UPDATE: Tara Apartments decks, sealed off limits in March, will be removed

Thursday, May 15, 2014 | 5:46 p.m. CDT; updated 6:11 p.m. CDT, Thursday, May 15, 2014

MU sealed off the rear decks at the Tara Apartments on March 21. The closure allowed for a careful inspection of the decks that determined they would need to be reinforced or replaced. MU has decided to remove the decks. Alex Scott

BY Missourian staff

COLUMBIA — Tara Apartments' rear decks will be removed following a recommendation from a structural engineering firm, according to an email sent Thursday to Tara residents.

Trabue, Hansen and Hinshaw Inc., inspected all MU buildings after the University Village walkway collapse in February. The firm found that 18 of the 376 buildings had structural issues of "immediate concern." Half of those structural issues came from Tara’s decks.

University Student Apartments staff had hoped to reinforce the decks, but that would only be a temporary solution, according to the report from Trabue, Hansen and Hinshaw Inc..
"Reinforcing them was the most expensive option, and it only deferred the problem because it didn't replace the original deck," said Frankie Minor, director of residential life.

The report estimated that reinforcing the decks would have cost about $885,060. The firm recommended removing the decks and replacing the doors with windows at an estimated cost of $770,220.

The rest of the "immediate concerns" in the engineering firm's report have been fixed or addressed with a temporary solution. The firm had cited issues with walkways at Missouri Theatre, Lafferre Hall and the MU Power Plant. The report also identified a "badly deteriorated" staircase at Loeb Hall, which has been replaced with a wooden staircase.

In March, the firm sent a letter to Larry Hubbard, director of campus facilities, to "strongly recommend" closing the rear decks of all 16 buildings at Tara Apartments.

Engineers from the firm looked at the decks from the ground during its campuswide evaluation and noticed that the supporting beams had "lost some of their original capacity due to age and exposure to the elements," according to the letter.

One deck was able to support three adult men, according to the letter, but there was enough "deflection" — or give — that the firm recommended sealing off the decks to allow time for further inspection. The decks were sealed beginning March 21.

Minor said there is no timeline in place for removing the decks, nor is there a plan for how Residential Life will pay for the project.

Residents can remain in their apartments while the decks are removed, Minor said.

Residential Life operates as an auxiliary unit from the university, so it does not receive institutional, state or other outside funding. Money for operating costs and improvement projects comes from apartment revenues, Minor said.

"Our sense is, (the residents) should not have to pay for (removing the decks), but the money has to come from somewhere," Minor said.
Residential Life's fiscal year ends June 30, Minor said. After that, the department will see if there is money left over to pay for removing the decks.

Residents can remain in their apartments while the decks are removed, Minor said.

Balconies have been removed from other Residential Life buildings in the past, Minor said. Steel and reinforced concrete balconies at Hatch, Schurz, Hudson and Gillett halls posed a liability risk and accessibility issue, and they were removed between 2007 and 2011.

Tara Apartments is one of four university-owned apartment complexes, including University Village, designed to house graduate students and students with families. The 16-building complex is located on Ashland Road off Stadium Boulevard. It was built between 1982 and 1984, MU spokesperson Christian Basi said.

**MU does not perform regularly scheduled structural inspections of its buildings, according to previous Missourian reporting. The buildings are checked by maintenance workers during routine work requests made by residents, Basi said in February.**

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**MU will demolish decks at Tara student apartments**

By Ashley Jost

**Thursday, May 15, 2014 at 2:00 pm**

Residents at Tara Apartments, a complex owned by the University of Missouri, were told in an email Thursday morning that the decks on the back side of each building will be demolished.
Access to the decks has been sealed off in each apartment since March 20, per a suggestion from Trabue, Hansen & Hinshaw Inc., one of the structural engineering companies hired to inspect all campus-owned buildings after the partial walkway collapse at the University Village apartments in February that killed a Columbia firefighter.

Engineers had concerns after initial inspection of deterioration on the cantilevered decks, which led to further inspection and discussions with MU staff about how to move forward. There now is no timeline on when the work will be done to remove the decks, according to the email.

