



# President's **FOCUS**

## *Monthly Report to the Board*

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### **Integrated Strategic Planning: Facilities and Information Technology Infrastructure**

Facilities planning is a process that relies heavily on the integration of input from a variety of divisions at the College as well as external stakeholders. These efforts inform the 20-year land use plan and a 10-year facilities plan, both required by the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to support the capital planning processes and capital funding requests of the College. At any given point in time at Montgomery College, there may be more than two dozen projects underway—including renovations, repairs, and new construction across the three campuses. In December 2017, the FY18 capital budget report listed 22 current projects: three on the Germantown Campus, six on the Rockville Campus, and one on the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus. Collegewide renovations such as roof replacements, elevator modernizations, ADA compliance enhancements, and parking lot repairs are included among 12 project areas not limited to a single campus. Information technology (IT) planning is part of capital planning, with network infrastructure and student-learning support systems included under the four current IT projects. In total, the College has \$64 million approved for these 22 projects in the capital budget as of December 2017. Like the operating budget, both the state and county provide resources to fund the capital budget. Given the complexity of the funding process and the variety of decision-makers, the Office of Government



Relations works hand in hand with Administrative and Fiscal Services (AFS) to advance College priorities requested capital budget.

Over time, there has been a shift in the genesis of planning for facilities at the College. While it was traditionally driven by the plans required by the state's budgeting cycle, increasingly it is being driven by pedagogy and academics needs, many of them outlined in the Academic Master Plan. As improved planning for STEM has become expected, collaborations across divisions have become more sophisticated, to incorporate needs for laboratories, equipment, and workspaces into new buildings. New research on humanities pedagogy has emphasized how space configurations and technology access in the classroom can successfully affect student interactions and learning. Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and other internal stakeholders meet regularly with designers and architects hired by AFS to assess the direction of instructional needs. The Office of Information Technology (OIT) meets with Student Affairs to get feedback on student needs—and through AFS—on employee needs. The trend toward user-driven technology choices has put OIT in the position of responding to user needs around software rather than choosing the software for users, a marked shift from earlier eras in which OIT dictated the systems that employees and students used. While the move to cloud-based technology has lessened the need for physical infrastructure, it has not diminished OIT's role in planning. The need for software that serves student support services optimally has been heightened, as well as the work to build systems that allow multiple software packages to interact successfully. The need for predictive analytics to drive scheduling for student success, for example, is one challenge facing OIT. Selecting or building a system that can alert counselors when students are not meeting milestones or have reached a benchmark number of credits without registering for graduation, are examples of other practical needs that such technologies must fill.

Efforts to close the achievement gap at the College have also driven collaboration between Student Affairs and AFS. The Rockville Student Services Building—similar to the Nunley Student Services Center at the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus—currently under construction, is a good example. Already 10 years in planning, the design of the building was a response to student needs around enrollment, financial planning, and advising. Since research has demonstrated that these functions are crucial in getting students successfully to completion, co-locating these services in a single, modern building was deemed an investment in accessibility and success. Since the Office of



Government Relations spearheaded the communication of these priorities to funders, it worked together with Student Affairs and AFS throughout the evolution of advocacy efforts.

As retention and completion have become more prominent, supporting students outside the classroom has also been prioritized. Careful attention to space deficiencies and to needs for student spaces that build community and provide study spaces between classes are all included in facilities planning. Including students in the planning and even design process is a trend gaining attention nationally. An excellent example of this is in the work done on libraries on the MC campuses. In an effort to determine what students need most, the libraries solicited feedback from users about their experiences of the libraries. As a result, through a collaborative process with AFS, a fiscally prudent project was devised with the hopes of speeding approval of the project through the budget process. The aim was to maximize capital renewal funds provided by the county to allow libraries to improve the user experience more swiftly.

By conducting 306 in-person interviews, written surveys, and design workshops (charrettes) with students and faculty, data on patrons' experiences of the libraries was collected, including their perspectives on the interior design of the libraries, technology available, and the configuration of space. The project gathered significant, detailed information about how students used the libraries, including patterns related to completing assignments, studying, and working in groups. It also obtained faculty and staff input on their needs related to the libraries.

Several ideas emerged from the study, which have been implemented, starting with extending hours of operation. Libraries are now open until 10 p.m. Since commuter students may not own the technology they need to complete their schoolwork, or it may be difficult for them to carry it to campus, the libraries upgraded technology based on users' highest priorities, circulated laptops and tablets within the libraries, and provided high-speed internet access. For students who do carry their own devices, additional power outlets were desirable, including USB outlets, and these were installed in all libraries, increasing public outlets by 67 percent. Charging stations were also added. In response to student needs, the libraries are working to establish a zoning map to ensure adequate quiet areas, and are working to increase the number of group study rooms.

While the funding for replacement buildings or full scale modernizations was not likely in the ideal time period, the libraries were able—through in-depth conversations with users—to identify solutions that positively impact libraries services and users. The study, which ultimately



involved over 1,400 people over three years, was an extraordinary model of how this can happen, while creating learning opportunities for students and working successfully with external partners.

Facilities planning depends on projections of student enrollment at three campuses and Workforce Development & Continuing Education sites many years in advance, as well as calculations of the renovations or replacement of buildings as they age. While enrollment is in a several-year decline right now, there is an overall increase projected in the 2013–2023 Facilities Master Plan during that timeframe. Planning for these changes is already well underway for students of the future. Space needs may change according to the evolution of technology or curricular needs over time, so Facilities has to be nimble enough to incorporate such shifts. As the libraries example showed, planning must respond to internal users of buildings—students, faculty, and staff. The more thoroughly this is done, the more opportunities there are to achieve creative solutions to funding challenges, which are likely to attract the support of taxpayers.

Residences and businesses that surround the College are also stakeholder groups that contribute valuable voices to facilities discussion. Their integration into planning at the earliest possible point is a College priority. Last spring's Community Conversations, for example, were born of collaborations between residents, and major functional areas—AFS, Advancement and Community Engagement, and Government Relations—to successfully integrate important community feedback into the planning on the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus. Upcoming charrettes will further inform design plans.

The very complex process of facilities planning, the long lead-time, and the large investment of resources makes it one that depends heavily on integrated planning. The changing nature of technology, as well as advances in pedagogy and student support mechanisms makes the collaboration of multiple groups essential. As the College moves rapidly toward more comprehensive integrated planning, facilities planning will continue to be an area that benefits significantly from such collaborations. Because facilities planning has long required such integration, it may also provide some examples of best practices for the wider College efforts.

