

Master disaster

Campus Master Plan ignores students' voices and demolishes A&M's history

In years to come, the majority of current students will come back to College Station at one time or another, whether for a football game, permanent residence or to enroll their children in classes. When the current students and alumni do eventually return to A&M, a dramatically different campus will await them.



SARA FOLEY

The wheels were set in motion for an overall renovation of A&M's campus two years ago, a project headed by a team of faculty, staff and administrators. Their product, the Campus Master Plan, was based on Vision 2020 and sets guidelines for the renovation, demolition and addition of many buildings on campus over the next 50 years. While the plan as a whole adds convenience and provides ways for the land to be utilized more efficiently, in the end the multitude of marginal disadvantages hurts students and alumni seeking tradition, historical value and input in their campus during their experience at A&M.

The emotional and historical significance of a building is one that is difficult to measure. Buildings closely associated with the University's identity, such as the Academic building and the YMCA building, have renovations planned to improve their functionality. However, what is significant to some people is not significant to others, and value judgments based on the opinions of faculty and administration who are considered outsiders by many may not always reflect the opinions of the student community.

Of the 40 buildings set for demolition, many of them are Northside residence halls.

Although many of these residence halls are in need of repairs, the history and tradition associated with them runs deeper than the inconvenience of community bathrooms that administrators feel is outdated.

"They aren't the kind of buildings people want to live in, the Corps-style residence halls with the gang-style bathroom. Students are moving away from that, and at some point in the not-too-distant future, students are not going to want to live in them at all," said Mary Miller, chair of the Campus Master Plan Steering Committee and associate vice president for administration.

The recent example of the plan to close Hotard Hall and the subsequent community outcry that resulted contradicts Miller's statement. Northside Student Sen. Will Hailey said he felt that students were not given equal voice when decisions such as these were made. The Campus Master

Plan Steering Committee did hold three public forums giving students the opportunity to voice their concerns and will hold another on April 26, but no student representative sits on the committee nor has any measurable influence on the decisions made.

Northside is more than a cluster of residence halls on campus; it is associated with separate traditions and a community that others know little about. To replace this area with "more desirable" housing might be economically beneficial, but it has the potential to erase the traditions and community that make A&M special.

Another example of a scheduled demolition site is the Pavilion, which originally had a dirt floor and housed rodeo events. Tom Woodfin, coordinator of the Campus Master Plan Steering

Committee and associate professor for architecture said the building is not being used for its intended purpose and has subsequently suffered due to problems in the foundation.

Charles Sippial, vice president for administration, estimated the cost to make necessary improvements on the Pavilion would be \$6 million, but to tear it down and build something else in its place would cost \$15 million. Sippial said he felt that a new building would be a better economic investment.

While buildings such as the Pavilion may not warrant salvation based on usefulness or feasibility and do not have a clear emotional appeal, they nevertheless contribute to the campus history, such as the Pavilion. Sippial said 50 percent of buildings on campus are more than 50 years old and that the interior systems within the buildings are only functional for about 20 years, resulting in them to be outdated. The Campus Master Plan focuses on the modernization of buildings in order to attain a newer and more appealing campus.

The plan also has no spot allotted for the return of an on-campus Bonfire, something administrators have not assured could come back. However, if buildings are put in the places available for Bonfire, it would be another excuse to delay its return.

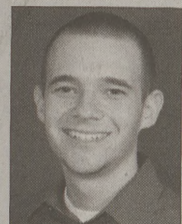
The Campus Master Plan provides outlines for potential building sites, points out necessary street improvements and adds needed renovations to some historical buildings on campus. However, student input is needed to ensure the salvation of many buildings and residence halls that students feel affection for and to prevent the change of the campus to a point that it would be unrecognizable to alumni.



Sara Foley is a junior journalism major. Graphic by Paul Wilson

Making students wait to be served alcohol will not stop birthday binge drinking

Michael Wagener, Class of 2000, died on his 21st birthday from alcohol poisoning, as reported by The Battalion. His mother, Susan, said Wagener went out with his friends at midnight on his birthday and began drinking, just like many others his age. When the police found Wagener in his apartment after the bars had closed that morning, his blood-alcohol level was 0.48.



MATT RIGNEY

Unfortunately for the Wagener family, this could have been avoided. Had Michael made the right decisions and known when to stop, he might have lived. Susan Wagener agrees that her son's death could have been avoided, but some of her ideas would inhibit College Station residents' personal freedoms to protect those who can't make wise decisions.

