

LOCAL / Education

UC regents approve major expansion at UC Merced

By **Larry Gordon** · Contact Reporter

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UC regents on Thursday approved a long-planned expansion to outfit UC Merced with new classrooms, dorms and labs over the next five years and an enrollment boost of nearly 4,000 students.

The full board of regents approved the proposal during its meeting in San Francisco.

The \$1.14-billion proposal to double UC Merced's physical capacity is unusual because a single master developer will be chosen to oversee the design, building and long-term maintenance of the project. In response to regents' past concerns that the university might face too much financial risk, the plan was changed recently to require more direct investment by the developer and other measures to better protect the university.

UC Merced, the youngest of UC's 10 campuses, opened in 2005 and enrolls about 6,600 students on its San Joaquin Valley campus. But its growth has been hampered by the UC system's financial problems since the recession and environmental issues on its vast acreage.

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UC Merced Chancellor Dorothy Leland said Thursday that the plan is “really about the future of the University of California and its ability to continue to provide access to the poorest region of the state and to an incredibly deserving and diverse population.”

She added that Thursday's votes by the full board of regents and two committees was a piece of good news after a difficult period, referring to the trauma earlier this month when a student stabbed four people on campus and then was shot dead by police.

About 919,000 square feet of new space is expected to be built by 2020. Over time, the UC system will use a portion of its annual state funding to pay back \$400 million in borrowings for the project, and the campus itself will pay \$137 million. The rest will be financed by borrowing and direct investment by the developer, officials said.

Merced Mayor Stan Thurston and other Merced community leaders urged regents to approve the expansion, pledging cooperation with UC and predicting that it would benefit students and families in the region.

The campus occupies 104 of the 840 acres it controls. Previous expansion plans called for 355 acres of grazing land to be developed, with the rest to follow. But those plans have been scaled back to use only 115 acres and to add somewhat taller buildings than originally envisioned.

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UPDATE

4:40 p.m.: This post has been updated to reflect that the full board of regents voted for the Merced expansion.

The story was originally published at 2:36 p.m.

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