Columbia City Council approves new downtown student housing

718-bed development wins split votes.

By ANDREW DENNEY

Monday, August 18, 2014 at 11:35 pm

The Columbia City Council voted Monday night to approve a rezoning request and a development agreement between the city and American Campus Communities, an Austin, Texas-based student housing developer, to construct a 718-bed student apartment complex just north of the University of Missouri campus.

The council voted 4-3 on the rezoning request and 5-2 on the development agreement. Third Ward Councilman Karl Skala and Fourth Ward Councilman Ian Thomas voted against both measures and Sixth Ward Councilwoman Barbara Hoppe voted against the rezoning request but voted to approve the development agreement.

Before voting against the measure, both Skala and Thomas said that while a parking garage was being included as part of the project, automobile traffic on Providence Road would likely increase.

Thomas noted that the city recently faced a controversial situation when it sought to alleviate traffic congestion on Providence Road by proposing to expand the roadway near American Campus Communities’ project site and that the new tenants there would likely exacerbate the problem.

American Campus Communities’ plans for the complex consist of two buildings to be constructed northeast of the intersection of Providence Road and Turner Avenue. The eastern building will contain a 546-space parking garage for its tenants.

As part of the development agreement, the company will provide $300,000 to improve a sanitary sewer line line running underneath Turner Avenue. The developer plans to have the building ready for tenants by August 2017.
The city’s Public Works Department has said that its planned improvements for downtown sanitary sewers to make them suitable for new growth should be completed within two years.

Several attendees to the council meeting spoke in favor of the project and one resident -- John Clark, a City Hall regular with unsuccessful bids for council seats in the past -- spoke against the project.

Tracy Greever-Rice, who has worked to collect signatures with the Repeal 6214 citizen group to oppose The Opus Group’s proposed downtown student apartment complex by referendum petition, said in testimony before the council that American Campus Communities has “listened in good faith” to residents’ concerns and said the location of the project is “absolutely appropriate.”

“It’s time for some new development there,” Greever-Rice said.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Columbia City Council approves more downtown housing, zoning rule changes

Tuesday, August 19, 2014 | 1:55 a.m. CDT; updated 7:06 a.m. CDT, Tuesday, August 19, 2014

BY CAITLIN CAMPBELL

COLUMBIA — Another developer got the green light from the Columbia City Council to build a student apartment building downtown near MU. The approval of American Campus Communities' project came just before the council approved new rules for others who want to develop downtown.

The council voted Monday night to approve a development agreement and rezoning request from American Campus Communities, a Texas-based developer that wants to build a five-story, 718-bed apartment tower at Providence Road and Turner Avenue. The developer plans to finish construction on the project by August 2017, according to the development agreement.

Council also voted to unanimously amend the development agreement with American Campus Communities to include language that would provide the developer with a
guarantee that the city will have adequate utilities to serve the project upon its completion.

“I think this goes a long way to setting the precedent that sewer and (utilities) should be in place for developments – especially large developments,” Sixth Ward Councilwoman Barbara Hoppe said.

The development agreement formalizes a $300,000 contribution by American Campus Communities to help pay for work on the Flat Branch Relief Sewer downtown and the purchase of $52,000 worth of city bus passes for 200 residents.

The sanitary sewer contribution is in addition to any on-site sanitary sewer fees the developer would have to pay. If the city were to raise existing sewer connection fees or sanitary sewer charges, the developer would be credited up to the $300,000 contribution.

The council had tabled the developer's requests four times since they were first introduced in March alongside proposed development agreements with Opus Development Co., which plans to build a 259-bed apartment building on Locust Street, and Collegiate Housing Partners, which plans to construct a 351-bed building on Conley Avenue.

The city originally tabled the agreement with American Campus Communities on March 19 because it was unable to provide the estimated five megawatts of electrical capacity the project would need. The requests were then tabled in May and July. The developer hired a new electrical engineer and worked with city staff to further refine the rezoning request and development agreement.

On Aug. 4, American Campus Communities presented the City Council with amended proposals that include a lower electrical capacity estimate of about two megawatts, Deputy City Manager Tony St. Romaine said. The city believes it can serve the project with power lines already in place and the addition of five to seven megawatts of power from a new feeder line from the Rebel Hill electric substation, he said.

