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For JCU, a master plan at last

By Ed Wittenberg
Staff Writer

UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS — John Carroll University's long-awaited campus master plan envisions the renovation of existing buildings, more parking, athletic facilities and green space.

JCU officials unveiled the plan to City Council Monday during a one-hour presentation.

Nicholas Santilli, JCU's associate vice president of assessment and planning, described it as the university's overall vision for the next 20 years. He noted the plan is not set in stone, but is more of a guide.

"Our goal is to develop a plan that will meet the university's needs and give us flexibility for changing conditions,

while trying to accommodate the concerns of neighbors and community leaders," he said.

Santilli said the university seeks to grow by attracting "a better mix of students" to its campus.

He noted enrollment has declined steadily over the past decade, from 4,250 students in 1998 to 3,650 today.

"The status quo is not an

option," he said. "We can't stand still as an institution."

The process was initiated in February 2007, when JCU hired Sasaki Associates, a Boston-based architectural firm, to create a master plan. The goal was to evaluate the university's physical improvement needs.

In response to residents' concerns about JCU's buying See JCU, page A9

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more homes in their neighborhoods, the university is trying to do as much as it can on the existing campus footprint, Santilli said.

"But we can't reach our goals without expanding at least a little," he said, citing playing fields, parking and residence halls as critical needs.

First phase

Those three entities are all part of the plan's early phase, as highlighted by Doreen K. Riley, vice president for university advancement.

A playing field on Milford Road, to accommodate not only JCU student-athletes but also possibly those from Gesu School, is being considered, Riley said.

"We would like to be able to add lacrosse and field hockey as varsity sports, but there's no way we can do that because the athletic fields we have are insufficient for the teams we have," she said.

More surface parking would be created by demolishing the Bohannon Science Center, Riley said. She noted the Bohannon center is at less than 20 percent capacity, as most academic functions in the science area have been moved to the newer Dolan Center for Science and Technology.

JCU would also alleviate some of its parking crunch, at least temporarily, by having freshmen park in the lot of Temple Emanu El at Cedar and South Green roads. In January, the university purchased the temple, which is relocating to a new building in Orange this summer.

"Freshmen could leave their cars there and be shuttled to campus," Riley said.

Existing residence halls would be renovated. JCU may also build two apartment-style residence halls for juniors and seniors on the front end of the Dolan center, Riley said.

Other components of the early phase include:

- Reopening and "re-greening" Hamlin Quad, a former grassy area between the Dolan center and the ad-

ministration building that is now a temporary parking lot.

- Renovating the Fairmount Circle apartments, some of which students would use while existing residence halls are being fixed up.

- Renovating the student center.

- Building a fitness center, with the potential for community use.

- Replacing tennis courts and adding three more adjacent courts.

- Redesigning pedestrian crossing and the parking entrance at South Belvoir Boulevard for safety reasons.

- More effective use of the varsity track, football field and baseball and softball fields, including dugouts for softball.

The university hopes to achieve each of the early-phase elements within three to five years, but it will depend on financing and funding, Riley said.

"I think it's a good plan," Councilman Steven Sims said. "But if it's going to be a win-win situation for the university and the community, it's going to take collaboration... I hope there will be an opportunity for compromise."

Riley said JCU is committed to working with City Council and neighbors to reach a solution "that works for everyone."

During the past few months, JCU officials have met with more than 100 neighbors from various neighborhoods, along with Fairmount Circle merchants and Shaker Heights officials, Santilli said.

"We have incorporated many of their comments and ideas into our plan," he said.

"We know we can't do this independently," Riley added. "We have been pretty open about what our visions are and what we'd like to do."

JCU officials will make presentations to Shaker Heights City Council at 7:30 p.m. Monday, and at a community meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the auditorium of the Dolan center, 20700 N. Park Blvd.

They will present the plan to the university's board of directors in May. Board approval is not required.