maintained at an affordable cost, Roosevelt said.

"Most colleges tell you can't do it because they've got all this money invested in equipment," he said. "We didn't have any of that because it was all decrepit."

College officials have said the campus buildings were in poor condition when the school closed in 2008.

A year before the college closed, Antioch University trustees announced the school would close due to a lack of funds, according to previous reports by this newspaper.

Antioch is a small private liberal arts college whose students have been active in the civil rights movement and other social issues.

Horace Mann, the college's first president, was an abolitionist and educational visionary. The school has also had notable students such as Coretta Scott King and Eleanor Holmes Norton, who represents Washington, D.C. in U.S. House of Representatives.

The ups and downs at Antioch are have a ripple effect on the community.

"The relationship between Antioch College and the Village of Yellow Springs is longstanding and strong, especially since the re-opening of the college," said Karen Wintrow, president of the Yellow Springs Village Council.

"Until the closure in 2008, the college was one of our top five employers and now that they're in their fourth year in operation and preparing to graduate their first class, the college is again one of our largest employers."

Vision is for a "no frills campus"

Antioch reopened with funds raised by alumni who helped grow the college's endowment to \$52 million in 2012. The school also received a \$35 million payout after it sold its shares of YSI Inc. — formerly known as Yellow Springs Instrument Co., according to previous reports by this newspaper.

"When we opened we had a dorm and a classroom," Roosevelt said. "No gym.... the entire campus had been let go for a very long period of time."

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Roosevelt said the lack of maintenance on the buildings turned out to be an advantage because the school could renovate the buildings to be more efficient.

Antioch College Physical Plant Director Reggie Stratton said the physical plant was in bad shape.

“The way they operated the buildings was very inefficient and so they had very high operating costs,” Stratton said. “Their gas, their water bills, their electrical usage.”

Frances Degen Horowitz, a 1954 alumnus and chair of the Antioch College Board of Trustees, said the when the campus closed, the infrastructure was inadequate and run down so the board decided to replace the heating and cooling system, which she described as “patchwork”, with geothermal and solar energy which is expected to save the college \$400,000 annually.

“It is part of a larger philosophy that the board adopted about sustainability and living with good healthy and energy efficient facilities,” she said. “On the energy basis, this was a deliberate decision to move into the 21st century and do it right.”

While estimates for campus improvements hover around \$81.1 million, Roosevelt said \$100 to \$120 million will be required to complete the entire campus.

“The main part of the vision that’s really important is we won’t have extra space,” Roosevelt said. “The vision is for a tight, efficient, clean, no frills campus, he said. “That’s really the essential part of the vision.”

In 2014, the college demolished Mills Hall, a 15,400 square foot former dormitory built in 1959. Antioch trustees have approved demolition of the 40,000 square foot old student union.

Trustees are also considering selling, demolishing or repurposing four additional campus buildings including the Fine Arts, library and Sontag Fels buildings, Stratton said.

“There is no current timeline on any of these buildings for considering to sell, demolish or repurpose and their fate is still an ongoing discussion on our master planning committee,” he said.

Sustainability efforts follow national trend

New sustainability focused higher education programs are being initiated on college campuses across the country said Meghan Fay Zahniser, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education executive director.

“The rate of growth in new programs has slowed somewhat since they peaked in 2010, but our findings indicate that steady growth in sustainability-focused programs will continue,” she said.

For the remaining buildings on campus, the goal is to make each building as sustainable as possible through energy efficient lighting, heating systems and thermal insulation of the buildings, such as the walls and roofs, Stratton said.

North Hall, one of three buildings remaining from when the college was founded in 1850, was the first building renovated and will serve as a model for other buildings on campus, Stratton said. A standalone geothermal heating and cooling system, solar array on the roof and low-flow plumbing fixtures were part of the building design.

“We focused our energy on that building,” Stratton said.

The building received a gold Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. LEED, a green building program, certified buildings use renewable clean energy and are expected to save money and resources, according to the U.S. Green Building Council.

The college will seek LEED certification for every building on campus, Stratton said. The focus is on the energy efficiency of the buildings.

“We’re trying more of a no frills approach as far as the architectural improvements of buildings so that we can spend more money on the energy efficiency things,” Stratton said. “So we give up some frills in order to beef up on the energy efficiency of the building. That’s how we balance those costs.”

Stratton said the investments in infrastructure are expected to lower operating costs over a 25 year period.

College must still achieve accreditation

Antioch has financed the capital improvement projects by borrowing against the schools’ \$42 million endowment.

"It's like making a loan to yourself," Andi Adkins, the Antioch College vice president of finance and operations said. "We've got repayment terms, market rate interest and we've got a plan in place to repay the principle. In fact we're paying interest on the loans now."

Until the college can charge tuition, Antioch College is mostly dependant on donations for funding operations, Adkins said. The school lost its accreditation after it closed in 2008 and has not charged tuition since it reopened. The college does not plan to charge for tuition until it is reaccredited.

"Antioch College is currently in candidacy status," said John Hausaman, a spokesman for the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association.

A team of higher education peer reviewers are expected to visit the campus during the 2015-2016 academic school year to determine if the college is meeting the commission's criteria for accreditation, Hausaman said.

"I am very inspired to see the rebirth of this wonderful institution," said Liam Marin, a 20-year-old political economy student at Antioch College. "I think a lot of people have put in hard work and dedication to keep this college going as well as restarting it ... I think it is import that we follow our mission and put our words in align with our mission statement. If we're a sustainably conscious campus, we should take all necessary steps to practice that."

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Sharahn D Boykin



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