

BTC to build new campus center, demolish four old buildings

KIRA M. COX - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM - By the middle of 2012, Bellingham Technical College should have a student center and auditorium, two things the school has been lacking in its 53 years.

The additions are part of a \$27 million construction project for a new campus center.

The new building will be in the heart of the campus, between the Morse Center and the Café Culinaire Restaurant building, and will replace the need for four aging buildings and provide additional classroom and lab space.

"We're running out of room," said Debra Jones, vice president of administrative services, adding that enrollment is up about 20 percent, compared to a couple years ago. "We're full, many of our programs we've expanded into evening programs and weekends. ... Square footage-wise, we don't have the capacity with our current campus configuration."

Every other year, the state community and technical college system surveys school facilities and makes a prioritized list of the most deficient buildings. The buildings being replaced at BTC have been labeled "severely deficient" for several years, and will be demolished as part of the project, Jones said.

"A large portion of our campus was constructed in the early '60s and early '70s," she said. "The infrastructure within the buildings doesn't support current technology."

The new, three-story, nearly 73,000-square-foot building will house classrooms and labs for the Computer Networking and Business and Computer Information Systems programs, which are currently housed in two of the buildings slated for demolition along Lindbergh Avenue.

The Learning Center, which supports the Basic Academic Skills program, and the Culinary Arts program, also will move to the new building when it is finished.

The Learning Center is currently in a building slated for demolition. The fourth building to be torn down is vacant.

The top floor of the new campus center will have an expanded campus library and a student center. The building also will feature an auditorium for large-group instruction and events, and the campus bookstore.

The project includes expanding student parking space off of West Illinois Street, and adding about 6,000 square feet of classroom and office space to two other buildings to accommodate displaced programs during construction. The location of the building additions hasn't been determined, but the spaces will remain after the campus center is complete, Jones said.

Construction, which will be overseen by Bellingham-based Exxel Pacific Inc., will start in May and is expected to take about 22 months.

Most of the money for the project is from the state. About 4,000 square feet will be funded by other sources: the bookstore must fund its own space under state law, and the student center will be paid for with fees that were approved by students several years ago.