

WIU expansion nears construction stage

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The next stage of growth for Western Illinois University's Quad-Cities Campus could begin as early as late January with the state's selection of a contractor for the project.

Bush Construction will be the single prime contractor for construction of Phase II, said Joe Rives, vice president of the Moline campus. The \$42 million project will bring five new buildings to the year-old riverfront campus.

The Davenport-based Bush Construction built the first building on the campus along River Drive.

"The number and the quality of applicants were truly remarkable," Rives said of the field for the competitive bid.

According to Rives, Phase II will include five interconnected buildings to house the university's colleges of arts and sciences, education and human services, fine arts and communication, public television station WQPT-TV and the campus library. Those departments will relocate from Western's campus on Moline's 60th Street.

The fate of that campus, he added, "is still under evaluation and review."

In August, school leaders joined federal, state and local officials for a groundbreaking ceremony for the second phase of the campus. Among the guests was Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn, who at the time released an additional \$38 million in state funds to begin the new phase.

Bush's \$29.5 million bid for construction of the 94,800-square-foot classroom complex is funded by the Illinois Jobs Now! capital construction program.

Rives said the support that the new campus has received from the community and the area legislators "has made Phase II and III a reality. And we are grateful for that."

A.J. Loss, Bush Construction's president, said the firm is pleased to be chosen for the latest project.

"Certainly, the fact that we did Phase I makes it all the more exciting," he said, adding that the latest Western project is Bush Construction's largest project to date. The firm is an affiliate of McCarthy Bush Corp.

Loss said the buildings' design work has been completed by the Chicago architect firm Holabird & Root, and work will begin when the state's Capital Development Board, which awarded the bid, gives its final authorization. "This is not a great time to build, but as soon as we get that final letter ... we'll be on site immediately," he said, adding that the firm has 18 months to complete the project "once the clock starts."

Rives said the new buildings will be ready for the fall semester in 2014.

The project could have as many as 125 workers on site at the high points of construction, Loss estimated.

Ahead of the actual building construction, work has begun on University Drive, a new roadway that will run on the south side of the campus. Bill Brewer, the university's architect and facilities director, said most of the utility work has been completed in preparation of the road construction. Valley Construction will resume work on the project when the ground thaws, he added.

Brewer said the latest addition has created excitement on campus and for Bush Construction. “They are chomping at the bit to get started, and we are chomping at the bit.”

Even before the construction crews arrive, Rives and staff are looking ahead. “Later this month, we’ll start a programming study for Phase III — identifying where it will be located and what will go in it.”

No funding has yet been set aside for that phase, he added.

Phase II comes as Western Illinois is setting new enrollment records at the Quad-City campus, Rives said. While actual numbers were not available, new student enrollment was at an all-time high for spring and last fall had record undergraduate enrollment on the Moline campus.

“You build it, and they will come,” he said.