The council tabled the requests at its Aug. 4 meeting because it voted to amend the development agreement and rezoning request. The amendments included additional landscaping, recycling and energy conservation requirements.
Commercial zoning changes
Other developers that want to build downtown will now be subject to strict zoning rules that deal with the height of buildings and parking and design requirements.

On Monday, the council also voted 5-2 to approve interim changes to the zoning code for the C-2 central business district. Most downtown developments fall under this type of zoning.

The city amended the C-2 zoning regulations ahead of the completion of a citywide zoning rewrite by a hired consultant. The consultant’s completed draft of recommendations is not scheduled to be delivered to council until the end of 2015. Council amended the regulations early Tuesday morning to lighten proposed parking requirements and include a minimum height requirement for downtown buildings. The new zoning rules:

- Require Columbia Planning and Zoning Commission’s review and the council’s approval of proposed downtown buildings of 10 stories — or 120 feet — or higher. All downtown buildings must be at least two stories tall.

- Mandate a minimum number of parking spaces for residential or mixed-use buildings. Developers would be required to provide one-quarter of a parking space for each new bedroom constructed. The council could make exceptions to reduce parking requirements, and the requirements would not apply to new or expanded residential buildings.

- Forbid first-floor housing that faces the street on certain downtown blocks on Broadway and Ninth Street. Housing and business entryways would still be permitted facing the street.

Council did not vote on a sunset provision that the commission suggested be included in the interim C-2 zoning regulations. The commission proposed that if passed, the ordinance would no longer be effective either two years after its passage or when the rewrite of the development code is approved — whichever comes first.

A report outlining the first phase of the consultant’s citywide zoning rewrite was delivered to city staff in July. The consultant has not yet outlined specific suggestions for
downtown zoning. Those will be included in its second round of recommendations in October.

University of Missouri students make 'hands up, don't shoot' photo

By ASHLEY JOST

Monday, August 18, 2014 at 12:41 pm Comments (28)

The sound of dozens of students with their hands raised in the air yelling, “Don’t shoot” reverberated off the columns at the University of Missouri on yesterday afternoon.

Students, some faculty and administrators gathered on the Francis Quadrangle for a “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot” photo session to honor the death of Michael Brown, who was shot and killed Aug. 9 in Ferguson.
The photo campaign circulated around the country. Protesters in Ferguson turned the phrase into a chant based on reports that “Don’t shoot” were reportedly Brown’s last words when he was killed. Witnesses said Brown had his hands raised.

Graduate student Jonathan Butler said he was taking photos because that’s his role and suggested other students look for their role to play, be it performing music during a vigil in Brown’s honor or writing letters to legislators.

The photo session was the second event MU students hosted since Brown’s death. The first was a vigil and moment of silence on Thursday as part of a national effort.

Letter-writing campaigns, another vigil and fundraising for Ferguson’s small businesses were among topics discussed later yesterday afternoon at a meeting of student organization leaders and members about what the students can do to show their support for Ferguson and educate their peers on issues such as their rights when dealing with police.

Students mulled an array of events that fall within their designated three-pronged approach: awareness, action and prevention.

Because many of the attendees weren’t aware they were legally allowed to record their interactions with police officers, a conversation spurred about hosting a town hall meeting or some event that shows students what their legal rights are in similar situations. Town hall meetings were also proposed on other issues, such as instances of police brutality throughout the ages.

Students expressed hope for change through the prevention prong. They talked about bringing in legislators to express concerns about race, law enforcement and possible legislation that could address interactions with unarmed residents. They also mentioned bringing in the Columbia and MU police departments to be part of the discussions.

Roshunda McLean, a senior and former member of the Associated Students of the University of Missouri, a group that lobbies the General Assembly on issues deemed important to the UM System, said she wanted the conversation to be “solution-oriented” and focused on making this a humanitarian issue rather than a “black issue” to reach more people.

Ashley Bland, one of the student organizers, said that she and the other organizers hope to hammer out details with student leaders for events “very soon,” as “this is a time-sensitive issue.”