The email, which was sent from the Office of Residential Life, said the decision to remove the decks was following a recommendation from the engineering firm.

"We had hoped that reinforcing the current decks with new supports would be a viable option," the email said. The engineers' report indicates that existing framing is solid enough to support deck work, but that won't always be the case as the framing deteriorates, the email said.

The deterioration and weathering are "normal," according to the email, because of exposure to the elements.

"Because it would only be a temporary (and expensive) solution, THH did not recommend reinforcing the decks," the email said.

MU, private developers to open new university day care

Thursday, May 15, 2014 | 7:03 p.m. CDT

BY Thomas Dixon

COLUMBIA — MU will ask private developers to partner with the university to replace the child care center at University Village, Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin announced Thursday.

The location of the proposed child care center has not been determined, MU spokesman Christian Basi said. The university plans to offer developers land "at
essentially no cost” in exchange for discounted rates for MU students, faculty and staff, according to a news release.

The current facility, the Student Parent Center, is scheduled to close June 30. MU officials decided to close the day care along with the surrounding apartments after a walkway collapsed Feb. 22 and killed Columbia firefighter Lt. Bruce Britt.

There are no plans for an interim child care center, Basi said.

Kimberly Bodner, a clinical psychology doctoral candidate who created an online petition urging MU to move the Student Parent Center away from University Village, said she hopes the new facility will be affordable and in a location convenient for student parents.

Bodner withdrew her six-month-old son from the Student Parent Center after the walkway collapse. She said it took her almost two months to find a new, adequate child care center — cutting time away from her research and doctoral program.

"We are pretty happy to hear that the university has such a positive response to all of the input but also cautiously optimistic as we look forward," Bodner said.

She said she hopes the new facility will be built in a timely fashion.

Bodner said she's new to the world of day care and mentioned there are parents who have been calling for an improved child care facility for five years.

She said she thinks the walkway collapse was the catalyst to make the process move more quickly.

Any developers interested in building the new child care center may submit a proposal to the university. The university has not yet issued a request for proposals nor set a deadline, Basi said.
The University of Missouri announced Thursday that Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin is seeking private sector proposals for child care.

Loftin has proposed the university would lease land for the facility at no cost to a private developer, expecting the facility’s operator would offer discounted rates to MU students, faculty and staff, a university news release said.

MU spokesman Christian Basi said there currently is no set timeline for the process or when the new child care center will be built.

“He would like to proceed with this as soon as possible,” Basi said.

This decision comes several months after Loftin announced the existing Student Parent Center child care operation and the University Village apartment complex will be closed June 30 and demolished this summer. Loftin called for the demolition of the complex, which houses the university’s child care center for faculty, staff and students, after part of a walkway collapsed at a University Village building in February, killing a Columbia firefighter.

Along with the announcement, MU released a report compiled by a task force created to assess on-campus child care needs. The task force included four of MU’s top administrators, who solicited input from groups including the Missouri Student Association, Graduate Professional Council, Staff Advisory Council, Faculty Council, Status of Women Committee and the Family Friendly Campus Committee.

The task force found that the consensus from the groups was that there is a need for convenient, affordable and quality child care.
“In light of the budget challenges faced by the university and all of higher education, it is highly unlikely that we will be able to put everything in place to provide quality, affordable and convenient childcare by the beginning of the fall semester,” the report states.

The report also points out that all SEC schools, with the exception of Auburn University, have on-campus child care for the campus community.

Jake Wright, president of the Graduate Professional Council, said in the report that adequate child care is “a significant factor” in some graduate and professional students’ decisions to attend MU. The council hosted a forum a few months ago to gauge interest in a new center, as well as a forum on graduate student housing as a whole, which Thursday’s announcement doesn’t address.

Kim Bodner, a doctoral candidate at MU who has heavily advocated for a new center since the announcement came about the Student Parent Center closing, said she is happy with Loftin’s decision.

“This is a great step in the right director for the university,” Bodner said. “We feel encouraged by the press release and by Chancellor Loftin. It seems like he’s understanding how important this is to students and the community.”

