




## OU Regents approve student housing center designs

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**NORMAN** — A new, \$75 million campus housing center at the University of Oklahoma will include a dining center, computer labs, study rooms and other resources designed to give students a complete college experience, OU officials announced Thursday.

It also could help recruit student athletes, school officials said.

Members of the OU Board of Regents on Thursday approved conceptual designs for the Sooner Center Student Housing project.

Officials hope to open the center before the fall of 2013.

The center will have a combination of two-bedroom and four-bedroom units that can accommodate about 380 students. Nearly half will be athletes.

“This is really going to be a remarkable transformation of this area of the university,” OU President David Boren said.

The center will be at the southeast corner of Jenkins Avenue and Lindsey Street, an area that was home to the original O’Connell’s Irish Pub & Grille until it closed earlier this year. It will include retail spaces, a courtyard, study areas and a gaming room, according to the designs.

The project will be funded through private sources, the Athletics Department and bond proceeds.

Boren said university officials hope to raise at least \$20 million through a fundraising campaign.

The new housing center will allow all of the university’s freshmen and sophomore student athletes who live on campus to live together in one building, said OU Athletic Director Joe Castiglione.

Currently, athletes live in three buildings on campus. Some of those buildings might be taken down after the new center opens, Castiglione said.

Boren said some rooms in the existing buildings are so small they can’t fit beds long enough for some student athletes.

More than half of the students who live in the new center will be nonathletes. That will create a more inclusive experience for student athletes, Castiglione said.

OU’s student athlete population has increased significantly in recent years, from about 430 in 1998 to about 600 today, Castiglione said. He said that growth probably stemmed from the addition and expansion of several sports, including women’s soccer and rowing.

Coaches and student athletes are excited about the new center because they believe it will help attract student athletes to OU, Castiglione said. He said many prospective students and their parents care about campus housing accommodations.

“This may be one of the most important projects we’ve ever taken on,” Castiglione said.

## OU regents approve design for new athletes housing facility

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NORMAN - The length of a Landry Jones bomb away from Owen Field, O'Connell's Irish Pub & Grille was torn down on Tuesday. An Oklahoma student blew "Taps" into his trombone, reflecting the loss of a 43-year game-day institution.

Even university president David Boren sensed the sadness.

"I saw the sentimental coverage this week, which is understandable in light of many memorable activities that took place at O'Connell's," he said at OU's board of regents meeting Thursday. "If those walls could talk, they'd have a lot to say."

Maybe it will lift spirits to know what's coming to the O'Connell's site at Jenkins Avenue and Lindsey Street - a new home for the Sooners.

The regents on Thursday approved the conceptual design for the Sooner Center Housing Center, a \$75 million residence that, if completed as planned, will host OU athletes by August 2013. Project funding will be derived from private fund-raising, athletic department capital accounts and bond proceeds.

"We hope to raise a minimum of \$20 million in this private fund-raising campaign, hopefully more," Boren said. "And then with the proceeds from bonds we will be able to start this project in the near term."

"This is maybe one of the most important projects that we've ever taken on at the University of Oklahoma," athletic director Joe Castiglione told the regents. "It gives us a chance for the first time in history to get all of our student-athletes under one roof. That's important as we try to give them the best start to their academic and athletic career coming to this campus."

"They'll stay in the facility for two years. Currently we have a portion of our student-athletes in our housing, and we can only accommodate them for one year."

Castiglione and Boren both referred to OU's three current athlete housing sites as "antiquated."

"Some rooms are even too small to have beds long enough for some of our student-athletes," Boren said.

Bud Wilkinson House, across the street from Owen Field, has its own historical marker out front. Many Sooners who move in there wind up doing what freshman running back Brennan Clay did.

"Being with the boys, especially our big class, was a lot of fun. We got to know each other, clowned around," he said. "But I moved out at the semester. They allowed three or four of us to move out because of good grades."

Assuming fundraising goes as planned and costs don't skyrocket during construction, incoming freshmen in 2013 won't be so quick to move out.

"We will provide amenities that those in the housing need, from dining to academic areas to lounges and game areas," Castiglione said.

The 230,000-square-foot, 392-bed Sooner Center also will include computer labs, faculty in residence, and the chance for athletes to mingle with non-athletes. Per NCAA guidelines, 51 percent of residents will not be OU athletes.

It's the 49 percent that excites coaches and administrators.

"It'll be a major advantage and recruiting boost for every program, not just football," Bob Stoops said. "We're all excited about it. It'll make a big difference."

"I think this is absolutely a terrific opportunity for all of our coaches," Castiglione said. "They know what this can mean for future student-athletes, how it can meet their requirement. Having great living quarters is probably the most important thing for many of them and their families to understand when they come."

"Now we can provide the opportunity for all our student-athletes coming here for the first time to live under one roof."

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