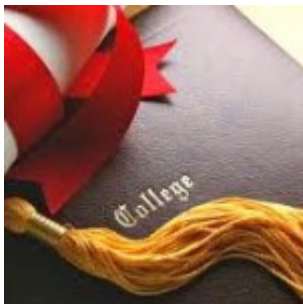


Towns on way to Lake Tahoe want a 4-year college

By Loretta Kalb, Sacramento Bee

Cordova Hills, the newly approved 2,700-acre development in southeast Sacramento County, isn't the only locale aiming to lure a private university.



Cordova Hills won 4-1 approval last week from the county Board of Supervisors, based at least in part on the appeal of the developer's plan to seek a university campus.

And while developer Ron Alvarado has said he will continue to work to attract another university after one candidate withdrew, a check with other jurisdictions in the region shows he'll have to get in line.

The mayor of Folsom, in a letter to Supervisor Roberta MacGlashan last week, wrote that the city has been aggressively pursuing development of a four-year university for the last three years.

On Friday, Folsom Mayor Steve Miklos said a couple universities have shown serious interest in Folsom and one is likely close to a decision.

Several communities in Sacramento and Placer counties are making such efforts to draw four-year campuses.

The strategy: Attract institutions that can diversify local economies, spawn entrepreneurship, produce higher-paying university jobs and bring the cachet that comes with higher learning.

Miklos said the presence of two-year Folsom Lake College, with its importance to the city and its growing amenities, has buoyed his optimism that his city will soon be named the winning candidate for a private university.

Large universities in the region, when they do come, will likely look for strategic sites along the Interstate 80 and Highway 50 corridors, he said.

"You are probably not going to put one in Folsom and one in Cordova Hills," Miklos added. "That probably doesn't make a lot of sense."

Of course, not all universities are made the same.

Clark Whitten, Mather program manager for Sacramento County, said the possible universities run the gamut, with differing focuses and enrollment, so there is no rule of thumb about how close campuses can be.

Sacramento County already is in contract with a partnership of California investors, Mather South LLC, to develop about 800 acres at the south end of Mather. About 175 acres are planned for a university.

The recruitment effort hasn't yet begun. But when it does, Whitten said, "That will test, nationwide, what the appetite for a university at our location is."

The city of Roseville is in discussions with a half-dozen universities – Sierra College, Drexel University, University of the Pacific, Brandman University, William Jessup and the College of Continuing Education at Sacramento State – on a plan for a 40,000- to 100,000-square-foot learning center, perhaps in downtown Roseville.

The aim, said Mike Isom, project manager for Roseville's higher education efforts, is to increase access for residents and businesses to higher learning at a central site. One

university would serve as landlord, with the other participants having access for teaching space.

The Van Hook University Center at the College of the Canyons in Valencia operates such a program, with 23 “smart” classrooms, two computer laboratories, six meeting/seminar rooms and a lecture hall/theater at the disposal of its constituent universities and their students.

In Elk Grove, Mayor Gary Davis said his goal is to attract a university to the city’s southeast area, along the Highway 99 corridor south of Elk Grove Boulevard and north of Kammerer Road.

Even the infrastructure for the defunct Elk Grove Promenade site – the mall that former owners General Growth Properties partially built before seeking bankruptcy protection – could be a potential higher education site, he said.

Outreach done so far, Davis said, shows that universities “expect free land or close to it.”

Providing land was Placer County’s plan in 2008, when the county Board of Supervisors adopted a 1,300-acre specific plan for West Placer that included 600 acres for a university.

The idea, Supervisor Kirk Uhler said, was that a four-year university such as Drexel would accept donation of the entire 1,300 acres and then sell the non-university land for planned housing and commercial uses. Proceeds from that, he said, would help pay for at least part of the university construction.

Drexel was interested, but withdrew in 2011.

Uhler said that, nevertheless, the site will work for other private universities.

Is it possible, or practical, for all of the jurisdictions to land a university?

Uhler likes the concept.

"I would love to see us all start sprouting university opportunities," Uhler said. "I'd love for Placer County to have a good, thriving university environment. I think it only helps overall with educational and economic development opportunities to have more than one.

"You're not just serving the local needs, which is what we need to do," he added. "We currently export the vast majority of our kids to other areas.

"So we need to serve the local, indigenous population and actually begin importing these finer young minds and the business and research opportunities that come with that."