

Flood-diversion plan report surprises

BY JOSH FUNK

The \$175 million first phase of the city's Antelope Valley project, which will redirect traffic and floodwater, is predicted to spur \$745 million in benefits over the next 50 years.

The biggest chunk of those economic benefits – more than \$300 million – is expected to come from the construction of four to six new University of Nebraska-Lincoln research laboratories over 30 years.

The economic analysis, released earlier this week, also predicts a \$63.8 million benefit from not having to wait for trains or traffic.

"It's all speculative at this point. It's just a good-faith estimate," said Mark Arter, co-owner of The Arter Group, the Lincoln development consulting firm that conducted the study along with UNL Economics Professor David Rosenbaum.

Although some of the project

ed windfall of this project is dependent on other factors such as grant funding for research laboratories, there are still about \$400 million in benefits to be realized from the initial construction investment and redevelopment opportunities, Arter said.

The Antelope Valley project is a two-phase, \$225-million plan to alleviate flood concerns along Antelope Creek and redirect the bulk of traffic around City Campus and over busy rail crossings.

Both phases of the project are planned to be completed over 20 years. The first phase, which deals primarily with the flood concerns and would create a new six-lane road around campus, is ready for City Council approval.

A public hearing will be held Monday at 5:30 p.m. on the plan's details.

The city's Urban Development Director Marc Wullschleger said the flood plain along Antelope Creek, which runs through the heart of the city from Holmes Lake in the south to Salt Creek in the

north, has always been problematic.

Any new construction or major renovation within the flood plain, which in places extends for several blocks from the creek, had to be built above possible flood levels like the Beadle Center was in 1995.

Wullschleger said that requirement, along with the cost of required flood insurance, has hindered redevelopment in several core Lincoln neighborhoods.

More than 900 homes will be brought out of the flood plain by this project, increasing valuations and opening up development possibilities, Wullschleger said.

The rosy predictions in this economic analysis surprised even Wullschleger, who said he hopes the report will convince council members.

"We hope (this report) will persuade some of the City Council members that are still on the fence," said Wullschleger, who said the plan has a lot of compromise but is the best solution.

As one of the principles in the Antelope Valley study and a prospective major investor, UNL will play an important role in the project's success, Arter said.

"The university is a powerful engine in the economy," Arter said, citing the grants and salary money it brings to the local economy.

Arter said his study assumed UNL would be able to secure 85 percent federal funding for the new research labs and that the state would pay for the rest.

The report also assumes grants would pay for 70 percent of the faculty salaries.

John Benson, UNL director of institutional research and planning, was unavailable Thursday afternoon to discuss how six new research laboratories fit within the campus master plan.

But earlier this month, Benson said the area between Vine, R, 17th and 19th streets will be a prime expansion area for the university when it is removed from the flood plain.

Federal aid denied to drug offenders

BY GEORGE GREEN

More than 6,000 college students are finding out the hard way that drugs are a dead end, thanks to a federal government policy.

These people, including two University of Nebraska-Lincoln students, will not receive federal financial aid for college.

A 1998 amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965, says students convicted of drug-related crimes can be found ineligible for federal aid, said Karen Freeman, a Department of Education spokeswoman.

Depending on the type and number of convictions, students can lose some or all of the aid they would normally receive, she said.

But the policy, which started in 1999, doesn't affect many college students, she said.

As of Oct. 22, more than 8 million students had applied for federal aid using the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, she said. Of those students, 1,327 had been found ineligible for aid and 5,675 had lost some aid or had

been suspended without aid for a period of time, Freeman said.

"Extremely small numbers of students are affected," said Craig Munier, UNL director of scholarship and financial aid.

Munier said two UNL students are serving one-year suspensions of federal aid for first-time drug offenses.

A student convicted of possessing drugs gets a one-year suspension for a first offense, a two-year suspension for a second offense and an indefinite suspension for a third offense, he said.

Students convicted of selling drugs receive two-year suspensions for first convictions and indefinite suspensions for second offenses, Munier said.

But the Education Department also considers whether students have completed a drug rehabilitation program, Freeman said.

These various factors combine to make the process sometimes hard to understand, Freeman said.

Said Munier: "There is a lot of gray area in this."

Since 1999, though, the process has become more clear, Freeman said.

In 1999, she said, confusing directions caused many students to mistakenly leave the drug question blank.

Last year and this year, students who have been convicted of drug-related crimes receive a worksheet in the mail that asks about their convictions, she said.

But to simplify things, she said, next year her office will contact students and help them fill out the worksheet.

Deb Sprague, the executive director of the Lincoln Council on Alcohol and Drugs, said simply punishing drug offenders will not solve the drug problem.

She said it is crucial to rehabilitate drug users, otherwise the problems will continue to resurface.

"We need to be opening more doors to treatment, not closing them," she said.

Richards renaissance brings new life

BUILDING from page 1

building class is now meeting in it.

And by the start of the second semester, Richards Hall will be open and fully functional, he said.

Amid the renovations, some faculty members have taken up shop in the building.

Upon completion, there will be two painting studios, two drawing studios, a special classroom for the visual literacy class, a 200-seat auditorium and a 42-seat classroom, he said.

There will be two exterior pavilions added – an outdoor sculpture court for students to work on larger projects and another area for outdoor kilns.

It will also be completely handicapped-accessible, he said.

"It's really turned out to be a nice building," he said.

But much of the praise for the building should be directed toward those who have spent countless hours renovating it, Shull said.

"The contractors have really bent over backward to help us," he said.

Richards Hall was built in 1908 and had never undergone substantial renovation until this project began in 1999, he said.

"We tried to keep all the character of the building, and I think we did," Shull said.

Joe Ruffo, chairman of the art and art history department, said

he was pleased with the renovations so far in the building.

"I think the facility will be one of the best in the country," he said.

The ceramics class moved into Richards at the beginning of the fall semester because renovations began in the Nelle Cochrane Woods art building, where the class was previously held, he said.

Ruffo said the improved building could draw in more art students.

"It will probably make more students want to come here (to study art)," he said.

Shull agreed, and said Richards Hall was like "a brand new building inside."

"It's going to be a great asset to the university," he said.

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