

UC Board of Regents approves UC Merced \$1 billion expansion proposal

By Alex Backus | abackus@ksee.com (<mailto:abackus@ksee.com>)

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The UC Board of Regents approved a \$1 billion proposal that will double the size of UC Merced, adding more students and hundreds of jobs.

The UC Board of Regents was initially scheduled to vote on UC Merced's expansion plan Friday, but gave full approval Thursday in San Francisco. The \$1 billion dollar expansion will allow the university to accommodate 10,000 students, it currently has about 6,600. School officials say the plan will add about 400 permanent jobs and 10,800 regional construction jobs. UC Merced is the newest addition to the UC system, just 10 years old, but school officials say it's already over capacity.

"Our two student dorms are housing three students, our laboratories and classrooms are going late into the night," Michael Reese, UC Merced Vice Chancellor for Business and Administrative Services said.

The expansion, years in the making, is now closer to becoming a reality and would add more classrooms, housing, laboratories and student amenities.

City leaders say the campus has already played a key role in the city's economy during the recession.

"The campus helped us during the downturn of the economy," Merced City Manager John Bramble said. "Without the campus, we would have been a ghost town."

Bramble says he is excited for the campus' expansion plans.

"An addition like that can't hardly be calculated. [The added jobs] will bring people into the downtown, which is definitely going to spur and assist the development of restaurants and retail shops."

Downtown Merced business owners like Eddie Beltran, who owns a pool hall, said he's already noticed a boost in business from the campus.

"We're getting into the trend that when the students are here, business is high," Beltran said.

The proposal now heads to development teams, construction is slated to begin in summer 2016.

"It's a huge, huge moment for the campus and it's a huge moment for the San Joaquin Valley," Reese said.

UC Merced officials say the funding for the project comes from: UC-issued bonds, campus revenue and fee sources and private funds and donations. The 2020 project will not impact student tuition, UC Merced officials added.

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