

CSU engines lab growth to foster change

An iconic city-owned building on North College Avenue and the surrounding property are in line to undergo some dramatic changes.

The CSU Engines & Energy Conversion Laboratory, which has been housed in the former city power plant building since 1994, has proposed adding a 60,000-square-foot building to the site. The triangle-shaped property is wedged between College Avenue, the Poudre River and an active railroad line.

As part of the project, utility buildings east of the main building as well as trailers that house Solix Biofuels, a spinoff company from the lab that is developing biodiesel from algae, would be removed and replaced with green space.

A fence separating lab equipment from the Poudre River Trail would be moved along with some of the equipment.

The final product would be visually dramatic but not massive, said Bryan Willson, founder and director of the engines lab, in an interview.

The facility, which would be called the Energy Innovation Center, is likely to attract international researchers and business

people, he said.

It would be linked to operations such as New Belgium Brewing Co. and the Rocky Mountain Innosphere, a nearby high-tech business incubator, and the new Fort Collins Museum of Discovery.

"This will further build Fort Collins' reputation for innovation," he said. "It brings a focus downtown and creates primary jobs."

Lease changes

Willson and the Colorado State University Research Foundation, or CSURF, have been discussing amendments to the lab's lease with city officials for five years. The City Council is expected to give preliminary consideration to a revised lease agreement at its Oct. 18 meeting.

The new lease would allow the lab to use the property for

Advertisement



**Protect Your Home
with ADT!**

ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER

**Click Here
to Learn More!**

40 years with the possibility of two 20-year extensions. CSURF would pay \$25 a year to lease the land the first 40 years and \$50 a year for the next 20 years, under a proposal reviewed last week by City Council.

The length of the lease is needed to secure funding for the \$16 million project, which will be funded through donations, officials said.

Council members did not vote on the proposal, but most said they favor revising the lease and supporting the lab even with the lease potentially lasting 80 years.

"I think this project ... is kind of everything we're about," said Mayor pro-tem Kelly Ohlson. "... It's CSU, CSURF, city partnerships; it's environmental health, economic health, good planning, infill redevelopment, habitat restoration. I mean, if not this, what?"

The revised lease would allow CSURF to build a parking lot for the facility on space next to the Northside Aztlan Community Center that could be used by Aztlan patrons on off hours.

The lease arrangement would be a benefit to the city, City Manager Darin Atteberry told the council. Marketing the property for other uses would be difficult.

CSURF and the lab have been "respectful" of the site's history and environmental issues over the years and in crafting their proposal, Atteberry said.

"I think that CSU and CSURF are uniquely situated right now to be able to do this primarily through donations and through a different investor than someone who might invest in a student housing project or commercial project in the downtown area," he said.

Connect past, future

Current plans for the new building call for it to be connected to and complement the existing familiar red-brick structure. When the building was a coal-fired power plant, it had four smokestacks that were removed years ago.

The 30-foot stacks would return, but this time they would be wind turbines. A hopper for wood chips and biomass would go in where a coal hopper once stood.

The new building would be designed to blend in with the historic building. A fountain that has stood in front of the building about 40 years would be moved a

Advertisement



**Protect Your Home
with ADT!**

ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER

**Click Here
to Learn More!**

few yards to make way for the new structure, said.

"The fountain would become an architectural element of the building rather than an afterthought," Willson said.

Lab officials are still working with city planners and the Landmark Preservation Commission on designs for the building. If the proposal gets through the city's development review process, construction could begin in May.

A portion of the site, which the city acquired in 1912, was a municipal landfill for many years. Soil compaction on the property is not adequate to accommodate the original design, which was for a three-story building with a basement, Willson said.

The current design is for a four-story building that would include space for classrooms, laboratories, offices, and advanced-energy businesses.

The power plant operated from 1935 to 1972. After it was decommissioned, the building sat vacant for years and fell into disrepair.

Willson started looking at the building as a potential lab in 1992. It was unheated and had no plumbing or insulation. Of its 4,000 windows, half were broken or missing.

About \$10 million has been invested in the building over the years to make the facility what it is today. But the interior is cramped

and more lab space is needed, he said.

The new building will be state-of-the-art in terms of energy efficiency, Willson said. It would be designed to meet platinum LEED certification standards at a minimum and be one of the most advanced buildings in the world.

The property has soil and groundwater contamination stemming from its days as a landfill and industrial site, including benzene, arsenic, lead, poly-aromatic hydrocarbons and methane.

CSURF would be responsible for managing contamination as it goes through construction following guidelines set by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, said Carol Webb, regulatory and governmental affairs manager for the city.

"This isn't technically a cleanup, it's really about managing the materials in place," she said.

Advertisement

An advertisement for ADT security services. The top half features the text "Protect Your Home with ADT!" in a bold, serif font. Below this is a dark, moody photograph of a person's silhouette in a doorway, looking towards a brightly lit room. The bottom left corner contains the ADT logo and the text "AUTHORIZED DEALER". The bottom right corner features the text "Click Here to Learn More!" in a stylized font.

**Protect Your Home
with ADT!**

ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER

**Click Here
to Learn More!**



 Wilson

Zoom

Advertisement

**Protect Your Home
with ADT!**



 **Click Here
to Learn More!**