The Long Game in Allston

Following approval of the University’s Institutional Master Plan (IMP) by the Boston Redevelopment Authority last October, the work of envisioning much larger, longer-term academic and commercial growth on Harvard’s Allston properties has now begun. President Drew Faust signaled the news in a low-key e-mail, titled “Allston Update,” just before the December holiday break. It announced that provost Alan Garber and executive vice president Katie Lapp would direct three committees charged with advising on “the creation or relocation” of academic facilities; planning “a community of commercial and nonprofit” entities in an “enterprise research campus”; and consolidating these ideas and putting them into a University, regulatory, and financing context.

Harvard’s aspirations for Allston have come in waves. Ambitious plans early in the previous decade for a multimillion-square-foot research campus, perhaps with new undergraduate Houses, fell to financial realities. Construction on one large laboratory complex halted in 2010, when the University felt unable to incur more debt (at least several hundred million dollars) to complete it. Now reenvisioned as a home for much of the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS), the building is a major capital-campaign priority; work is under way to redesign the site and proceed to completion soon. Construction has also begun on Barry’s Corner: residential and retail buildings at the northwest corner of the Western Avenue-North Harvard Street intersection. Other projects are under way (renovation of the hockey arena) or just completed (Tata Hall, the new executive-education residence at Harvard Business School—HBS).

The IMP authorized nine projects, most within, or at the periphery, of the existing HBS campus and the athletic facilities. They include renovation or replacement of executive-education housing, and conference buildings; construction of new HBS offices; and the Harvard Stadium renovation. There are three greenfield projects: a new basketball arena with housing, behind Barry’s Corner; “a gateway” office building at the northeast corner of that intersection; and a hotel-conference center on Western Avenue—the only facility truly separated from the existing campus or current building sites. (The draft environmental impact report, published January 6, has comprehensive maps and a schedule for the IMP projects; see evp.harvard.edu/allston%20.)

But most of Harvard’s Allston plans remain unified. Schematic “long-term vision” diagrams from recent filings show new road systems, academic quadrangles on the parking lots and playing fields south and west of HBS, new academic and commercial buildings lining Western Avenue to the Charles River, and a large enterprise campus behind the Genzyme factory and beside the Massachusetts Turnpike interchange. In time, these developments may approach the scope of the plans from a decade ago. (See diagrams, page 23.)

The committees “formalize a structure for the next phase of planning for Allston,” said Provost Garber during a mid January conversation—beginning the process of “thinking hard about what else will go into Allston” for academic and other facilities as the area develops. Allston has been part of his agenda continuously, he noted. The new committees had begun to take shape even before approval of the IMP. Their unveiling, he said, formally starts the process in light of current aspirations, Garber said (all three committee rosters are posted at www.provost.harvard.edu/reports). Purpose-built facilities in Allston may better suit research synergies emerging in new fields or across disciplinary lines than opportunities in Cambridge. (And SEAS will have a large presence in the vicinity now; the new planning will

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be influenced by what might locate near those applied scientists, by the non-SEAS users sited there, and by shared facilities incorporated into the structure.)

Identifying those fields involves judgments about how research will evolve in the next decade to 15 years, he indicated—a process in which the views of the Harvard community will be solicited. To that end, the committee members are drawn from most Harvard schools—including SEAS, on a growth trajectory, and the Graduate School of Design, which is out of space in Gund Hall. Members will help determine the focal fields for Allston, consider faculty and student space needs, investigate how to pay for the plans, and see where these fit in Allston overall: a major role in shaping Harvard’s future.

Asked whether the committees’ creation signals anything about the pace of

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the Harvard Campaign and ambitions to accelerate the Allston timetable, Garber observed only that philanthropy and external economic conditions (such as endowment returns) were unpredictable—but having plans in place would enable Harvard to move quickly if the means become available.

External conditions, aided by planning foresight, will also affect the timing for the 36-acre enterprise research campus. It is intended to accommodate commercial space capitalizing on discoveries from Harvard and other universities. The site, near what he characterized as “one of the greatest concentrations of research, students, and faculty in the world,” is one-fifth larger than Kendall Square, the area around MIT that has become a magnet for biotechnology, pharmaceutical, and information technology businesses.

