New hotel, convention center possible for Columbia

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COLUMBIA - For a few decades, the possibility of Columbia getting a new convention center has been at the top of discussions at the University of Missouri.

However, the idea is starting to become a reality.

In the fall of 2014, the university hired PKF Consulting to determine if a new hotel and conference center should be built near campus.

The firm surveyed MU faculty and staff, alumni, hotel operators and others and concluded that the economy would benefit from a 200-bed hotel with a 30,000-square-foot convention center. Six potential sites were studied with a location on Stadium Boulevard and College Avenue being the top choice.

Hotel owners said a large conference center is needed, but said the hotel shouldn't be too large as to take away business from other hotels in the area.

The proposed plan for a convention center includes an 18,000-square-foot grand ballroom that seats up to 1,200 people, 6,000-square-foot junior ballroom and 6,000-square-feet of meeting rooms.

The study found that many current events that already take place in Columbia would consider relocating. It also found 915 events that could be attracted to Columbia with a new convention center, 37 of which exceed 1,000 attendees.

"The university hosts hundreds of events every year that bring many people to Columbia,” MU spokesperson Christian Basi said. "This would allow us to expand those events to a greater number of people."
Megan McConachie, marketing and communications manager of the Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau, said the idea is to bring in larger regional conventions that currently can't fit in Columbia.

"If there's a group and right now they have their state convention here every year, but there is a potential to maybe have their Midwest convention here, and so that's something this convention center could accommodate," McConachie said.

Taking into account annual occupancy, the study estimated that the hotel and conference center would have an income between $2.5 million and $3.75 million between the years 2018 and 2022.

Currently, the only convention center in the Columbia area is Holiday Inn Executive Center by the Columbia Mall.

There is no timetable for the initiation of the project, but based on the recent findings, McConachie said she thinks things may move quickly.

"Just based on what the information was they released, I think they're pretty active in hoping this will move forward," she said.

The university said it has no plans of building, operating or funding the facility, so an outside funding source is necessary for the process to begin.

The study recommended the Embassy Suites, Marriott and Sheraton as possible brands for the hotel.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU considers significant renovations to Memorial Union

Monday, February 23, 2015 | 12:00 p.m. CST; updated 8:55 p.m. CST, Monday, February 23, 2015

BY JACOB STEIMER

COLUMBIA — All four walls of the Jane Froman meeting room on the second floor of MU’s Memorial Union North are scuffed. Paint has chipped off the doors, and visitors probably wouldn't be surprised to learn that the floor hasn't been renovated since 1952 — 28 years before the actress's death.

Those scuffs and chips make up a minor part of the $11 million in deferred maintenance MU estimates Memorial Union North needs.
A recent MU-commissioned report by PKF Consulting referred to the second floor as being in "extremely poor condition," in part because of the building's five-decade-old heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system.

“The second floor of Memorial Union must be renovated because of its deferred maintenance, lack of aesthetic appeal and functional obsolescence of its meeting space,” the report said.

The $35,000 study was commissioned because of a perceived shortage of on-campus meeting space.

The consultants spent most of their time doing a market study on a proposed hotel and conference center. They concluded that the city and MU would benefit from a new hotel and conference center, ideally one with 200 rooms and an 18,000-square-foot ballroom.

PKF Consulting also considered a major renovation of Memorial Union and construction of a Welcome Center on the northwest corner of Stadium Boulevard and Mick Deaver Drive on the site of an existing parking lot.

The report recommended the Memorial Union facelift but expressed concern about the academic benefits of the Welcome Center.

Memorial Union

The proposed Memorial Union North remodel would "completely renovate" the second floor of the building and add a third floor that would hold a 10,000 square foot ballroom.

It would become Columbia's second largest ballroom and would be about the size of a baseball infield. It could comfortably seat about 600 people — 250 more than Columns Ballroom in the Reynolds Alumni Center, MU’s largest ballroom.