Five people are currently employed at the Student Parent Center, Basi said. He said the university is currently working with them to find positions outside of the center. “A few” have already found positions, and one person has retired, he said.

More than 5300 graduate from MU this spring

May 15, 2014  BY Sarah Redohl

More than 5,300 students will graduate from the University of Missouri this spring, starting May 16. University officials also plan to bestow an honorary degree upon Jim Held, the owner and founder of Stone Hill Winery in Hermann, Mo.

Over the course of commencement weekend, MU will bestow 5,452 degrees: 3,814 bachelor’s degrees, 1,009 master’s degrees, 268 doctorates, 128 law degrees, 111 veterinary medicine
degrees, 97 medicine degrees and 25 education specialist degrees. More than 270 of those degrees will be conferred upon students who have completed online degree programs.

“The University of Missouri is proud to send students into the workforce knowing that they have gained an education combining world-class research opportunities, extracurricular activities and nationally recognized classroom experiences,” said Ann Korschgen, vice provost for enrollment management at MU. “We know that our graduates will continue to be successful whether they are continuing their education or going into the workforce.”

Monsanto, University of Missouri partner on leadership program

By Ashley Jost

Thursday, May 15, 2014 at 2:00 pm Comments (9)

A new program at the University of Missouri College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources this fall will give a few dozen promising doctoral candidate students the chance to learn communication and management skills as they prepare for the next steps of their professional careers.

The yearlong program, called "Preparing Tomorrow's Leaders for Science," is set to start with the first class of 15 to 20 students this fall.

After hearing from industry leaders that students are leaving their institutions educated but lacking many essential communication tools, program coordinator Loriana Tisher, president of leadership coaching and consulting company BONSAI, decided it was time to act. Tisher decided to bring MU and St. Louis-based Monsanto to the table to discuss a solution, which became the program.
The college is receiving money from Monsanto to underwrite program costs for the first year, Tisher said. She did not provide the exact dollar amount. That number will include the cost for programs that students will use throughout the year.

Students are going through a strenuous application process, which includes interviews to find those who are promising and coachable, Tisher said. Students who are chosen will enroll in the one-credit-hour class this fall, which will take an average two hours per week.

There are four main goals of the program. Students will learn how to present themselves through networking and through their résumés. They will also develop some key attributes Tisher said the industry requires from them, including managing projects and developing interpersonal skills. Students also will learn how businesses operate, including the regulatory market and laws related to business operations. Finally, Tisher said it's key that students learn how to "think globally, think strategically, holistically and conceptually."

Students will participate in in-class case studies as well as a case study for a "developing project" at Monsanto that they will present to business leaders.

"As a company whose only business is agriculture, science is the foundation of all we do and developing the next generation of people leaders is critical to our ability to serve farmers and our industry," John Raines, vice president of business operations for Monsanto, said in a news release.

In addition to hands-on course work and group activities, students will learn these skills through speakers and one-on-one coaching with Tisher, who is co-teaching the class with Ken Schneeberger, international training coordinator with CAFNR's international programs.

"That one-on-one coaching will be a unique element," Tisher said. "That one-on-one time and helping people modify behavior in real time versus work in the classroom that really drives behavioral changes."

MU plans 3-day teaching event

Thursday, May 15, 2014 at 2:00 pm
The University of Missouri is hosting its Celebration of Teaching event for faculty, staff, graduate instructors and advisers Tuesday through next Thursday.

The three-day event gives attendees the chance to attend workshops and concurrent sessions led by other faculty, staff and a few visitors.

On Tuesday, the keynote speaker will take the stage, an event that is free and open to the public. The speaker is Cathy Davidson, an educator who was recently appointed to the National Humanities Council. She will speak at 1 p.m. Tuesday in Jesse Auditorium.

Davidson is heading to the City University of New York to teach English at the Graduate Center and to direct the Futures Initiative, a program that promotes innovation through collaboration in higher education. Previously, Davidson has taught at Duke University.

Anyone interested in hearing Davidson speak should register for free online at celebration.missouri.edu.

