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## Demolition begins on aging Bemis Lawrence Hall

By AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com) Sep 6, 2019 Updated Sep 6, 2019

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Western Kentucky University civil engineering students Daris Payne (right) and Ryan Mains (second from left), and civil engineering instructor Jason Wilson (left) and Tyler Baker talk Friday, September 6, 2019, as Bemis Lawrence Hall is demolished on campus. (Bac Totrong/photo@bgdailynews.com)

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Staring up at a towering excavator outfitted with a claw, Anthony Maldonado watched as it took bites out of Bemis Lawrence Hall, sending debris falling to the ground below.

“It’s unexpected,” said Maldonado, a Western Kentucky University sophomore from Radcliff. When he pictured the demolition of the 1960s-era residence hall, he thought of dynamite and explosions, much like the implosion of a skyscraper.

Maldonado was joined by at least 100 other onlookers who gathered around the residence hall Friday to watch the beginning of a 90-day demolition process. The university welcomed students to watch the demolition by offering free coffee and doughnuts.

Alyssa Bailey, a graduate student from Russellville, expected something more like a wrecking ball.

“I thought it would be faster, like bigger, but we think it’s really cool,” she said.

“This was the safest, best way to bring it down,” said Mike Reagle, executive director for Housing and Dining. “The whole process will take 90 days. They’ll take out of here an estimated about 350 truckloads of debris, which will all be recycled.”

Built in 1966, Bemis Lawrence Hall was named in honor of the vice chairman of the university’s Board of Regents from 1955 to 1966. It was closed this summer to prepare for the new “First-Year Village,” which will open in the fall of 2021 and include two residence halls and an enclosed greenspace.

Over the next two years, campus leaders want to demolish Bemis Lawrence Hall and then Barnes Campbell Hall. Both buildings will be replaced with two high-end residence halls that feature a “pod-style” concept. The idea is to have fewer students sharing a floor’s common amenities, such as bathrooms and lounges, by building to house about 25 students per pod.

Within the same project, administrators want to convert the large Pearce-Ford Tower parking lot into green space enclosed by the two new more elongated residence halls that will be situated just off Normal Street.

Although Barnes Campbell Hall is actually closer to the First-Year Village construction site on Normal Street, Bemis Lawrence “is actually in the footprint of building No. 2. You can see the hole over there where they’ve begun to get ready to pour the footers and that sort of thing for building No. 1,” Reagle said. “This building has to come down before they can pour the footers for building No. 2.”

After the \$48 million project concludes, the plan is to open both residence halls in the fall of 2021.

“This time two years from now, we will have two brand new buildings sitting here. The parking lot will be gone. It’ll be all greenspace out there,” Reagle said, adding that campus leaders are still evaluating exactly when Barnes Campbell Hall will come down.



Through the first-year village project, campus officials have said they’re aiming to provide freshmen students with living-learning communities organized around interests they share. It’s part of the university’s broader goal to keep students around longer after their first year on the hill.

Asked about the quality of campus housing, Maldonado recalled his father’s reaction when he helped him move in. His father compared it to the U.S. Army barracks he used to sleep in before retiring.

Bailey never lived in Bemis Lawrence Hall herself, but she had friends who did live in the female-only residence hall.

“They did not enjoy Bemis,” she said, recalling allergies they had due to mold issues. Bailey lived in Minton Hall, which was also temporarily closed due to mold issues. To improve housing, she suggested adding more apartments, like the units on Kentucky Street.

“The ones they have now, there’s like a super long waiting list,” she said.

Overall, she said, the campus could use more modern freshmen housing.

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## Aaron Mudd

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