

Housing Master Plan Q&A

Q: Why is the University of Washington (UW) redeveloping on-campus housing?

A: The older residence halls, constructed decades ago, have reached their end of useful life. What does this mean? It means that without substantial renovation or replacement, major systems in the buildings will begin to fail and piecemeal repairs would cost substantially more than one-time renovation or replacement. (Major systems include plumbing, electrical, windows, roofing, cladding and heating.)

Q: How was this determined to be the case?

A: As is done in other on-campus housing programs, Housing & Food Services (HFS) routinely conducts building audits. A building audit is an evaluation of the building and all its systems, done by engineers, architects and other experts. Audits conducted on UW residence halls in 1995, 2000 and 2006 suggested that we needed to plan for an extensive redevelopment of the buildings to avoid major failures.

Q: When was the Housing Master Plan started?

A: The Housing Master Plan (HMP) was started in 2007 and began with a comprehensive study of the demand for housing, including looking at desired room types (doubles, singles, apartments, etc.), rental rates, construction costs and financial planning. The plan included adding new housing, due to the many years of overcrowding, and renovation of existing residence halls in response to the building audits.

Q: So why are we not renovating existing buildings?

A: (Old) Lander and (old) Terry Halls were the first on the schedule to be renovated. HFS began the renovation process by hiring an architect and contractor. As the buildings were carefully evaluated in order to complete the predesign process, the evaluations showed that renovation would cost more than new construction. While somewhat counter-intuitive, this is because of the extensive work required to replace all of the old systems in an existing building structure that contains hazardous materials such as asbestos.

Also, renovations cannot address all significant issues. For example, the room doorways in old Lander Hall were not wide enough for a wheelchair. In order to make every room accessible, all doorframes would have had to be removed and the walls rebuilt to accommodate a wider doorframe. This, and many other such issues, caused the cost of proposed renovation to exceed new construction. New construction can be designed for optimal accessibility, can address the need for gender-neutral bathrooms, contribute to institutional sustainability commitments and results in spaces that support student academic success.

Q: Why do rental rates have to increase?

A: Rental rates are set based on the cost to operate a building. Debt service is an expense associated with the building that must be covered by rents. Designing and constructing a building using efficient processes results in a lower-cost project and consequently lower rents. The UW has completed the HMP construction projects to date at a very favorable cost when compared to other like projects.

The older buildings were built over a half century ago and construction costs for those buildings have long been paid for, so their rents are solely based upon the cost to operate them. The new buildings offer a number of operating efficiencies that result in lower cost per bed, and looking at utility expenses provides a good example of this. Older buildings with systems beyond their intended lifespan are less efficient and therefore have high operating costs.

Leaving the older residence halls as they are is, unfortunately, not an option for the UW because of the additional risk of failing systems. Repairing these systems “one at a time” is more costly than addressing these issues all at once (comprehensive renovation), which in turn is more costly in this situation than new construction. Regardless of which strategy is taken, adjustments to rental rates are necessary to cover the cost.

Q: Can the UW build new residence halls for less?

A: Affordability is a concern for all at the UW and this includes on-campus housing. Due to the hard work of many professionals involved in these projects, the new residence halls reflect thoughtful decisions based on data regarding efficient construction processes, materials selection and opportunities for value-engineering. Examples include:

- Wood framing—Typical five floors of wood framing over two above-grade concrete floors with additional below concrete-grade floors
- Aesthetic design with cost-efficient materials on exteriors—Brick, cementitious materials (HardiePanel®), metal panel and vinyl windows
- Modest and durable interior room finishes—Carpet, laminate counter surfaces, fiberglass showers, vinyl flooring, polished concrete, painted appliances, economical lighting and casework

Throughout the West Campus phase of the Housing Master Plan, the University consistently built new buildings for less per square foot than other West Coast universities, with the average cost per square foot for other universities’ residential building projects done in the timeframe of the UW projects coming in at \$502 per sq. ft. compared to \$339 per sq. ft. for UW.

Q: What is being planned on North Campus?

A: Construction of the three new residence halls that will replace demolished McCarty Hall is on schedule and the new halls will open in Autumn 2018. These three new buildings are being built at a total cost of \$240 million and will house about 1,750 students. A future phase of the plan calls for the demolition of Haggett Hall and construction of one new building.

The residential units are proposed as 1 percent studio apartment beds, 1 percent single room beds with private baths, 15 percent double rooms with community bath, 9 percent quad room beds with private bath, 8 percent triple room beds with private bath and 66 percent double room beds with private bath. This mix of unit types will allow the less private units to have lower rental rates.

When compared to the double rooms with private baths, double rooms with shared bath will cost approximately 10 percent per month per person less; triples will be approximately 20 percent less; and quads will be approximately 30 percent less. This phase has a new residential dining center, regional service desk, an innovation/maker space called The MILL, and a learning resource center targeted at aiding a student’s academic success.