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Regents to support Washington Avenue light rail route

Regents also discussed future of UMore Park during Thursday meetings.

By Betsy Graca

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he University will support the Washington Avenue Central Corridor light rail through campus, contingent upon several agreements, according to a statement released by the Board of Regents Thursday morning.

University President Bob Bruininks recently changed his position on the Central Corridor and the Board of Regents discussed some issues that are still of concern in order for the project to gain their approval.

An effective and efficient mitigation plan, the avoidance of a negative economic impact on the University's Academic Health Center and hospital, an understandable traffic plan and the assurance of a safe environment are a few of the agreements the regents are hoping to achieve, according to the statement.

The board was addressed by several supporters of the light rail, including Metropolitan Council chairman Peter Bell, Ramsey County Commissioner Jim McDonough and Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak.

"I understand the impacts," Rybak said, "but also the opportunity."

McDonough said all important issues could be resolved along the eleven-mile-line as long all partners worked together in a cooperative way.

Bell said the Central Corridor Light Rail is currently in competition with ten other transit projects in the United States and that a projected 42,000 riders would use the corridor on weekdays by 2030.

Bell said he didn't think the University "would be left holding the bag" but he couldn't say the University wouldn't have to spend a dime in the process.

UMore Park Updates

University Vice president Charles Muscoplat addressed the Board of Regents Thursday afternoon on the history, progression and future plans of the University of Minnesota Outreach, Research and Education Park.

UMore Park, a 5,000 acre site in Dakota County that the University hopes to turn into a livable and sustainable community for nearly 30,000 people, now has four different scenarios to be evaluated: a traditional master-planned community, a new urban center, a lifestyle community - where neighborhoods would be centered around outdoor amenities - and a new sustainable community.

Bruininks said he didn't know of a university in the United States that was doing something as "courageous and innovative."

Regent David Metzen said he thought the future of the project is the most important decision to face the University in the last 15 years.

"This will be the lasting legacy of this administration," he said.

Different advantages and disadvantages were given for each scenario and the future of the park will be discussed

further this month.

Several public forums will be held in June, giving the University the opportunity to hear thoughts from the general public.

The regents will act on the 2009 operating budget, the president's annual capital improvement budget and the six-year capital improvement plan Friday morning. Check mndaily.com for updates.

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