

Payson University Campus Update - April 2017

By Gary Cordell

There have been a lot of changes in the project since the last update. One of the most obvious is that Highway 260 just east of the forest service entrance has been widened considerably. This is the first main project to take place since the pioneer road was opened in the spring. The pioneer road followed a cut pathway that weaved its way between the ponderosas to the location of the designed location of the academic building and the two student housing buildings. It was cut to allow for equipment to enter the site and do geological readings to understand the density of the soil to determine how difficult it would be moving the soil at various locations. As it turned out, the soil was more favorable for the excavating than anticipated.

The widening of Highway (HWY) 260 is needed because there needed to be a deceleration lane into the site as you are driving east toward Star Valley from Payson, and then a left turn lane was needed as you are driving west toward Payson. The widening project moved the road wider on the south side of the road, and it was a very complicated process. The main government entity that controls the permitting for the project is the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT). The permitting process with ADOT is what has created much of the delay in getting the project started, as we were expecting to start the widening in June and actually didn't start until August. Most of this was due to staffing levels at ADOT. There is a tremendous amount of design documentation to get approved through ADOT, and we aren't the only project in the state. As it turns out, ADOT was very cooperative in helping us expedite the paperwork through the entire approval process. Part of the widening involved work that was on forest service property. That also requires special documentation and that can be quite lengthy in time. However, our local forest service neighbors were very creative and pushed the paperwork through in a much shorter time period. Cooperation on this entire project was superb.

Our goal on this project is always to use local contractors. This was accomplished very well on the HWY 260 widening project. The general contractor was JnL Contracting, Inc. This local company was perfect for the project because of their local knowledge of the soils, their knowledge of the stringent ADOT requirements, and their hiring of local subcontractors. The final approval by ADOT of the widening project was in December 2016. This was very critical as it now gave us permission from ADOT to enter the actual site with equipment, which was not possible until the deceleration lane and left turn lanes were in place. It was too dangerous to have trucks and equipment entering and exiting without it, especially with traffic zipping through that location at 55MPH.

One of the major changes to the project was the decision to not underground the APS power lines. The reason was that the cost was so high, and that was not good for the budget in the Phase 1

portion of the project. There just wasn't a way to re-capture all that extra cost in the early stages of the income generating for the project. Where the academic building and the student housing were designed to be built, was right where the APS lines were designed to be buried underground. That meant moving the buildings to a new part of the site away from the lines. This was very significant because that meant that the new location for the buildings would have to be re-engineered for all the new terrain. This included new parking areas as well. This was accomplished by mid November 2016.

With the new location for the campus site, there needed to be a new route to get back to the southern side of the property where buildings were now located. Because of the topography, University Way had to be carefully designed so as to not have very steep grades given the potential for snow at our elevation. Many of the students, faculty and visitors may never have driven in inclement weather. This new road design has been successfully completed with the best possible grade changes.

We are now looking at the requirements for all the utilities which includes how APS will support with electricity, Northern Gila County Sanitation District for sewer, Payson Water Department, and a solution for propane usage. There will be a large water tank that will be erected on the site that will service the entire master plan for both domestic water use and for fire safety.

Negotiations continue with several different universities, as this will be a multiversity campus. The anchor university partner has not been solidified, however, we keep getting closer to finalizing this process. It is a very long negotiation, and adding a campus to a rural location needs to be vetted very well by the universities, and we understand that. We also recognize that the lack of a commitment is frustrating for many (including us!), and we are asking for your continued patience while we move through this very important decision in choosing the university partner for the anchor school.

Thank you for your continued interest by coming to the site for an update. We will continue to make information available as it develops.