

Hotel learning center proposed for Auraria

By Marianne Goodland

A hotel learning center, part of the public/private development outlined in the Auraria campus master plan, would benefit all of Auraria's academic institutions, according to a Metropolitan State College of Denver professor who recently spoke to the Auraria Higher Education Center board of directors.

The hotel and its learning center would be located on the northeast side of campus, adjacent to the intersection of Auraria Parkway and Speer Boulevard. It would be developed as part of the public/private partnership included in the Auraria master plan, which was approved last year by the AHEC board of directors. The master plan also projects retail space and housing to be located on a 1.5 million gross-square-foot area, which would require relocation of parking Lot R and the current Auraria athletics fields.

Chad Gruhl, director of the hotel management program at Metro, told the AHEC board during its Jan. 16 meeting that the hotel learning center could be used by the Executive MBA Program at the University of Colorado Denver Business School, both as a place to house students and as a potential classroom site.

Under the plan Gruhl presented, the hotel learning center would provide 25,000 net square feet of academic space, 150 to 200 guest rooms, an 8,000–10,000 square-foot ballroom, eight "break-out" rooms, a boardroom, a 50-seat restaurant and a 24-seat bar.

The hotel learning center could offer "world-class academic research opportunities" in management, leadership, property operations, marketing, finance and loss prevention for UCD's Business School as well as for the Metro program, Gruhl said.

In addition, the nearby hotel could offer special rates on rooms and meeting spaces for the three Auraria institutions, visiting professors and their families, Gruhl said. He added that the hotel could be a site for academic conferences and academic association meetings, events that the Auraria campus can't host now because of lack of space. The hotel also would provide an "excellent test case" for the private/public partnership outlined in the Auraria master plan, Gruhl told the AHEC board.

The program plan for the center was expected to be finished by the end of February. If the plan is approved by the Metro board of trustees, Gruhl said, the hotel could open as soon as fall 2011.

The UCD Business School has embarked on an effort to find funding for its own building. The Executive and 11-month MBA programs are included in the program plan for that project and would require more than 13,000 gross square feet in the projected 120,000 gross-square-foot building. Gruhl later told *S&GR* that he had spoken with business Dean Sueann Ambron and Rod Nairn, vice chancellor for university initiatives, regarding the availability of conference space at the center, which could negate the need for conference space in the new business building.

Gruhl also said preliminary conversations had taken place with UCD about a linkage between Metro's business program and UCD's MBA program, in which Metro graduates would go on to the master's program at UCD.

In other Auraria news:

- Nine more trailers for classroom use have been set up on parking Lot I on the Auraria campus, causing Auraria officials to dub the area the "Auraria Trailer Park." The campus already has four trailers set up for UCD classroom use on the north side of the Tivoli Student Union. AHEC Executive Vice President for Administration Dean Wolf told the Auraria board that more trailers will be added next fall, as the campus works to resolve its space issues.

- The Auraria board last month approved an intergovernmental agreement between the city of Denver and Auraria regarding police services. According to Barb Weiske, Auraria vice president for operations, the lack of an intergovernmental agreement has meant delays and poor use of resources. For example, when Auraria police responded to shoplifting calls in the bookstore, they could take the suspect into custody but had to wait for Denver police to write the citation, which could take up to two hours. Under the agreement, Auraria police can write the summons and release the individual, freeing up both Auraria resources and those of the Denver police.

"It helps in our ability to respond to things directly and gets our resources back on the street," Weiske said. The agreement recognizes both the increasing activity on the campus and the increasing population at Auraria, and is a "win-win" for both departments, she said. Denver City Council still must approve the agreement.