Fight against Tesla is cronyism

Thomas Lambert and Michael Sykuta

Since their recent override of Governor Nixon’s tax-cut veto, Missouri’s Republican legislators have been touting their commitment to innovation and entrepreneurship in our state. But a high tax rate isn’t the only policy that squelches innovation. Regulation also matters. And in that area, some Republicans are proving themselves more committed to crony capitalism than free enterprise.

Last week, Senator Jay Wasson, R-Nixa, sneaked some innovation-killing language into an otherwise straightforward House bill addressing the definition, licensing, and use of off-road and utility vehicles. The language was drafted by the Missouri Automobile Dealers Association, the third-largest donor to Wasson’s last campaign. It would bar automobile manufacturers from operating their own retail outlets in Missouri, forcing them to distribute through independent dealers.

One notable carmaker — Tesla — uses the forbidden approach. Missouri’s automobile dealers would like to offer Tesla’s flashy electric vehicles on their lots, but they haven’t been able to
persuade Tesla to use their services. That’s why they want the government to force Tesla to do so. But neither the car dealers nor the folks in Jefferson City are in a good position to dictate how Teslas are sold to consumers. Tesla alone should make that decision.

Product distribution, you see, is just another input for a carmaker. As with all inputs, the producer faces a “make or buy” decision about distribution. It could “buy” distribution services by selling through dealers, effectively paying them the difference between the wholesale price dealers pay and the higher retail price they collect from consumers. Alternatively, it could “make” distribution by selling its cars directly to consumers, cutting out the middleman and earning the higher retail price on each sale. Left to its own devices, it will pick whichever approach creates the most value.

For most carmakers, the traditional independent dealer network created value by taking advantage of local market retail expertise and by giving consumers a chance to compare makes and models in person. Now, however, most car buyers do much of their car shopping online before ever visiting a local dealer. Moreover, dealers may be reluctant to make investments in promoting a disruptive technological innovation like Tesla, particularly if Tesla sales will cannibalize sales of traditional vehicles. For a brand like Tesla, it may well be in the interest of the producer to provide distribution itself.

We’re not saying self-distribution is necessarily the optimal approach for Tesla. We don’t know what’s best. But neither do the automobile dealers, who have an obvious conflict of interest on the matter, or the good folks in Jefferson City. Tesla itself is best poised to determine which distribution model is most cost-effective, and to profit or lose by its own choice. Consumers—who ultimately pay all product costs, including the costs of distribution—will be best off if this decision is left to Tesla. Despite this economic logic, car dealers have asserted several arguments in support of a direct distribution ban. Each is unsound.

First, the dealers have argued that a direct distribution ban is needed to break up monopoly power. That’s absurd. The automobile market is intensely competitive, and Tesla’s market share in Missouri is tiny. Moreover, even if the market were electric cars, where Tesla might have market power, the company would have an easy means of exploiting such power even if required to sell through dealers. It could simply jack up its wholesale prices.

Car dealers have also argued that independent dealer distribution is necessary to guarantee adequate aftermarket servicing of vehicles. Tesla, though, has every incentive to ensure that its cars can be easily serviced. If they can’t be, Tesla’s sales will plummet.

Finally, some have argued that dealer distribution will lead to more safety recalls because dealers, unlike manufacturers, benefit from servicing recalls. But this ignores the fact that dealers don’t initiate recalls. Manufacturers and the government do that. Dealer distribution is therefore unlikely to increase the incidence of safety recalls.

We feel no special affinity for Tesla, itself a beneficiary of crony capitalism in the form of massive federal tax credits for purchasers of its luxury automobiles. But two wrongs don’t make a right. The anti-Tesla language in House Bill 1124 rewards well-connected political interests at
the expense of innovation and consumers. If our Republican-dominated legislature really wants to be seen as fostering innovation in our state, then it can’t just talk the talk. This is Missouri. Show us.

*Thomas Lambert is the Wall Chair of Corporate Law and Governance at the University of Missouri School of Law. Michael Sykuta is an associate professor and director of the Contracting and Organizations Research Institute at the MU College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.*