That planning committee, co-chaired by

Huntington Lambert

In the old farmhouse in Dover, Massachusetts, where “Hunt” Lambert grew up, “everything was broken.” His chore as an eight-year-old was to wake up early and take a blowtorch to the pipes, so the water could get past the ice—or, if ice had burst the pipe, to cut out that section and weld in a new one. “I’m a handyman—all I do is fix things,” he says. “I went from pipes to fixing multinational corporations and now, fixing higher education. Toasters are my specialty, but multinational corporations pay better.” As dean of continuing education and University extension since 2013, his ambitions run large: “to ensure that high-quality education is available at a fair price to the 20 million Americans who need better education to participate in a knowledge economy.” At 10 years old, the “massively dyslexic” Lambert couldn’t read, but could break down and reassemble a car. He became an expert cliff-jumping and mogul skier who turned into a “really serious” student at Colorado College, where he majored in psychology and business, met his wife, Kelly, now a lawyer, and graduated in 1980. Next he joined a venture-capital company before earning an M.S. in management from MIT’s Sloan School in 1984. He worked in strategic marketing for US West in Denver, then moved to Colorado State University, where he taught, directed the Center for Entrepreneurship, and, with a team, created a public online university in 11 months. Now, Harvard is offering HarvardX MOOCs, with student services, for credit at low tuition. “Besides the 20 million in America, let’s talk about the two billion outside America,” he says. “We all know that the only path to sustainable freedom is education.”
John Harvard's Journal
Lapp and Rick McCullough, vice provost for research, includes faculty members versed in real estate and economic development, and administrators responsible for technology licensing and campus planning and construction. They have been charged to think “expansively,” Garber said. Given Boston’s process for negotiating taller, denser development than Cambridge permits, the resulting facilities, in toto, could represent a big investment (presumably led by private investors, on terms to be discussed). He emphasized that no one envisions a biotech or IT park per se: the uses will emerge with discovery and might embrace fields of research, as yet unknown, with commercial potential. Much planning, permitting, and infrastructure investment must precede construction, but the torrid pace of building in Kendall Square and on the Boston waterfront makes it attractive to prepare the site, should developers’ appetite extend westward.

The academic and enterprise groups will exist for a few years at least, Garber suggested, assisted where necessary by support staff and consultants. They report to a steering committee. Garber is chair, joined by Lapp; the deans of law, design, SEAS, HBS, and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS); a professor of urban planning who has completed significant assignments in Boston (including the master plan for the Seaport innovation district); and administrators—significantly including Harvard’s senior development, government relations, and financial officers. They are responsible, he said, for “Allston development from a holistic perspective”: how pieces fit together, design, financing, and permitting. The steering committee will coordinate its work with the detailed planning and capital-budgeting functions managed by Katie Lapp, and with the schools, and issue recommendations to Faust. The Corporation’s finance and capital-planning committees will also weigh in, before the governing board decides to authorize development projects.

The schematic plan for greater Allston laid out in the

Illustration by Mark Steele
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IMP and environmental report is exactly that, he emphasized: provisional at best. But clearly, as FAS, the design and medical schools, and others plan for future research and teaching space; as the IMP and other projects morph from plan to reality; and as Boston’s building momentum resumes and the University’s fundraising gains momentum, the sap is running again for a new season of imagining the Allston, and Harvard, of the future. Said Garber, “We’re excited to move forward.”

The College’s New Dean

RAKESH KHURANA, Bower professor of leadership development at Harvard Business School and professor of sociology in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS), will become dean of Harvard College on July 1. He and his wife, Stephanie Ralston Khurana, have served as master and co-master of Cabot House since mid 2010, and will retain those posts when Khurana assumes his new duties in University Hall. FAS dean Michael D. Smith announced the appointment on January 22. It follows a formal search, and concludes a somewhat difficult decanal transition from Evelynn M. Hammonds, who departed at the end of the 2012-2013 academic year, to Donald Pfister, who serves as interim dean this year.

As a House master, Khurana is already deeply involved with undergraduates’ daily lives outside the classroom, an important aspect of the College dean’s responsibilities. In inclination and intellect (he studies leadership development, organizational behavior and effectiveness, and management as a profession), he is known for building consensus, listening and creating opportunities for others to be heard, and enthusiastic engagement with the students in Cabot House. (For a full report on Khurana’s background and Harvard commitments, see http://harvardmag.com/khurana-14.)

In his statement, Dean Smith said Khurana “brings to the deanship an intimate understanding of the Harvard College experience, a profound commitment to the values of a liberal-arts education, and a warm and compassionate personality that accompanies his belief in the importance of community and an inclusive approach to decision-making.” The new dean, he continued, “will advance undergraduate education with both a respect for enduring values and the