

Penticton Western News

Public given preview of college expansion



Okanagan College student Erin Nendick works on her studies at the Penticton campus this week. An open house is scheduled for today to show off plans for the \$28 million expansion of the college. The information session will take place from 4-7 p.m. in the school cafeteria.

Mark Brett/Western News

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By [Steve Kidd - Penticton Western News](#)

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Supporters of Okanagan College will get their first chance today to see how plans for the new Centre of Excellence are shaping up at an open house for the \$28 million expansion.

The college, along with design firm CEI Architecture, are hosting the open house from 4-7 p.m. in the Penticton campus cafeteria, with a presentation from the architectural firm followed by a question and answer period.

“Anyone who is interested in our plans, we would really like to see. This is a community building and we want them to be proud of it,” said regional dean Donna Lomas, who is sure there will be a lot of questions. “We want them to understand the different goals of what it is we’re trying to achieve and how that might affect people as they come into the system.”

The full name of the project is the Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Building Technologies and Renewable Energy Conservation. Lomas said the name relates to more than just the type of courses they plan of offering there. Rather, it’s a concept that will be wrapped up in the fabric of the building.

Lomas expects a lot of questions will focus on the living building challenge, which she explains is even higher than the platinum level in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design green building rating system.

The living building concept revolves around creating a structure that makes as little impact as possible, with the goal of achieving “net zero” in its systems — taking no more than it returns.

“The living building challenge has so far not been achieved by anybody. I know there are a couple of buildings that are trying to reach that goal, but we’re certainly going to be one of the first pushing the envelope on this,” said Lomas. “It would be quite a coup for Penticton if we can get there. It may take us a few years, but the architects think it’s a believable goal.”

Lomas explains that even the positioning of the building has been adjusted to make the best use of the sunlight and wind for heating and cooling systems, lessening the need to put energy into those tasks.

“Where you can use passive systems to help the building run efficiently, that’s

what we're doing," she said. "In other words, you're not using materials all the time, you're trying to complement and lessen the carbon footprint and lessen your imprint on the land."

The building will use solar power for as much of the year as possible, Lomas continued, possibly generating enough excess power in the summer to feed back into the grid, balancing the energy it needs to use during the winter.


The new building will triple the size of the campus, allowing the college to bring all students back on campus from rented facilities, as well as creating badly needed space for growing enrolment.

According to the latest figures, the number of people enrolling at Okanagan College campuses up and down the valley is rising, with a total of 5,663 signing up for classes through out the region. In Penticton, 66 more students enrolled this fall than last, an increase of 13.4 per cent.

"The growth in student numbers tells only part of the story," said college president Jim Hamilton. "We're also seeing an increase in the number of credits students are taking — 8.9 per cent more credits this year than last fall. That means more of our students are taking more courses than they did in 2008."

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