Student and Auxiliary Services spokeswoman Michelle Froese said the third floor would not change the outside appearance of the building and noted that the original Memorial Union plans called for four floors.

Five years ago, Student and Auxiliary Services hired an architect to estimate the price of a second floor renovation and identify options.

The architect's plan included two meeting rooms the size of Stotler Lounge, on the Union's first floor, that could be subdivided into 10 breakout rooms. The cost was estimated between $4 million and $5 million on top of the $11 million of deferred maintenance.
MU has no cost estimates for adding a third floor, but Froese said that work should be tied to the second floor renovation if possible.

"Why would you split it up?" she asked. "To split up the work would cost more money and create more disruption of current facilities."

The report said that the renovation has "potential university funding."

Froese said this refers to a forecast from her office that the project could be financed with auxiliary funds that come from Mizzou Store sales and reservation fees paid by off-campus organizations to use Memorial Union and the Student Center. Any proposal would need to go before the UM System Board of Curators for approval.

**Welcome Center**

The proposed Welcome Center would include a new Team Store, ticketing operation and 7,000 square foot meeting room.

With its location near Mizzou Arena and Memorial Stadium, the report said that it could be ideal for donor and football recruiting events.

While the report said that the Welcome Center would "greatly benefit the university," it also said that priority should be given to the Memorial Union project. The Welcome Center would be less "conducive to fulfilling the academic mission of the university," partly because of its proposed location on the outskirts of campus.

Froese indicated that the Welcome Center proposal is in an earlier stage than the Memorial Union remodel proposal.

**Hotel and conference center**

Unlike Memorial Union or the proposed Welcome Center, the proposed hotel and conference center would not be operated by MU.

The PKF Consulting report was designed to study the potential introduction of a new nationally-branded hotel and conference center.

The researchers conducted four email surveys and met with officials from Boone County, the city of Columbia, the Columbia Chamber of Commerce, Regional Economic Development Inc. and the Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau.
Amy Schneider, director of the Convention and Visitors Bureau, said she was asked the same questions that a hotel looking to enter the Columbia market would ask. She expressed full support for a new hotel.

The report projected the conference center would bring enough new events to the city to raise city-wide occupancy at all hotels by 2 percent by 2020, despite a total of four new hotels entering the market by then.

MU spokesman Christian Basi said the findings of the report do not mean funding is imminent. “There’s a lot more that has to go into it before we talk about funding possibilities,” he said.

Graphic by Madalyne Bird/Missourian

After considering six proposed sites that included the site of the Hearnes Center, consultants recommended a piece of land just south of Stadium Boulevard where the privately-owned Cliffview Townhomes and the university-owned Campus Facilities Storage Building are located.

Rob Cooper, owner of A&B Management and Cliffview Townhomes, said he had no knowledge of the project.
MU announces plan to install new radar this spring

Monday, February 23, 2015 | 7:51 p.m. CST; updated 6:49 a.m. CST, Tuesday, February 24, 2015
BY CHRISTOPHER AIKEN

COLUMBIA — A new MU Doppler weather radar will improve mid-Missouri forecasting and advance climate studies at the university's atmospheric research program.

The new radar will supplement Doppler coverage currently supported by radar sites in St. Louis and Kansas City. Images produced by those sites exclude low altitude weather movements over Columbia because of the curvature of the earth, said Randy Mertens, media coordinator for the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.

Those radar sites don't cover much movement under about 10,000 feet, Mertens said. Bigger storms occur in the 20,000 to 60,000 foot range, he said, but certain storm components, including small tornadoes, can form in the low area not currently covered by the other two sites.

Jon Carney, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's office in St. Louis, said that while current radar coverage for mid-Missouri is adequate, additional information is always appreciated.

"It's great for us," Carney said. "It helps us see stuff closer to the ground and to see more features of the storm in greater detail."

The new radar will transmit its data to the Kansas City and St. Louis sites where it will contribute to the overall radar image, Mertens said.