Earlier this month Wagener testified before a Texas House committee that is studying underage drinking, urging the legislators to pass laws that would ban bars from serving customers until opening hours on one's 21st birthday, rather than at midnight.

Not only would this legislation be a blow to civil liberties enjoyed by College Station residents, it wouldn't solve the problem that students such as Michael Wagener faced.

Wagener's mother told the committee that students are often encouraged by peers to drink at midnight on their 21st birthdays as a rite of passage.

As it stands now, bars can legally serve alcohol to people at midnight on their 21st birthday. That is, after all, when the day starts. Delaying the time at which a person can be served alcohol by a mere 10 hours won't have an effect on the pressure he feels. That is something Susan Wagener doesn't understand.

According to Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), the median age a child begins consuming alcohol is 15.7 years old. That means the average teen looks forward his 21st birthday for more than five years.

Delaying this anticipation until 12 p.m. the next day isn't going to positively affect the way in which students release their anticipation. They have been waiting for five years, so what is 10 more hours?

Society also plays a role in the pressure that college students feel to consume alcohol.

Television, movies and music glorify drinking to minors, which only adds to the pressure they feel from friends and family.

When students finally turn 21 and want to go out to Northgate and exercise their right to be served alcohol, they're going to do it as soon as they can, whether at midnight, noon the next day, three days later or at age 25. Delaying the inevitable is not a solution to the problem.

If this law is passed, it could even have negative effects on the

community. If a student was forced to celebrate his birthday at noon, he would be leaving the bars three to five hours later — right in the middle of rush-hour traffic. This is at a time when CARPOOL doesn't give free rides home. Although most people realize driving drunk is not a wise choice, neither is drinking until a blood-alcohol level of 0.48 is reached. Some of these students would drive drunk, and rush hour in College Station is not a good time for that to happen.

What concerned parents such as Wagener's should be focusing on is instilling in their children the ability to make level-headed choices. If Wagener had been aware of his condition, a sensible choice would have been to stop. Wagener's friends could also have seen when he had enough and stopped him.

Although Susan Wagener's intentions are admirable, delaying the time at which students can be served alcohol probably wouldn't have saved her son, and it won't relieve the pressure that students face.

“Delaying the time at which a person can be served alcohol by a mere 10 hours won't have an effect on the pressure he feels.”

Matt Rigney is a junior journalism major.

MAIL CALL

Proposed rail line wastes taxpayer money

In response to the April 21 opinion by Cody Sain:

While the prospect of a 20-minute travel time to Houston is appealing, Mr. Sain has ignored some key facts, the biggest of which is that the travel time would actually be greater than 20 minutes. To reach Houston in 20 minutes, a train would have to travel at well over 200 mph. The only operating high speed rail line in the United States, the ACELA Express in the northeast, travels at approximately 150 mph.

Mr. Sain also indicates that the high-speed rail would alleviate fuel constraints. Did he assume the rides would be free? The fare to travel on the ACELA Express from Boston to New York is \$128, well above the fuel cost to make the same trip by automobile. In addition,

travelers would still have to drive to the train station and arrange for transportation once arriving at their destination. It is doubtful that anyone would pay these costs just to save a few minutes on their travel time.

We should use the taxpayers' money to actually improve the transportation infrastructure rather than simply squander it on an unnecessary high-speed rail line.

Justin Winn
president, Texas A&M Institute of Transportation Engineers
Class of 2003

Students aren't seeing benefits of state funding

President Robert M. Gates' letter detailing the plan for a new research facility sounded like a great idea until you read where the funding for this facility

will come from. The funding will come from the state Permanent University Fund and from the Available University Fund, both of which have been said to be declining in amount in the past few years. This decline is said to have been part of the reasoning behind the need for a tuition increase. I understand the need for the addition of new buildings and new research facilities, yet I don't understand why this has to come out of the funding from the state.

These research facilities do not add any amount of revenue for the students. It would not lower the cost of tuition or fees. In fact, students would probably have to pay a fee to use this new facility.

The Permanent University Fund was set up to establish a school where people could come to get an education at an understandable cost, not pay for future research facilities. Having these new facilities would follow with the plan of Vision 2020, instead of focusing on the students who attend this University.

Being as though the tuition increase for the fall has already been passed, this may seem like a futile attempt to argue my point. I just wish that this administration would remember why this University was created 128 years ago.

Ramon Johnston
Class of 2004

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 200 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters also may be mailed to: 014 Reed McDonald, MS 1111, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647 Email: mailcall@thebattalion.net

