

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Finance and Planning**  
**Tuesday, December 4, 2012**  
**2:00 – 4:00**  
**238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Will Durfee (chair), Gary Cohen, Dan Feeney, Catherine Fitch, Susan Hupp, Lincoln Kallsen, Kara Kersteter, Jill Merriam, Paul Olin, Gwen Rudney, Michael Rollefson, Ann Sather, Aks Zaheer

Absent: Talha Khan, Ruth Lane, Russell Luepker, Fred Morrison, Richard Pfutzenreuter, Jahon Rafian, Terry Roe, Arturo Schultz, S. Charles Schulz, Kyle Smyth, Thomas Stinson, Michael Volna, Pamela Wheelock

Guests: Bob Baker, Lonetta Hanson (Parking and Transportation Services)

Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) update on light-rail construction; (2) the sustainability of higher education]

**1. Update on Light-Rail Construction**

[Note: Because the presentation was largely visual, using slides, the summary will be very brief.]

Professor Durfee convened the meeting at 2:00 and welcomed Mr. Baker and Ms. Hanson to provide an update on the construction of the Central Corridor Light Rail train tracks.

Mr. Baker presented slides that include the history of the project, the timeline (civil construction is about 95% done; the total project is about 75% complete; 2013 will see a testing of the power systems; 2014 will see testing and then the trains will begin to run (once certified), the location of the stations (the University insisted on simple but clear names: West Bank, East Bank, and Stadium Village, which names must remain in place for 10 years, after which time the Met Council could change them (but probably would not; the University has first right of refusal to buy the naming rights once the 10 year period is over), road construction around the stations, the art at the stations (they consulted with experts at the University to be sure the art, such as birds on the West Bank Station, the formula for a spirograph at the East Bank Station, and ceramics of images from the campus and area, to ensure everything was accurate), the configuration of the Washington Avenue Bridge (no change to the pedestrian level), the alignment of Washington Avenue (pedestrians on the edges, then bike lanes, then bus/LRT lane, then the station platform), and ongoing issues related to maintenance and operations. Mr. Baker also described the vibration monitoring system being installed and said the University is satisfied with the dispute-resolution process in place should there be disagreements about the effects of any vibrations.

There is ongoing discussion on several topics: The timing of the return of buses to Washington Avenue, long-term vibration and electro-magnetic monitoring systems, and negotiating a free-fare zone through the campus.

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Discussion included the following points:

- There is a concern about security, particularly at the West Bank Station, and the University is talking with the Met Council about cameras and sharing feeds. The University places a high priority on security.
- Buses and trains will share the same lane on Washington Avenue through the campus for three years and then they will evaluate how it works; the University did not want bikes and buses in the same lane because there are a lot more bikes here than in other places around the country where bikes and buses share a lane).
- They are trying to reduce the number of buses through the campus because of the duplication of services (i.e., MTC line #16 and the train); #16 buses will stop at the Stadium Village Station except for the period 1:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. The University is also evaluating the routing and frequency of the campus buses.
- Parking and Transportation is considering how to deal with the move of Human Resources and Employee Benefits to WBOB. There are no present plans to change the campus circulator buses.
- Parking and Transportation is aware of the pedestrian/bike problems around STSS and Kolthoff and Smith Halls; they have a consultant to help them deal with them.
- The University chose to take responsibility for certain elements of the maintenance of the corridor on the campus (e.g., snow removal, trash) so that it is up to the University's standards. There is not likely to be any big financial "hit" for the University because it is only four-five blocks and the University's maintenance responsibilities will not involve substantial costs.

Professor Durfee said it appears that there are no major changes since the last presentation to the Committee; it appears to be moving on schedule with no surprises. Mr. Baker concurred and said they are on schedule and on budget and the construction has followed the plans to the 95-98% level—and when it does not, the University reminds them. They are "in pretty good shape," Mr. Baker concluded. They will continue to keep the University community apprised of progress and what to expect.

Professor Durfee thanked Mr. Baker and Ms. Hanson for the presentation.

## **2. The Sustainability of Higher Education**

Professor Feeney brought to the Committee a question he had posed in response to a request from Professor Durfee for issues that Committee members wished to see on an agenda:

One topic I think needs discussion, but we'll have to have the appropriate administrative presence, is that of higher education "sustainability". From my perspective, we have the potential of a perfect storm with progressively increasing student debt, lagging state support (for those institutions who have that), ever increasing overhead, competition for qualified faculty, over built campuses, progressively higher expectations from students, . . . I keep wondering when we will have to stop doing some things (or scaling them back significantly) because they are not sustainable (lots of sacred cows in that discussion). Specifically for Minnesota, can we continue to support 2 systems of public higher education when the state pie and the student tuition \$ can only be spread so far. Will the flagship research institution (U-MN) be sacrificed to preserve MSCU? We know that we cannot "research" our way out of the problem, because the research

endeavor cannot support itself and the sources of funding are drying-up anyway. . . . I understand this is both an internal and external political "hot button." My concern is that if we fail to begin looking at the problem, it could easily be suddenly forced upon us. This is particularly true with the world economy in its current state and the lagging US economy.

The goal of the discussion today is to begin to identify how to frame the question(s) and whom to invite to explore them, Professor Durfee said. The Committee will continue the discussion at another meeting.

Committee members made several points in the ensuing exchanges.

- The University seems not be getting ahead of the curve in terms of all the threats to revenue sources and increasing costs.
- Perhaps the Committee should hear from someone at NIH or NSF, or an expert on higher education economics.
- This is not solely a University problem; there should be interactions with MnSCU and perhaps the private colleges, especially given the failure of the government and political groups to address the problems.
- Universities are doing more and more without new recurring dollars, so the result is to dilute the other things it does (and often that means diluting the core).
- It may be easier for this Committee to raise the difficult questions than it is for the administration to do so.
- These are also national issues (costs, debt, salary pressures); some institutions are using online education to raise revenue, although there are academic integrity issues, but it is a threat; and state support for the University is down to 17%, and the MnSCU-University balance may be addressed by the University becoming more private and MnSCU becoming more state-supported.
- The University needs to do online education smarter and examine what it really needs to do it.
- There is also the question of student loans versus the first salary someone is likely to receive.
- The current model may not be sustainable. The question is what the public needs from universities. What will it need in 20-25 years? What organizational arrangements will meet those needs?

Professor Durfee said he would compile the themes from the discussion and schedule a more focused discussion in the near future to develop an action plan so the Committee can move ahead. He adjourned the meeting at 3:40.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota

