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Harvard plans new arena, refurbished stadium, hotel

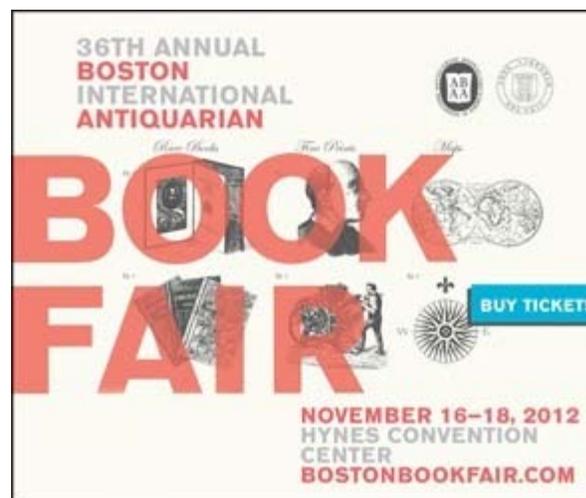
By **Matt Rocheleau and Katherine Landergan** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS OCTOBER 13, 2012

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Harvard University is readying a 10-year development plan for Allston that will feature nine new projects, including a new basketball arena, a refurbished football stadium, a hotel and conference center, and new business school buildings.

Expected to be submitted to the Boston Redevelopment Authority next week, the filing represents a renewed effort by Harvard to develop its vast holdings across the Charles River from the university's main campus. Earlier efforts drew objections from neighbors and slowed amid the financial downturn.



“The university and the Harvard-Allston Task Force have been meeting over several months to discuss many elements of the plan,” said Kevin Casey, a spokesman for Harvard, which previewed its plans at a community meeting Thursday night.

“We are pleased to take this important step forward in the master planning process next week and look forward to our continued discussions within the university, with the city and with our Allston neighbors,” he added.

Harvard officials declined to offer specific details on Friday, such as the cost or the timeline for what they call a master plan. Some details were available in an [outline](#) filed with the Boston Redevelopment Authority and on the [Harvard Magazine](#) website.

While some of the expansion plans [have been discussed](#) by the university in the past, there were new details this week.

Three of the projects call for renovating and building an addition to Harvard Stadium, a new basketball venue, and a hotel and conference center, according to the outline on the city’s website.

Harvard Magazine reported that those three projects would be completed between 2017 and 2022 and that the addition to the school’s historic football stadium would house a press box, club seating, an athletics office, and athletic facilities. Harvard Stadium opened in 1903.

The basketball arena would be 60,000 square feet inside a four- to nine-story-tall building that would also include 40,000 square feet for mixed use and offices, the magazine reported. The hotel would include 150 to 250 rooms in a building six to nine stories tall, according to the magazine.

Ray Mellone, a Harvard-Allston Task Force member, said university officials are proposing to build the “first-class” basketball arena in the area of North Harvard Street and Western Avenue. It would hold approximately 2,700 people and would replace the school’s smaller, outdated venue.

The current basketball venue, the Ray Lavietes Pavilion, has a seating capacity of 2,195 and is located on North Harvard Street. The Pavilion was built in 1926 and is among the oldest basketball arenas in the country. The new basketball plan comes a year after Harvard’s men’s basketball team made its first appearance in the NCAA Tournament since 1946.



Two other projects call for renovating the Soldiers Field Park housing complex and building a new mixed-use development. Those are also planned for completion between 2017 and 2022, the magazine said.

Another project would build new business school faculty and administrative offices. The remaining projects would replace business school buildings Kresge Hall and Burden Hall and renovate Baker Hall.

The university magazine reported that those projects would be completed between 2014 and 2020.

Two other Harvard development projects, a health and life sciences center and a mixed-use complex in Barry's Corner, are already being planned and reviewed separately.

Mellone said that the Harvard Allston Task Force — composed of residents and local civic leaders in the neighborhood — plans to address any concerns with the plans moving forward. “With good faith we are going to look at the issues and tell them what we think,” he said. “It’s quite a blend of issues that have to be resolved.”

City redevelopment authority officials declined to comment on the specifics of the plan because it has not yet been filed. The plan will go through a public review process. If the master plan is approved, each project within the plan will undergo separate, detailed review before construction can begin.

“We certainly have been working with the task force and Harvard to come to this milestone and we look forward to continue to work with the community and the university on this 10-year plan,” authority spokeswoman Susan Elsbree said. “It’s certainly a step forward and progress to be at this point.”

The university’s development plans in Allston have been rife with controversies.

Harvard began pushing for an expansion in Allston in the late 1980s, and it 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, at Western Avenue and North Harvard Street.

Work on a science center — the first phase of the massive redevelopment effort — began. But, it was put on hold indefinitely in 2009 as the university’s endowment was rocked by the recession.

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.

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.

The university announced this past summer 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.

The building 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 have said.

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