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USF gets approval for state's biggest-ever dorm project

By [Anastasia Dawson](#)



FRONT / MAIN -- ** TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO** Hillsborough, Tampa, 2-27-15---A student skateboards past the Epsilon dorm at USF. The dorm is one of a set of dorms collectively known as Andros 1. The dorms opened in 1964 and will soon be demolished to make way for a vibrant live-work-play residential village.

TAMPA — The state Board of Governors unanimously approved plans Thursday for the largest student housing project in its history — Andros Village at the University of South Florida Tampa campus.

USF's new mixed-use, student housing village will cost an estimated \$133 million and house 2,165 students, with shops, private rooms, a health and wellness center, a dining center, study rooms and an outdoor pool.

The village will also include the first Publix grocery store ever built on state university property if the plan is approved at the Board of Governors' next meeting, Jan. 20-21.

The village will replace nine 1960's era Andros dorms on the north end of campus that USF System President Judy Genshaft likes to refer to euphemistically as "more mature housing." The new complex will feature a combination of suite and traditional-style rooms designed to meet the standards for LEED Silver certification.

Demolition of the existing Andros Delta, Epsilon, Eta and Zeta dorms, as well as adjacent support buildings and the existing pool, could begin in May. Construction on rooms for about 1,250 students could start this summer and finish by fall 2017.

The Iota, Kappa, Lambda, Mu and Theta dorms could be demolished May 2017 and construction could start that summer on the remaining 900 beds. The entire project should be open to students in June 2018.

In a call from the board of governor's meeting in Miami, Genshaft said the new housing village will be transformative for the university. It's been three years since USF officials began planning for the dorms, she said.

"I'm a very focused, optimistic president," Genshaft said. "I always knew it would come together, but with this size of a project we had to have all the details right."

The project also brings USF closer to qualifying as a primary residential campus under the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Learning. That classification is given to universities where 25 percent of undergraduates live on campus. The new dorms should boost USF's housing capacity to 6,500 and, ideally, 18 percent of the undergraduate population. USF housing is at capacity now with 5,600 of 40,000 students calling campus home, said spokesman Adam Freeman.

USF is working on the project in a private-public partnership with Capstone Development Partners and Harrison Street Real Estate Capital. It is the largest partnership of its kind in the State University System, and one Genshaft and USF trustees say they expect to see replicated at other universities soon.

Birmingham, Ala.-based Capstone specializes in student housing developments. The company built the Greek village at Florida State University as well as residences at Florida Atlantic University, the University of Florida and the University of West Florida.

Through the partnership with USF, Capstone-Harrison Street bears the risk for financing, building, furnishing and operating the project and makes its money off student rents. By leasing the land, USF would make \$317 million over 52 years.

At \$2,200 a semester, the current Andros dorms, with two students to a room and eight sharing a single bathroom, are the cheapest living option on USF's campus. Rooms in Juniper-Poplar Hall, built in 2009 with shops and other amenities, cost \$2,826 to \$3,300 a semester, and the two bedroom apartment-style Holly dorms cost \$3,620 a semester.

Brian Lamb, vice chairman of USF's board of trustees, said rent in the new dorms will not exceed the most expensive rooms currently on campus. Early projections say rooms could cost \$3,395 to \$4,595 a semester.

"We know students who live on campus, particularly during their first and second year, become more connected to their university," Genshaft said. "Data across the nation supports that students who live on campus do better, finish school sooner and are happier graduates. This project is important for the satisfaction and recruitment of the best and brightest students for our future."

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