

AURARIA

Metro's board gets in bed with idea for campus hotel

By Dominic Graziano

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If you've ever wanted to stay the night at Auraria, you'll soon be able to now that plans for an on-campus hotel have been approved. The Metro Board of Trustees authorized the proposal for a hotel and hotel learning center that will be used as a working classroom for Metro's hospitality department at a June 4 meeting.

At the board meeting, Chad Gruhl, director of hotel management, laid out a tentative plan for the hotel and learning center. Gruhl went over the approximated space needed for the hotel, as well as a tentative plan for the layout of the classrooms and hotel rooms. The hotel will be approximately 100,000 square feet, with 20,000 square feet dedicated to a learning center that will be used strictly for academic purposes.

The learning center will house several classrooms, including laboratories dedicated to the different aspects of hotel management and food production, as well as faculty offices.

"The entire project will cost roughly \$34.2 million dollars in today's figures," Gruhl said. "\$7.5 million for the hotel learning center, which will be raised through the development office and \$26.7 million for the hotel itself."

Funding for the hotel has yet to be determined, but it will not be paid for with taxpayer dollars, according to Gruhl.

The \$26.7 million needed for the actual hotel will come from a local or national hotel company. To find a company to pay for the project, Gruhl said a Request for Proposal will be submitted.

"This way everybody has a fair game for it," he said. "We'll put advertisements in newspapers and on the Internet. It is a bidding process."

As of now, there is no solid layout or blueprint for the hotel, Gruhl said.

Gruhl added that releasing preliminary plans would be unfair to companies competing for the project.

"There will be 12 floors. Nothing else has been solidified. We haven't released any blueprints or layouts," he said.

Several different areas on campus were considered as potential building sites for the hotel, including the area where the athletic playing fields currently are.

"The building will be built on parking lot R, on the corner farthest from campus. It will be right next to Lodo," Gruhl said. "The area is such an incredible gateway to downtown. Its location and visibility will be beneficial to the campus as a whole."

"We did a feasibility study with the HREC (Hospitality Real Estate Consultants) last summer," Gruhl said. "They found that without a question, that is the most feasible location for a hotel."

The hotel will skyrocket Metro's hospitality program, Gruhl said.

"There are roughly 200 hospitality programs in the country at this time and, without question, this will put us in the top 20," he said.

Gruhl added that the hotel proposal was modeled after several similar programs at colleges on the East Coast. No colleges in the West have an on-site hotel.

The addition of a hotel will put Metro above other similar programs in nearby states.

"This will make us the preeminent institution for [hotel] operation managers in the five states area."

The closest school with similar plans is the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

Gruhl said that the school is in the development stages for a hotel now that Harrah's agreed to provide \$30 million in funding.

At the board meeting, Gruhl's plan was met with some hesitation by board member Eugene Saxe.

Saxe was concerned about how the hotel would benefit the entire student body and not just one department.

"I'd like to understand a little more clearly, like to have a little more assurance, that we're not burdening ourselves with something that doesn't function as effectively in the interests of the entire college," Saxe said.

The department of hospitality, tourism and events management at Metro is made up of more than 400 students, according to Gruhl.

President Stephen Jordan noted that the hotel and its facilities would not solely be used for the hospitality department.

"Clearly, one of the problems we're trying to solve with this is we do not have any space on this campus to host conferences," Jordan said. "This creates the opportunity for any academic department to host a major conference. They have the hotel space there. They have the meeting space there. That's part of what this space