

Posted Online: Apr 28, 2009 08:40PM

Quinn: WIU riverfront campus will be part of budget

[Comment on this story](#)

By Pete Nickeas

SPRINGFIELD -- Gov. Patrick Quinn pledged Tuesday to fund the long-proposed \$80 million Western Illinois University riverfront campus when a budget is passed later this year.

Last month, Quinn said he thought the Quad-Cities should have a full riverfront campus, but Tuesday was the first time he publicly committed to funding it.

But Quinn doesn't have the final say in the matter. Lawmakers would have to approve the funding and there isn't a formal motion before the legislature. Quinn wouldn't say why he didn't include the full amount in the construction budget he proposed to lawmakers last month.

When the governor proposed a construction plan in March, he included \$16 million for extensive renovations to the existing building at the WIU-Quad Cities campus. University plans call for a three-building riverfront campus at a cost of \$80 million.

Quinn also said he would visit the Quad-Cities in coming weeks to talk about the Western campus.

University officials and area lawmakers have tried to get the riverfront campus off the ground since 2003, but the project has been hampered by a lack of state funding.

State Rep. Pat Verschoore, D-Milan, said the governor's Chief Operating Officer Jack Lavin, was very supportive of the riverfront campus plan when he met with a Quad-Cities delegation of business, government, and labor leaders last week.

"He asked a lot of good questions, took a lot of notes, and said he'd relay all the information to the governor," said Verschoore, who was optimistic and thought the meeting went well.

State Sen. Mike Jacobs, D-East Moline, also attended the meeting between Lavin and the delegation. He said this is the state's one shot at providing full funding - a looming tax



Photo: submitted

The final design for the first building on the Western Illinois University Riverfront campus is complete. This view is from the northwest of the 20-acre campus, located on the site of Deere & Co's former tech center near 34th Street and River Drive. The building will include 15 classrooms, a computer lab, engineering technology lab, academic support center, as well as meeting rooms and 26 faculty/staff offices.

increase that would be used to pay for a statewide construction plan might provide money now that won't be there in the future.

Though there's not a firm proposal aside from the \$16 million in the governor's construction plan, Jacobs said he thought Lavin and the governor understood the importance of the campus.

"Jack's an economic development guy, that's where he started. He understands the importance of the university toward attracting outside business, so it wasn't a hard sell to Jack," Jacobs said. "We set it up in such a way that the university won't capture all the money -- they won't have a book store or

a food store, or housing. Those will all be things off campus that local business can come in and compete for."

Verschoore said there's around \$100 million in private money waiting to be pumped into the area if the riverfront campus is constructed.

"There's a lot of people that want to move in around there if a riverfront campus comes to the Quad-Cities, private businesses and ancillary services, but there's going to be new roads and things associated with that too," he said.