

Kibbie Dome project under way

Work on west wall has begun; east wall replacement on hold for now

By Halley Griffin, Daily News staff writer

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A crane at the University of Idaho Kibbie Dome stands taller than any structure in Moscow and looms over the dome's scaffolding-covered west end.

Observers can watch the crane remove chunks of the western wall, which will be replaced with translucent fiberglass panels as part of a major renovation project planned for the 33-year-old facility.

Replacement of the east wall, however, is on hold.

Vice President for Finance and Administration Lloyd Mues said there are several factors stalling work on the east wall.

Officials don't want to replace the wall and then discover that future construction projects require it to be torn down again. They also lack the necessary money to work on that end.

"We just don't have the money for that wall right now," Mues said. "So we are anxious to see if we might get something through the Permanent Building Fund and how much."

The Idaho State Board of Education in December authorized the UI to spend \$10 million on life-safety improvements to the Kibbie Dome. The university had hoped to spend \$17 million on the improvements but had to scale back the project due to shaky bond markets.

The university instead took out a short-term construction loan from Wells Fargo to cover the first phase of the life-safety improvements.

Assistant Vice President of Auxiliary Services Tyrone Brooks said the university hopes to receive several million dollars from the state's Permanent Building Fund, an ongoing portion of state treasury funding mandated by Idaho Code.

Still, the UI could be millions of dollars short of the originally anticipated cost of all the life-safety improvements.

"We've got to find a way to bridge that," Brooks said.

East-end construction and improvements will be on hold until that gap is filled, but Brooks said officials still hope the project can be completed reasonably soon.

The Kibbie Dome also needs improvements in accessibility, fire-suppression and smoke-exhaust systems. These improvements will come after the west wall is replaced and a field-level exit is installed.

"Basically almost everything we set out to do we're doing, except for that east-end wall," Mues said.

Mues said he and other officials are excited to finally see construction begin on the dome.

"This is a great project," Brooks said, adding that he believes it truly is investing in the university's future.

The life-safety improvements are separate from the Kibbie Dome "game-day" renovation project, which carries a \$52 million price tag.

The plans include increasing seating capacity by 3,600 seats to 20,000, lowering the playing field, updating the press box and rest rooms, adding a club room and adding VIP parking at the west end of the dome.

The fundraising campaign for the "game-day" renovations began in January.

The UI's May 16 commencement ceremony will take place in the Kibbie Dome, as will an academic conference on evolution in June. These are the last two events that will be staged in the dome until kickoff of the football team's first home game this fall, which is scheduled for Sept. 19 against San Diego State University.

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