He said that the new radar could be installed at MU’s South Farm Research Center as soon as April. It will be operated by MU's Soil, Environmental and Atmospheric Sciences Department, which will also use it as a tool for climate and agricultural research.

The new radar will show storm mechanics and moisture movement in greater detail and give more precise information about rainfall. This information can be used by both agricultural and atmospheric scientists, Mertens said.
The radar is one part of a $20 million National Science Foundation grant to study the agricultural, ecological and social impacts of climate variability.

UM System employees take million-step challenge

By Ashley Jost

Monday, February 23, 2015 at 2:00 pm

The University of Missouri System started a pedometer program about six years ago, but with the proliferation of updated wearable technology, that program has changed.

Now, the Million Steps Pedometer Program reimburses employee purchases of Fitbit fitness trackers, and is one of a slew of wellness options that entice employees with a $450 incentive.

Jenny Workman, manager of the UM System’s wellness program, said the pedometer program started because employees asked for it. Around 2012, the system transitioned from older clip-on pedometers to the Fitbit, Workman said.

About 9,000 people are enrolled in the million-step program, which prompts users to reach a million steps each year. That averages out to about 2,740 steps per day. Fitbit users are encouraged to set a daily goal of 10,000 steps per day when activating the devices. That goal, according to Fitbit’s website, is “a rough equivalent to the Surgeon General’s recommendation to accumulate 30 minutes of activity most days of the week.”

The program, which is available for university employees and their dependents, reimburses employees up to $80 per person for Fitbits they purchase from the university’s bookstore.

The price for a Fitbit ranges from a $60 clip-on pedometer to a $250 watch-like device that monitors heart rate and exercise routines. Workman labeled the program a success, so far.

“My first incentive to do this was obviously the $450,” said Kody Guest, a student support specialist with family and community medicine at MU. “So, I got the Fitbit and use it every day. I’m on my second one now. I have these challenge groups with my friends to keep each other motivated, and it’s been a lot of fun.”
Quantifying physical activity with steps is motivating, Guest said, particularly on the weekends when it’s easy to be lazy.

Julie Middleton, director of organizational development with MU Extension, said being a black woman at age 65 with a family history of heart disease, high cholesterol and high blood pressure, she is always looking for ways to preserve her health. She and her husband, Mike, MU’s deputy chancellor, both use their Fitbits for the million-step challenge, and the Middletons keep each other motivated with a treadmill and elliptical at home.

“It’s created a culture of health and well-being in the workplace, which makes it easier to do it. You’re not alone,” Julie Middleton said. She said most people in her office also have a fitness tracker and they motivate each other during the day to take walks instead of being sedentary at their desks.

Million Steps is the most popular wellness program the UM System offers, Workman said. Other programs vary, from three months of Weight Watchers dieting to participating in classes at on- or off-campus gyms. The university provides discounted gym memberships to a handful of locations around each campus in Columbia, St. Louis, Kansas City and Rolla.

Each sanctioned activity is worth a point value, and employees have to earn a certain amount of points to earn the $450 incentive.

Exercise after dinner is important timing when you have Type 2 diabetes

By Diamond Dixon University of Missouri

Individuals with Type 2 diabetes have heightened amounts of sugars and fats in their blood, which increases their risks for cardiovascular diseases such as strokes and heart attacks. Exercise is a popular prescription for individuals suffering from the symptoms of Type 2 diabetes, but little research has explored whether these individuals receive more benefits from working out before or after dinner. Now, researchers at the University of Missouri have found that individuals with Type 2 diabetes can lower their risks of cardiovascular diseases more effectively by exercising after a meal.

“This study shows that it is not just the intensity or duration of exercising that is important but also the timing of when it occurs,” said Jill Kanaley, professor in the MU Department of Nutrition and Exercise Physiology. “Results from this study show that resistance exercise has its
most powerful effect on reducing glucose and fat levels in one’s blood when performed after dinner.”