There will be another photo taken at the Welcome Black Barbecue sponsored by the Legion of Black Collegians & the National Pan Hellenic Council from 3 to 6 p.m. Thursday at the Plaza Amphitheater on campus. Students discussed having a peaceful march after the barbecue and photo, but plans weren’t finalized yesterday.
Columbia unites to honor Mike Brown

Three MU seniors organized the event to spread awareness of underlying issues behind the Ferguson riots.

By Emily Brehe

Just as protesters in Ferguson, Missouri began this week’s first night of peace, Columbians gathered in Speakers Circle for a National Moment of Silence honoring Mike Brown and other victims of police brutality.

MU seniors Ashley Bland, Kailynd Beck and Naomi Daugherty used Twitter and Facebook as a conduit for informing the time and place of the gathering. The movement adopted the hashtag “#MU4MIKEBROWN” and the Twitter page @MU4MIKE.

“I want this to be a catalyst for other things,” Bland said. “It’s just a start. This is so much bigger than Mike Brown, than Trayvon Martin, than Oscar Grant. We’re tired of seeing this happen to young black men.”

The vigil attracted about 200 people. Attendees made signs and tied red ribbons to their wrists. Peaceful protestors hugged each other and at one point reached out to put a hand on the shoulders of black men standing near them. Two students performed original poems, and the Legion of Black Collegians Gospel Choir led the group in singing “We Shall Overcome.”

Speakers stepped forward and spoke of change, the importance of staying informed and the need to keep the movement going after Ferguson slips out of the mainstream media’s attention.
“This issue is greatly affecting black bodies and it’s affecting the black community, but it’s not our exclusive problem,” Bland said. “It’s not something we should have to solve on our own. It’s deeper than that. It’s a human issue.”

Moberly Area Community College student Aaminah Muhammad said she felt compelled to be part of something. Muhammad said she used to live minutes away from Ferguson and she is familiar with the aggression of the police in that area, but the shooting of Mike Brown still felt surreal to her.

“I’m not surprised (by the way St. Louis County Police handled the situation),” Muhammad said. “My mom always used to tell me that when a group of oppressed people come together demanding change, it’s always going to fill the oppressor with fear, causing the oppressor to do whatever they can to silence those being oppressed.”

Muhammad said she believed that a similar situation to the Mike Brown shooting could happen in Columbia.

“There are people with the same mindset of that police officer everywhere,” Muhammad said.

Muhammad said that if people want change, they have to keep moving and organizing.

“We really need to be willing to live by the (phrase) ‘by any means necessary,’” Muhammad said. “This needs to be a tireless movement, and it’s got to keep going if we want change. We have to keep going by any means necessary.”

Local activist Joel Reed attended the vigil. He spent Wednesday in Ferguson, holding up signs and showing his support. He said he left at sundown before the police started spraying tear gas at peaceful protesters.

“I came tonight because I just wanted to support the cause and show that you don’t have to be a black person to value a black person’s life that was taken unjustly,” Reed said.

Speakers included Jonathan A. McElderly, director of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center, Mary Ratliff, president of the Missouri NAACP, and others.
The movement will carry on with the “Don’t Shoot” Photo Challenge at 1 p.m. Sunday at the Francis Quadrangle and an open session at the Black Culture Center at 3 p.m. Sunday. McElderly encourages anyone to come and provide input and suggestions for what needs to happen next.

For-Profit College Degrees Don’t Help—or Hurt—Hiring Prospects

How do employers really view graduates of for-profit colleges like the University of Phoenix and ITT Education?

No better—or worse—than they view people who received the same qualifications from community colleges, according to a new working paper from the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research. And listing an associate’s degree or certificate from a for-profit college gives a young candidate no great boost over someone who skipped college entirely.

The findings show that young job applicants with for-profit college credentials appeared to have no edge over those with community-college credentials. “If anything, the opposite may be true,” the authors conclude.

That may be unwelcome news for operators of for-profit colleges, which generally charge higher tuition than similar programs at community colleges do. For-profit schools are already under scrutiny, given their dramatic enrollment growth over the past decade, and the high debt loads their graduates carry. The U.S. government is weighing a plan to tie schools’ access to federal student aid to graduates’ employment success, and its recent decision to withhold funds from Corinthian Colleges Inc. fueled that school’s collapse.

