

Convention center back on the table as FSU pays for updated feasibility study

[TaMarvn Waters](#), Tallahassee Democrat Published 6:24 a.m. ET Sept. 24, 2018



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An updated feasibility study has been commissioned to determine if and what kind of [convention center could be suitable for Florida State's emerging Arena District](#).

During Thursday's Blueprint board meeting, city and county commissioners green-lighted the study. FSU has agreed to pay for it and partner with the Tallahassee-Leon County Office of Economic Vitality for the next six months.

Once the study is completed, the Blueprint board will review the findings and determine whether to [grant up to \\$20 million toward the long-discussed project](#), which will require bond financing as early as 2020.

Changes made since the 2011 study?

A 2011 feasibility study by HVS indicated the need for a convention center. However, the economic landscape has shifted with more hotels coming online or in the works downtown and near Gaines Street.

"Once we have all of that data, we will know what is the real need for a convention center," said Ben Pingree, director of PLACE, which stands for Planning, Land Management & Community Enhancement. "There's a ton of change so we really need to know from the experts what is the modern day demand."

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In a Sept. 4 letter to Pingree, FSU Real Estate Foundation Executive Director Kevin Graham outlines the university's plan to create an Arena District. Plans call for a convention center, a hotel and relocating the FSU College of Business. The design phase should be complete in the next 24 to 36 months.

"We are very pleased with our commissioners' decision to fund the convention center in 2020," Graham told the Tallahassee Democrat. "Establishing the Arena District as a location for convention business will profoundly impact our community's economic development platform."

In the letter, Graham talks of steps already made — ownership of the Tucker Civic Center in 2013, a groundbreaking in the next one to two years for the College of Business and plans for a hotel development independent of OEV and the Blueprint board.

"FSU absolutely values a strong relationship with the City, County and Blueprint leadership," Graham wrote. "We have each made significant contributions, and together we will continue to support and promote economic growth in our community. Our respective obligations demand we remain the best stewards possible of the land and financial resources that have been entrusted to us. FSU is ready to move forward on the hotel and convention center development now."

Agreement to see hotel with up to 300 rooms

Graham said a hotel is a high priority. Letters between Graham and Pingree indicate an agreement to see a full-service convention hotel with up to 300 rooms and 50,000 square feet of convention space.

Blueprint board members expressed overall support for the feasibility study.

"This is going to be a great project in my mind. The study is absolutely necessary," City Commissioner Scott Maddox said. "We are a small puzzle piece in a much larger puzzle that's being put together in this district. And, I think we should be an active and willing participant with our puzzle piece."

Leon County Commissioner Bill Proctor said there needs to be public access if taxpayer funds are used.

[Pointing to the Gateway project](#) that rankled some residents, he expressed caution and said to move forward FSU should formalize its plans in writing to the Intergovernmental Agency, including the university's master plan.

"Those are very important points to me when we are dealing with an entity like Florida State," he said.

He said the board was making a "skeletal commitment" and said the partnership needs to be further fleshed out.

Back story: [Providence and Progress: Residents bracing for potential change](#)

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Snapshot of FSU's economic impact

\$10 billion — economic impact statewide

\$850 million — money spent by its students in the local economy

\$25 million — investment in improving the Tucker Civic Center.

14,000 people — number of employees

<https://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/money/2018/09/24/updated-feasibility-study-approved-fsus-convention-center/1380657002/>