

Charge to Facilities Master Planning Science Group

Thank you for being part of Carleton's Facilities Master Planning process. This memo is meant to give your planning group a clear sense of what lies ahead; to lay out some parameters that should shape your inquiries, discussions, and recommendations; and to explain what I expect as the "end product" of your work. Let me reiterate at the very outset, however, how deeply grateful both I and the College community are for your leadership. We shall benefit very much from the integrity, care, wise insights, and desire to help Carleton fulfill its goals that you bring to this endeavor.

The Task at Hand

Carleton's recently-adopted strategic plan (*Carleton's Future: A Strategic Plan for the College 2012* and hereafter the "Strategic Plan") affirms our commitment to preserve and enhance our academic excellence so that Carleton remains one of the very best liberal arts colleges in the world. The plan lays out critical next steps we must take to secure the College's continued success and distinction.

One of those key initiatives is to make focused investments in facilities that directly advance Carleton's mission. Going further, the plan identifies both the three most pressing physical plant projects to be addressed in the next decade as well as four other priorities that require attention in the near term. It also calls for the college to make meaningful headway in reducing its backlog of deferred maintenance projects.¹

In order to determine how best to meet the goals and address the principal issues identified by the Strategic Plan, how best to use our extant space, and how best to anticipate and provide for future College needs, the Strategic Plan calls for a Facilities Master Plan. As you know, I have charged a Facilities Master Planning Committee to develop and recommend a draft plan to me and the College's senior leadership team, for eventual review and adoption by Carleton's Board of Trustees.

A central task posed to that Committee is to make recommendations on the investments in facilities necessary for the College to maintain its historic leadership in undergraduate physical and biological science education. This will involve determining the correct mix of renovating extant spaces and/or new construction to obtain needed modern, interactive teaching space, space for undergraduate and faculty research, appropriate faculty offices and infrastructure (e.g., storage and utilities), and the shared spaces we must have to drive forward interdisciplinary and cross-departmental teaching and research.

However, because determining Carleton's wisest solution to this question demands a level of expertise and vision about the teaching and conduct of science—both now and for several decades into the future—that is not shared by all members of core Facilities Master Planning Committee, I have decided to supplement that group with this more focused panel comprised of Carleton science faculty and a student and staff member with experience working in our research and teaching laboratories. In some respects, this topic-focused planning group will function akin

¹ Obviously, in addition to programming needs, project costs and the availability of funding will determine changes in our physical plant.

to the extant interdisciplinary Science and Math Steering Board that has played such a successful leadership role in crafting and administering grants from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Your topic-focused group will submit its recommendations on the question presented above to the Core Facilities Master Planning Committee, for its consideration and evaluation..

Guidance as You Proceed

Obviously, the Strategic Plan should be the starting point for your efforts. But I would also urge you to bear in mind the excellent set of planning “Assumptions” that were endorsed by the entire campus community in crafting the Strategic Plan. These Assumptions recognize Carleton’s defining characteristics and the profound strengths we need to draw on and retain (e.g., a fierce commitment to the liberal arts; a symbiotic relationship between superb teaching and scholarship; the need to recruit/retain the best faculty and staff; the importance of lasting personal connections between students and faculty/staff).

I ask you to begin with the premise that Carleton must have first-rate buildings and facilities and that we must maintain our physical plant to appropriately balance the needs of current and future generations. Expanding on this latter point, we have a responsibility to be a wise steward of our man-made and natural environment. Please bear in mind that Carleton seeks to reduce its carbon footprint in accordance with our Climate Action Plan.

It is absolutely essential that our Facilities Master Planning be conducted with care, rigor, an insistence upon quality and a solid understanding of the tradeoffs entailed in setting priorities. As we have discussed on many occasions, Carleton has limited resources (financial as well as time and energy) and must make choices about the most pressing objectives to pursue. Accordingly, your planning group should observe the following parameters throughout its work and in crafting your recommendations:

Academic Excellence is our Touchstone Carleton’s physical plant exists to help us achieve academic goals. So whatever we choose to build and maintain, we must do it well and with appropriate regard to its impact on our academic profile (e.g., the projected strength of affected programs; student and faculty recruitment and retention).

