

UC Berkeley backs off on plans for big new campus in Richmond

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The University of California, Berkeley, and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory are backing away from plans to develop a multi-billion dollar, 34-acre new global research campus in Richmond, officials confirmed Friday morning.

Nicholas Dirks, U.C. Berkeley's chancellor, met with members of a Richmond activist group Thursday evening, and said "significant budgetary challenges" at the university forced it to "indefinitely" suspend plans for the mammoth new campus, originally envisioned as evolving into a 5.4 million-square-foot complex over four decades.



The site envisioned for UC Berkeley's potential Richmond campus, which has been **suspended**... more

The new campus, dubbed the Berkeley Global Campus at Richmond Bay, has been in planning stages for years, but appeared to be stuck in slow motion recently.

Even so, as recently as April, U.C. Berkeley told the Business Times the huge project was still in the works, with environmental reviews completed and approvals obtained for 5.4 million square feet of development. At that point, it had spent \$25 million on environmental cleanup of the site, the Richmond Field Station between the East Shore bayfront and I-580.

Officials at Lawrence Berkeley National Lab, which recently has been a secondary partner in the project, sent me a statement Friday afternoon indicating that it earlier "scaled back" its plans when funding from its primary financial sponsor, the U.S. Department of Energy, failed to materialize.

Berkeley then took the lead, but the Lab ultimately decided for budgetary reasons "that there are no longer the means" for it to develop any projects in Richmond. That news was delivered to the Richmond community group Thursday night.

"The University will, however, continue to explore options for the site that reflect new priorities for the campus around enrollment growth and housing in the near future," Dirks said in a statement to the Business Times. "The campus is also committed to continue working closely with the City of Richmond on their Richmond Bay Specific Plan and existing partnerships in workforce training, procurement and education."

He added that the university will follow up if and when "the university's plans for new large-scale construction in Richmond are clear."

Dirks disclosed last week that he intends to resign once a successor is in place, possibly next year. The renowned public university's 10th chancellor had come under fire for a host of financial and management miscues, including an embarrassing parade of sexual harassment scandals involving high-ranking administrators and faculty.

Some faculty members— and quite possibly others at U.C. Berkeley and the University Office of the President — hope to see Dirks leave the scene more rapidly. University of California President Janet Napolitano immediately accepted Dirks' resignation and moved to find a successor post haste.

As for the Richmond campus, it appears to be another casualty of recent financial and management problems at Berkeley.

Back in April, U.C. Berkeley spokesman Dan Mogulof told the Business Times that the university hoped to see the Global Campus "as a dynamic extension of our main campus, and a place where our commitment to global engagement and potential revenue streams can be realized."

At the time, he said, U.C. Berkeley still hoped to fund the project through fundraising and philanthropy — a possible clue that other funding streams were drying up.

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