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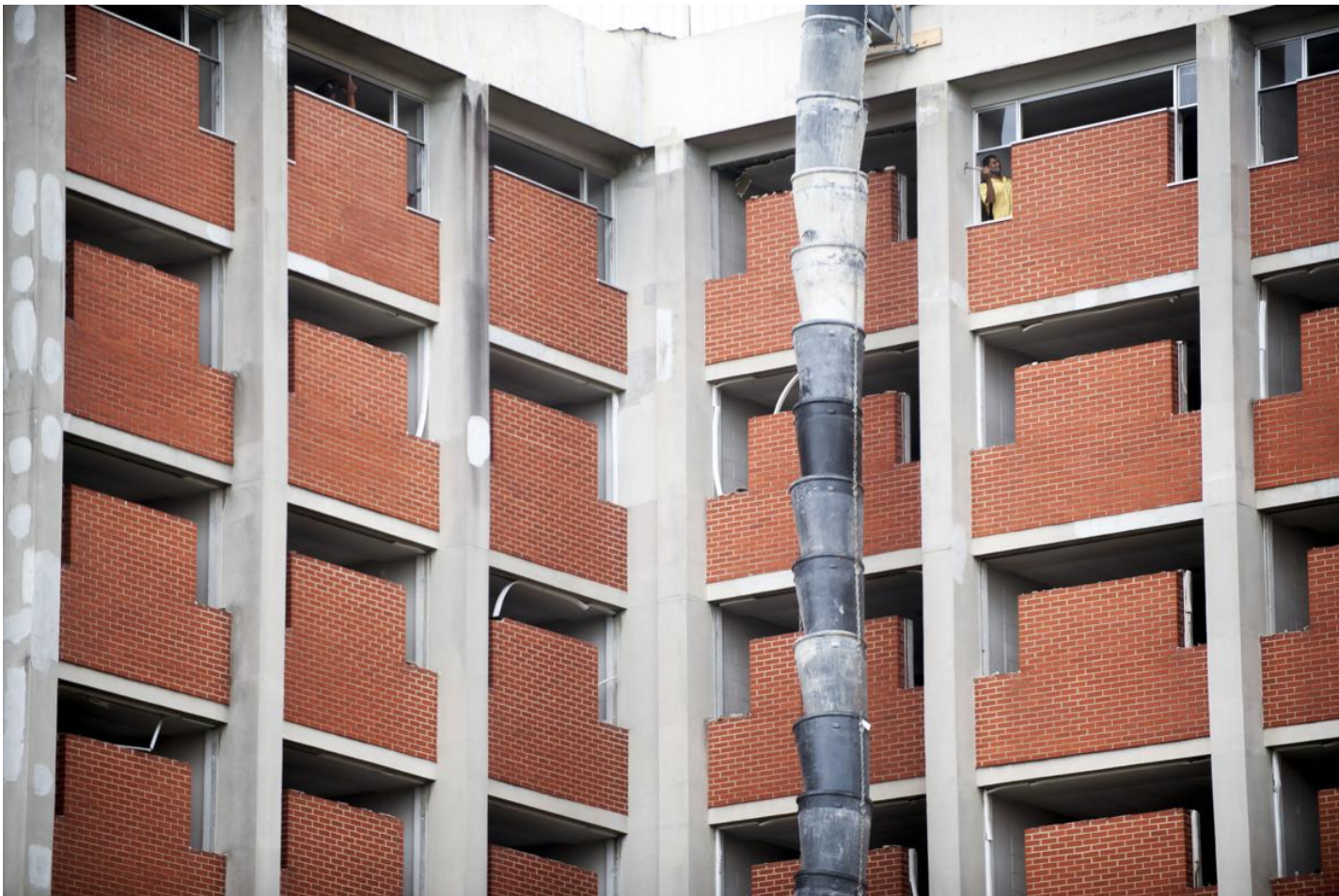
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WKU to begin replacement of two residence halls next month

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com Jul 18, 2019



Construction continues Thursday, July 18, 2019, at Western Kentucky University's Barnes-Campbell Hall and Bemis Lawrence Hall. (Bac Totrong/photo@bgdailynews.com)

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Next month, Western Kentucky University will take its first major step to transform housing on the south end of campus by developing a “first-year village,” complete with two new residence halls with recording studios and other draws.

Mike Reagle, WKU’s executive director of housing and dining overseeing the project, told the Daily News that the demolition of Bemis Lawrence Hall will begin next month as part of the \$48 million project funded by the university’s Student Life Foundation.

Crews have removed windows and fixtures from the building ahead of demolition, and construction fencing has been raised around the site along Normal Street.

“Demolition begins the first week of August and is expected to be complete within 90 days,” Reagle wrote in response to emailed questions about the project.

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.



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According to WKU, the project is part of the university's 10-year plan to revamp the on-campus living experience for students by renovating and constructing residence halls.

The process has been informed through focus groups, interviews and student surveys. Through the first-year village project, campus officials say they're aiming to provide freshmen students with living-learning communities organized around interests they share.

According to Reagle, both buildings are scheduled to open in the fall of 2021. This marks a change from a previous plan to have the first residence hall replacement ready to open next fall, which WKU President Timothy Caboni previously said was the university's goal.

"Both buildings are now slated to open Fall 2021," Reagle wrote in the email. Construction of the first building has also begun this summer, he added. Asked about the influence of recent heavy rainfall on the project, Reagle wrote it's had "no impact."



Officials hope the new residence halls will help take WKU's housing experience into a new era. A news release from the university said both Bemis Lawrence and Barnes Campbell Hall opened in 1966.

As part of their experience living in the first-year village, students will have faculty, staff and peer mentors to help them navigate their freshman year on the hill.



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The first building will house 260 students, while the second will house 375, the release said. Both halls will feature unique facilities, including classrooms and even music practice and recording studios.

All this, campus officials hope, will keep more students around longer in an era when enrollment is shrinking.

“It is important to connect the time spent in the classroom with the 150 hours students spend outside of the classroom to ensure they take full advantage of the WKU experience,” Reagle said in the news release.

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