While the paper does not measure full hiring outcomes for graduates of for-profit and community colleges, it does track employers’ initial indications of interest in applicants, a loose proxy for individuals’ potential to be hired at some point.

Researchers from the University of Missouri and RAND submitted 8,914 fictitious résumés in response to job postings in Atlanta, Chicago, Seattle and four other cities around the country in 2013 and 2014. (No more than two résumés were sent for any single job ad.) The “applicants” attended randomly selected local for-profit or public community colleges, as well as local high schools, and were
angling for positions in sales, customer service, IT, medical assisting, medical billing and administrative support.

Employers responded to community-college grads with an interested call or e-mail 11.6% of the time, compared with 11.3% for for-profit college graduates. They asked to schedule interviews with 5.3% of applicants who had community-college credentials, and 4.7% of applicants hailing from for-profit colleges. (High-school graduates received responses 10.6% of the time, and interview requests 4.2% of the time.) None of the differences are statistically significant.

The authors do note a caveat to their study: They only tracked employers’ initial responses to applications, and differences that would only come out in, say, late-round interviews were not accounted for here. However, they say, other research has found limited labor-market benefits from for-profit college education.
Employers’ overall response rate -- meaning a positive, non-perfunctory reply via phone or e-mail -- was 11.6 percent for applications that listed community colleges compared to 11.3 percent for those that listed for-profits. Likewise, the split for interview requests was tilted slightly in community colleges’ favor, at 5.3 percent versus 4.7 percent. Those splits fell well within the study’s margin of error.

To the five researchers who conducted the study, the primary takeaway is that for-profits are a worse investment.

“Our results provide no indication that résumés that list for-profit college credentials generate more employer interest than those that list community college credentials,” they wrote. “If anything, the opposite may be true.”

**Cory Koedel, an economist at the University of Missouri at Columbia, is one of the study’s co-authors. He said the economics orientation of the researchers led to the framing of their primary interpretation of the study.**

“It is more expensive to attend for-profit colleges,” he said, and the findings show a better return on investment for community college credentials because they produce a comparable result at a lower price to the student.

Koedel also pointed to the slightly better response rate for job applications that listed community colleges, even if it wasn’t statistically significant. The study had clear data that a community college-issued credential was at least not a disadvantage compared to a for-profit one.

“If you had to make a bet, you’d bet on community college doing better,” he said. However, at least one expert who reviewed the study had the opposite response to its results.

“I would’ve expected that there would be strong negative effects of attending for-profits,” said Stephen R. Porter, a professor of higher education at North Carolina State University. “I was astounded that there was no difference between the groups.”

Porter was a discussant of the study’s findings at a recent conference. He called the methodology and research design “rock-solid.”
Yet he differed with the report’s authors in their big-picture take on the findings. Given that critics and the news media often describe the for-profit sector as being “greedy degree mills,” Porter said, the study suggests that in the eyes of employers, the colleges “aren’t doing as bad of a job as we thought.”

**Study’s Design**

The National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER) published the 48-page paper, which has yet to go through the full peer review process. It’s part of a research program by the American Institutes for Research and six research universities.

**CALDER, the Spencer Foundation and the Economic and Policy Analysis Research Center at the University of Missouri paid for the research. And the center receives funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, among others.**

Researchers sent the nearly 9,000 fake job applications in response to online postings in seven major U.S. cities. They responded to ads during the year prior to this June. The faux applicants were young. They all earned a high school diploma in 2010. For those who attended college, they completed their studies last year. The study included holders of certificates, associate degrees and applicants with some college credits, but no credential.

Researchers opted not to include bachelor’s degrees and to focus on “sub-baccalaureate credentials” because for-profits issue so many of them -- roughly one-third of all certificates and associate degrees earned in the United States.

The study sent applications for positions in six broad categories of occupation, all of which might be realistic for young job-seekers with less than a bachelor's degree. The jobs were in administrative assisting, customer service, information technology, sales, medical assisting (excluding nursing) and medical billing, and office work.