Kanaley and her colleagues studied a group of obese individuals with Type 2 diabetes. On one occasion, participants performed resistance exercises before eating dinner. During another visit, participants exercised 45 minutes after eating dinner. Participants performed resistance exercises such as leg curls, seated calf raises and abdominal crunches. Compared to levels on a non-exercise day, Kanaley found that the participants who exercised before dinner were able to only reduce the sugar levels in their blood; however, participants who exercised after dinner were able to reduce both sugar and fat levels. Participants consumed a moderate carbohydrate dinner on the evenings of the study.

Kanaley said her research is particularly helpful for health care providers who have patients who exercise every day but are not seeing benefits.

“Knowing that the best time to exercise is after a meal could provide health care professionals with a better understanding of how to personalize exercise prescriptions to optimize health benefits,” Kanaley said.

Kanaley also found that improvements in participants’ blood sugar and fat levels were short-lived and did not extend to the next day. She suggests individuals practice daily resistance exercise after dinner to maintain improvements.

“Individuals who exercise in the morning have usually fasted for 10 hours beforehand,” Kanaley said. “Also, it is natural for individuals’ hormone levels to be different at different times of day, which is another factor to consider when determining the best time to exercise.”

In the future, Kanaley said she plans to research how exercising in the morning differs from exercising after dinner and how individuals’ hormone levels also affect exercise results.

The study, “Post-dinner resistance exercise improves postprandial risk factors more effectively than pre-dinner resistance exercise in patients with type 2 diabetes,” was published in the Journal of Applied Physiology.
Missouri bill would stop cities from banning plastic bags

Monday, February 23, 2015 | 7:41 p.m. CST; updated 6:50 a.m. CST, Tuesday, February 24, 2015
BY SUMMER BALLENTINE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JEFFERSON CITY — A Missouri lawmaker who also leads an association of grocery stores is trying to stop cities and towns in the state from restricting the use of plastic bags, bucking a national trend toward banning their use to help the environment.

The move comes as the city of Columbia considers a ban that would prevent grocery stores from offering plastic bags and would impose a 10-cent charge on paper bags.

Legislation proposed by a state representative would stop that. A Missouri House of Representatives panel is set to vote on the bill Tuesday.

Environmental activists have successfully pushed plastic bag bans in cities across the U.S., including Chicago, Seattle and Austin, Texas. Hawaii is also on track to have a de facto statewide ban, with all counties approving prohibitions.

In September, California became the first state to enact a ban on single-use plastic bags in an effort to cut down on litter and protect marine life, though opponents of the ban have submitted signatures to the secretary of state's office to have a statewide vote on the ban.

Republican state Rep. Dan Shaul of Imperial, who sponsored the Missouri proposed legislation, said state and local bans go too far.

Shaul, who is the state director of the Missouri Grocers Association, said it should be up to grocery stores and consumers to choose what bags they use.

He said sponsoring the bill while serving in the association is not a conflict of interest. The association's website says it, "monitors industry related bills and is actively walking the halls" of the state Capitol to represent members.

"It doesn't affect the organization, it affects the consumer, it affects the industry," Shaul said. "I mean sure, it could be a conflict if you want it to be. I don't think it is."

MU School of Law professor Richard Reuben said legally it may not be a conflict of interest.
"But from a standpoint of public perception, it makes him look pretty bad," Reuben said. Missouri has relatively loose ethics laws for legislators compared to many other states, and lawmakers are considering measures to tighten them this session.

So far Florida is the only state that has halted local efforts to regulate the use of plastic bags, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Similar efforts in 2013 failed in Texas.

At issue is local control, Columbia Fourth Ward City Councilman Ian Thomas said. He is in favor of a ban on plastic bags but said it might take time to gain more community support.

"The state ban on city bans is an enormous overreach," Thomas said. "It's important for individual cities that maybe have a different political outlook or a more progressive tendency to be able to approve this kind of legislation."