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# State must help its universities

## Assembly should pass SUNY reforms that would advance UB 2020 plans

Updated: April 14, 2010, 6:50 am /  
Published: April 14, 2010, 12:30 am

Pieces of the University at Buffalo's future are falling into place. If UB's plans for growth and greatness unfold in ways that create jobs and boost the regional economy—part of the UB 2020 vision—that prospect will be bright.

But unless the State Legislature acts, the future remains clouded.

One piece of the plan advanced recently was the announcement of the possible sale of the McCarley Gardens low-income housing development along Goodell Street and Michigan Avenue to UB for \$15 million. Although that was understandably upsetting to residents, the sale would give UB room for medical campus expansion and allow the church selling the property to invest in more housing nearby.

The concerns of residents of McCarley Gardens, a grassy neighborhood where kids have played safely and some families have lived since the development opened in 1979, deserve response. But St. John Baptist Church, which owns the 15-acre parcel and has its own designs for a \$500 million Fruit Belt revitalization, is taking steps to accommodate residents in future development.

The deal still needs approval by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, but it could help with both neighborhood revitalization, which could help McCarley's residents, and with UB's large-scale plans to attract thousands of staff members and students to the downtown campus.

But there's another needed piece: The Assembly must act on reforms, which it so far has been unwilling to approve, that would allow UB to move forward with its 2020 plan. The Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act would allow UB and other state campuses to live by the same rules that virtually every other state's public university system enjoys. The governor and the chancellor and trustees of the State University of New York are all behind the changes.

The reforms are in Gov. David A. Paterson's executive budget bill. The Senate chose to include these reforms in its budget resolution, thanks to a strong push by State Sen. William T. Stachowski, D-Lake View, and Senate Democratic Conference Leader John Sampson of Brooklyn, with support from the Western New York delegation. But the Assembly's budget resolution cut out these same reforms and, worse, both chambers did not restore funding for public universities.

As a result, Albany is failing to grant the tools to complete UB 2020, essentially eliminating the chance at 6,700 direct jobs at UB, 20,000 good-paying building and construction jobs and nearly \$2 billion more in economic impact from the build-out and the kind of future economic growth seen in other research triangles.

The stakes are high and the time is now to act. This should be an easy sell during one of the toughest

economic periods for the state, since the university is not asking for funding, simply for policy tools. There is, however, strong union opposition.

The legislation's key features include a plan for predictable tuition increases and local retention of tuition. Moreover, the change would allow campuses the ability to enter into partnerships to leverage private-sector funding and economic growth. UB President John B. Simpson has said that if Western New York and SUNY do not get these reforms, there will be no UB 2020. Building the downtown medical campus—crucial for the plan and Buffalo—is at great risk.

At McCarley Gardens, the goals of the church, university and community can converge on a dream to enhance the entire region. Beyond dollars, though, there remains a need for policy tools that can make a difference.



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