Non-academic characteristics of applicants, such as work experience and high schools attended, were randomly assigned and controlled for across sectors.
In each city the study used names of roughly 14 real community colleges and for-profits. The institutions were selected randomly from a pool of candidates, all of which had a local presence. On the for-profit side, researchers picked a mix of both large national chains and smaller local institutions.

However, Koedel said the sample of colleges was weighted by enrollments. So in most cases “we’d grab the big one” among for-profits rather than a mom-and-pop provider.

**Controversial Issue**

Porter said the study’s sample and various controls allowed it to give a straightforward comparison of how employers view the names of for-profits versus community colleges on job applications.

There are several possible reasons that the findings were a toss-up, according to the researchers.

“A simple explanation for this result is that job applicants who attended for-profit and community colleges who otherwise have similar characteristics do not systematically differ in skills valued by employers,” the paper said.

Yet the study notes that the relatively high cost of attending a for-profit “results in little labor market payoff” for credentials earned from colleges in that sector.

The researchers also compared applicants that had at least some college under their belts to those that just held a high school diploma.

While the study found “little evidence” of a benefit from listing a for-profit relative to no college at all, that comparison was statistically insignificant and inconsistent. The estimated effects of community college compared to no college were also insignificant, although they suggested more positive returns.

Koedel cautioned against reading much into the high school-only comparisons because of possible confounding effects the study could not prevent.

For example, the study said it’s possible that employers are less favorable about applicants whose work experience occurred at the same time they were attending
college. And the study was not designed to weigh the longer-term payoffs of college, which may look better over time.

“What’s not clear is what will happen 10 years later,” Koedel said.

Both Koedel and Porter are aware of the deeply politicized fight over for-profits that’s occurring in Washington, D.C., and in many state capitals. They acknowledged that advocates on both sides of the debate are likely to run with the two differing interpretations of the new study.

“People love to grab data to support their point of view,” said Porter. “As a researcher you can’t really help that.”

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Actor Jon Hamm being honored by Cardinals, cut teeth at MU theater

Monday, August 18, 2014 | 6:37 p.m. CDT; updated 8:43 p.m. CDT, Monday, August 18, 2014

BY ABBY RICE

ST. LOUIS — Jon Hamm perfected his acting chops on the MU stage long before the character Don Draper hit television waves in AMC's award-winning drama "Mad Men."

The St. Louis Cardinals honored the actor and St. Louis native at Jon Hamm night at Busch Stadium on Monday, and fans who purchased a special ticket received a bobblehead of his likeness.

Professor Jim Miller, a teacher in the MU Theatre Department for 35 years, mentored Hamm while he was a student at MU. Miller said Hamm, an English major, was a constant stage presence in his and other director's shows, even though he was not a theater major.

Hamm acted in MU's 1992 Summer Repertory Theatre production of "Cabaret" and later in the 1993 production of "Assassins," a Stephen Sondheim musical that features interactions between infamous assassins. Miller described Hamm as an outstanding talent in a group of talented students.
"He's handsome in the way leading men used to be handsome," Miller said. "He's like Gary Cooper."

Hamm received his bachelor's degree in English in 1993. After graduation, he took a teaching position at John Burroughs High School in St. Louis. Hamm taught there until 1995 when he left for Los Angeles and a shot at stardom.

After years of waiting for his break, Hamm won the role of Don Draper, a suave and mysterious advertising executive who spends most of his day in a haze of cigarette smoke and alcohol.

Since then, Hamm has gone on to star in big screen hits such as "The Town," "Bridesmaids" and "The Million Dollar Arm." After stints hosting "Saturday Night Live," audiences learned even the actor who played Don Draper could crack jokes.

"He can write, he can direct, he can do anything," Miller said. "He's going to be one of the greats."

Hamm threw out the first pitch before the game against the Cincinnati Reds.

Before the pitch, he spoke to the media about his Cardinals fandom, the current issues in nearby Ferguson, and of course, his bobblehead

"It's great, it's fantastic. It's amazing how many people I've had ask me to get them one," Hamm said in an article from the Associated Press. "That was the weird thing — aunts and uncles and friends of all stripes, so I'll probably need about 40 of them."