Take Financial Implications into Account Your planning group will be proposing initiatives that require new outlays of money. Therefore, it will be necessary to balance our dreams of innovation and distinction against cold fiscal realities. To the extent possible, I would have you assess how much money proposed construction and subsequent operation of projects would require and from whence such funds would come. At appropriate points in the process, the Treasurer’s Office will set some financial envelopes that will channel and assist your deliberations. Some of the cost of necessary projects may come from new borrowing, as Carleton has the capacity to add more debt without lowering its Aa2 debt rating. And of course I also expect that we shall raise new external funds for key projects (at least some of the most compelling priorities identified by the Strategic Plan are likely to become linchpins of a next fundraising campaign). But it would be irresponsible to assume that new monies will “just appear” to accomplish our goals. We shall clearly need to prioritize our goals. And, because every project we choose to undertake means that we are choosing not to undertake some other work or to make some other capital or operating expenditure, I also ask you to be especially

mindful of these “opportunity costs”—the cost of any activity measured in terms of the best alternative forgone.

Consider the Impact of Technology We live in a world of rapid technological change, some of which is already reshaping higher education. It is safe to assume that the pace and extent of such change will only increase. Therefore, I would ask your planning group to bear in mind how extant or developing technology might change your recommendations.

Be Alert to the Competition Carleton is in a highly competitive arena for talented and diverse students, faculty, staff; for the attention and affection of prospective donors; and for general visibility. Please recognize that other colleges and universities, for-profit business, and other actors will aggressively pursue strategies of their own that could adversely affect Carleton. Be mindful of such external threats and opportunities.

Resources/Help in Your Deliberations

Let me assure you that we want to make your work as manageable as possible and that you will have a variety of resources to draw upon.

First, your planning does not take place in a vacuum. While Carleton does not have (and, indeed, has not had for many years) an operative, vibrant Facilities Master Plan that shapes the character of our campus, there is a series of historic and foundational documents—culminating in the Strategic Plan—that have influenced the physical footprint and operational character of our College. We have begun compiling these documents and other background information/readings for your planning group and the core Facilities Master Planning Committee; these will be maintained in a common file on a dedicated site for easy access.

Second, your planning group will be able to rely upon the data and professional expertise of our Facilities Management and Planning Office. Director of Facilities Steve Spehn will be a particularly prominent internal resource. Other staff (e.g., Institutional Research analysts, Sustainability Coordinator, Registrar) will also be available as needed.

Third, we shall tap the knowledge of external facilities planning and campus design consultants.

Finally, in some cases, members of your planning group may need to visit other institutions to understand what is possible and wise for Carleton.

Reasonable levels of funding will be available for all of these planning activities—both from dedicated College sources and from the use of the remaining one-time “presidential initiative” grant dollars we received from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation that also supported the development of the Strategic Plan.

Logistics

As you know, I have asked Associate Dean and Professor of Biology Fernan Jaramillo and Vice President and Treasurer Fred Rogers to serve as Co-Chairs of the overall Facilities Master Planning effort. I have also asked Professor Jaramillo and Associate Professor of Chemistry Joe Chihade to serve as Co-Chairs of your science-focused planning group. They will take the lead in driving discussions and deliberations forward on a realistic schedule.

Consistent with our College culture and our desire to keep our planning inclusive and transparent, your group can of course invite guests to participate in sessions and I would also encourage you to consider opening up at least a part of some of some sessions to the broader College community and to solicit input at key points from non-members. However, I understand that reaching the best answers and achieving consensus on your recommendations will at times call for especially candid, passionate, thoughtful, and civil exchanges in a non-public setting.

Your group should keep at least rudimentary records of its deliberations (though I am not requiring formal minutes) and I shall ask you to provide periodic updates of your progress to the core Facilities Master Planning Committee and the Carleton community. My point is that we do not want this planning process to seem a “black box.”

Final Thoughts

As noted above, I hope that Carleton can complete the entire Facilities Master Planning Process (including board approval of our plan) by June 2014. This means that we need to press ahead with dispatch as well as care. But of course we must not compromise the quality of our thinking to meet artificial deadlines.

Perhaps it is worth reinforcing my expectation is that your planning group will forge a consensus behind its recommendations. Your work will not be complete if you remain deadlocked over competing visions; in such circumstances, a compromise solution will need to emerge that is consistent with our planning parameters—for we will not continually reopen our planning process and must move forward in support our of institutional priorities.

I know you share my excitement over this Master Facilities Planning initiative. This is a rare opportunity for Carleton to shape its physical character, appearance and operations for decades to come. The ideas we generate and then come together to support will ensure Carleton’s health, fidelity to its best self, continued success, and merited distinction.

Steve Poskanzer
February 2013