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Harvard resuming work on complex

Construction on Allston facility to restart in 2014

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JUNE 14, 2012

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DAVID L RYAN / GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/FILE 2011

Work on the science center was put on hold indefinitely as the university's endowment was rocked by the recession.

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For the first time since construction was halted in late 2009, Harvard University said Wednesday that it expects to resume work in 2014 on its planned science complex in Allston, the single largest investment in a science facility the 375-year-old Ivy League institution has ever made.

Construction is planned to begin on a building that would contain between 500,000 and 600,000 square feet of space for a state-of-the-art health and life sciences laboratory, research, classrooms, and areas to foster collaborative innovation, officials said.

Stem-cell research would be an “anchor component” of the building that would also feature programs in engineering and the physical, biological, and life sciences, according to the university. Initially, the facility would house about 500 scientists and support staff.

The building would be the “biggest investment in science space envisioned for at least the next decade,” Katherine N. Lapp, executive vice president at Harvard, said in a letter outlining the plans.

The project's scale is similar to the original design, a 589,000-square-foot building estimated to cost \$1 billion that the city approved five years ago. But the new proposal focuses on maximizing square footage for science uses. That point concerned some members of the Harvard-Allston Task Force.

At a meeting at the Honan-Allston Branch Library Wednesday night, members of the city-appointed neighborhood group expressed concern that more science uses could push out community space included in the building's previous design.

Harvard officials said the building's size and configuration will be determined in the coming months. Once a more definitive proposal has been drafted, the project will go before the Boston Redevelopment Authority for public review, officials said. It took a 2½-year public review process to approve the building's original design.

Residents remain skeptical on whether Wednesday's announcement means Harvard will finally follow through on plans laid out nearly a decade ago. Already strained relations between the university and the Allston neighborhood have soured more over the past 2½ years.

Work on the science center — the first phase of a massive development — was put on hold indefinitely as the university's endowment was rocked by the recession, diving \$11 billion, or 27 percent. The complex's foundation was built before construction stopped.

"We still have a giant hole in the ground. It's older than the hole" at Filene's in Downtown Crossing, said task force member and longtime resident Paul Alford, who lives near the site. "It's like a sarcophagus."

He said Harvard should not be allowed to move forward with other projects until it completes the science center.

"You should finish what you've started before you start something else," Alford said.

Others were more optimistic.

"Of course, I'd like to hear them say the project is starting tomorrow," said task force member Cathi Campbell, but "I'm certainly happy to see the project moving forward."

Last summer, the school adopted a dramatically different approach to expanding in Allston by dividing its

vision into smaller projects and working with outside developers and investors in an effort to ease Harvard's financial risk.

At Wednesday's meeting, the university said it has chosen a private partner, Boston-based Samuels and Associates, to help build a planned mixed-use development in the Barry's Corner section of Allston.

The science center will be funded by Harvard and donations it raises.

"We envision the health and life sciences center as a hub of 21st century learning, collaboration, innovation and growth," Lapp wrote in her letter.

In a statement, Mayor Thomas M. Menino of Boston said he was excited about the university scheduling work to resume on the science complex.

"This is just more evidence that Boston is a global life sciences hub," he said. "Harvard's Health and Life Science Center will keep Boston at the forefront of innovation, collaboration and success."

Harvard began pushing for an expansion in Allston in the late 1980s. In 1997, the school revealed it had covertly spent \$88 million to buy 52 acres of land in the neighborhood, drawing an outcry from residents and Menino.

The university agreed to pay the city millions in lieu of taxes for its exempt property and tried to reshape its image as a good neighbor.

But Harvard also kept buying land and now owns 359 acres in Allston, nearly double the size of its Cambridge campus.

In late 2003, Harvard envisioned a massive 250-acre campus in Allston that included academic space, student housing, entertainment facilities, and the transformation of Barry's Corner to replicate Harvard Square.

Work stopped in 2009, however.

Last spring, the university began its first major project since the science complex stalled: a \$20 million investment to convert a building into a laboratory for innovation and entrepreneurship, which opened last fall.

A month later, the university broke ground on a \$100 million building that will be used primarily for housing on its business school campus.

It is scheduled to open in late 2013.

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at mjrochele@gmail.com.

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