

# PSU's new president sets aggressive goals for growth

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Since 2002, Portland State University has doubled the number of student beds on campus.

It's a good start, said Wim Wiewel, PSU's new president. Just a month or so into his new role, Wiewel has started sketching a vision of PSU's future, which includes more buildings and more renovations. Additional student housing, which is critical to creating a more traditional academic experience, is a key piece of the picture.

"I wouldn't mind doubling it in another six years," said Wiewel, who has co-authored several books on the role urban universities such as PSU play in downtown development.

Adding more beds to accommodate students is just a start. His vision extends to classrooms, research facilities and offices, as well as support services and even retail space for the university's growing population.

"If we don't have a crane going at all times, we aren't doing our jobs," he told a crowd of PSU staff and students in September, when the school rededicated Shattuck Hall. Shattuck, built nearly a century ago as a primary school, was given a \$13 million makeover by Howard S. Wright Constructors and reopened this term as home to PSU's architecture program. When the university launches its graduate program in architecture next year, it'll be housed at Shattuck.

The need for space is clear. Portland State enrolled a record 27,000 students this fall. It educates them in 49 buildings on its 49-acre campus. In all, the school's classrooms, offices, student housing and other university-related programs occupy about 4.5 million square feet. Counting just aca-

demically and support space, it has about 88 square feet per student.

In contrast, Lindsay Desrochers, vice president of finance and administration, notes that its peer institutions average about 133 square feet per student.

The deficit translates to an immediate need for about 2 million square feet.

The vision of a new and expanded Portland State starts with the university's freshmen. Just 38 percent of students who enter as freshmen earn degrees within six years of starting college, a stark contrast to the 85 percent graduation rate for students who transfer from other schools as older students.

Wiewel said 38 percent is too low and raising it to at least 50 percent is a priority.

That's where the continuing emphasis on campus life comes into play.

Established on the Columbia River at Vanport to educate soldiers returning from World War II, Portland State moved to Lincoln High School's original downtown campus after Vanport flooded and Lincoln moved out. That brought PSU downtown, but did not give it much elbow room for traditional campus activities like residences.

Even now, with more than 2,000 beds on campus, it labors under the reputation as a commuter school. Wiewel wants to leave that label behind.

He said the school will better serve — and retain younger students — if it continues to transform itself into a place where they can not only study but live. It's even more necessary as PSU enrolls freshmen from beyond Oregon.

"We will be looking for places to build more student housing," he said.

Just six weeks into his new job, Wiewel hardly has had a chance to form any kind of detailed growth plan, but university officials already have been talking about



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PSU President Wim Wiewel, left, and Portland City Commissioner Randy Leonard discuss projects.

ways to expand the campus, including adding more land. The coming year will bring plenty of opportunities for campus and city leaders to discuss PSU's needs to grow in relation to the rest of the city.

He is, he said, undaunted by the challenge of urban development in the city.

Portland State is not particularly landlocked, he said. Surface parking lots and underdeveloped land offer room to grow. And aging buildings can be redeveloped for higher uses too.

With the future in its sights, PSU has plenty of construction in process and in the pipeline.

Deferred maintenance is a big challenge throughout campus. Before its renovation, Shattuck Hall, constructed in 1917, was a perfect example of a building past its prime.

Now, Wiewel called it a perfect example of what can be done to recycle an old building and give it a new purpose.

"I'm very proud of how the university has been able to reuse and recycle an old building," he said.

The real estate community is watching with interest.

NAI Norris Beggs & Simpson President Clayton Herring welcomes a new sense of investment at PSU, especially projects that bolster the region as a center for advanced research.

"Anything Portland does to gain stature in research is a net plus," said Herring, whose firm provides real estate brokerage, investment and management services.

That said, the university's campus at the southern edge of downtown is a development challenge because it's somewhat isolated from the rest of the central business district.

Herring's company manages several PSU buildings that have tenants. The tenants, he said, tend to rely on PSU staff and students for business. They don't get much traffic from the wider community.

PSU's push for more campus amenities is repeating itself across the country, said John Bartell, vice president and general manager for Opus Northwest, the national developer. The company builds residences and other facilities for universities and has seen former commuter schools such as PSU remake themselves as traditional campuses.

He said Portland State has positioned itself well to do that by purchasing land to the east and south of the main campus. But the future, he said, will depend on its ability to replace or renovate underused buildings.

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