

YSU

Board set to vote on energy-saving upgrades

By: Bill Rodgers
NEWS EDITOR

At tomorrow's Board of Trustees meeting, members will vote whether to approve contracting with Johnson Controls Inc. to make energy-saving upgrades to Youngstown State University's facilities. Under the proposed contract, JCI guarantees at least \$15 million in energy and operational expense savings over the contract's ten-year span and will pay the amount of any shortfall.

Under the contract, YSU will borrow up to \$12 million to finance the upgrades. The university will pay the loans with the annual savings in energy consumption it would collect as a result of the upgrades.

The contract is made possible by Ohio Revised Code 3345.64-66, which allows public universities to contract with energy services companies for the purposes of making energy conservation upgrades to campus facilities. John Hyden, YSU's executive director of facilities, said the law revises the way state universities apply for energy-sav-

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ing contracting and funding procurement.

Hyden said the law allows the university to work with a single contracting company rather than ask for bids from companies for each project. The law also allows the university to borrow the money necessary for the upgrades from a third-party financier, without a budget appropriation from the state general assembly. Hyden said the financier would be found by sending out requests for proposals.

Hyden said that the university would be required to pay 10 percent of the cost of the upgrades in two years. The university would pay off the entire cost in 10 years.

Hyden said he had “absolutely no worries” about the university being able to pay

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off the cost of the upgrades.

"We're not dealing with fly-by-night contracting companies; the university would be working with the leaders of the industry. The proposed vendor also guaranteed us the savings. If we fall short, they pay the difference," Hyden said.

Hyden said the project that would offer some of the biggest savings to the university would be a new lighting system. The university would switch from the typical fluorescent light bulbs it currently uses to smaller, more energy efficient lights. He said that having the latest lighting technology would offer the university 'significant savings.'

"You wouldn't normally think about the cost of turning a light on, but when you light as many as we do, changing the lighting system is a very cost-effective thing to do," Hyden said.

If YSU signs with JCI, Hyden said it would have to decide whether to upgrade its current electric cooling system or to use a steam cooling system. YSU is cur-

rently using an electric cooling system, but Hyden said the university would explore the possibility of steam cooling by negotiating possible rates with local steam utility Youngstown Thermal. YSU currently uses a steam system for heating.

"We're not sure which way to go yet. There are some variables that still need to be worked out," Hyden said.

John Habat, vice president for administration at YSU, said the current electric cooling system is getting old, can no longer efficiently serve the needs of the university and needs to be replaced.

JCI outlined the benefits and problems of each system in a presentation they will give to the board tomorrow. An electric system would cost approximately \$9.4 million; a steam cooling system would cost approximately \$11 million.

With the electric cooling system, the report said the university would eliminate the risk of relying on Youngstown Thermal for steam. The university would also remove R-11, a refriger-

ant that Hyden said the EPA has deemed harmful to the ozone, from the campus.

A problem with the electric system, however, is that the university would not have any flexibility in fuel usage. The university would be limited to using electricity.

With the steam cooling system, the university would still have its electric chillers, allowing more flexibility; electricity or steam could be used. The diversity would allow YSU to take advantage of whichever fuel cost less in the future. The detriments to a steam system are that they would require higher maintenance costs, and would rely on Youngstown Thermal. The R-11 refrigerant would still remain on campus in this scenario.

Hyden said the energy saving upgrades would reflect positively on YSU's image.

"I'm excited about this project," Hyden said. "It will show that we're good stewards of our financial and natural resources."

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