MIDDLEBURY, Vt. — The Middlebury College board of trustees approved the most far-reaching and environmentally progressive campus master plan in the college’s 208-year history at their annual May meeting. The plan, which was built on a foundation of sustainability principles, will guide the college’s growth and development for the next 50 years.

In 2006, on completion of the college’s strategic plan, “Knowledge Without Boundaries,” Middlebury President Ronald D. Liebowitz charged a committee of trustees, faculty, staff and students with developing a new and visionary campus master plan to support the goals of the strategic plan. The group was assisted by Michael Dennis & Associates, a Boston firm that specializes in campus planning and architecture. “We initiated this process with the goal of preserving the special aspects of our campus that are so central to our identity, and with an eye to the future in terms of how to be responsible stewards of our environmental gifts and resources given the considerable environmental challenges of our time,” said Liebowitz. “This has been a monumental undertaking, with excellent collaboration among many groups.”

The plan contains many recommendations that support the college’s goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2016, ranging from dramatically increasing renewable energy for heating and cooling to making the campus more bike-friendly. Dean of Environmental Affairs Nan Jenks-Jay says the emphasis on greenhouse gas reduction throughout the plan makes it a groundbreaking effort. “We are ushering in a new era in which the environmental impact of anything we do must consider minimization of carbon dioxide emissions. A critical piece of this plan was figuring out how to measure and estimate CO2 impact throughout our entire operations and planning.”

The master plan sets forth 10 overall goals:
• Promoting sustainability in all college operations and planning
• Enhancing Middlebury’s relationship to the ecological landscape
• Reinforcing the campus’s architectural character and scale
• Promoting an accessible pedestrian-friendly campus
• Improving the relationship between town and college
• Increasing the variety of campus open spaces
• Optimizing pedestrian and vehicle traffic flow
• Fostering year-round campus
• Consolidating academic units on campus
• Establishing connectivity between campus areas
**Future Growth**

With regard to new building projects, the plan urges “careful, limited, internal building development, rather than continued outward expansion of the campus, but with significant restructuring of the landscape.” The plan proposes binding the three primary areas of campus, which are bisected by two major roads, over time through a safer, more continuous network of spaces. Sustainable building renovation is also key to the plan, with an emphasis on upgrades to building envelopes to improve energy efficiency.

Some of the short and long-term building projects include a new field house to replace the inefficient air supported structure known as “the bubble;” additions to the Center for the Arts for theatre, music and dance; new or replacement residence halls; and a new academic and office building. The plan recommends improving pedestrian access through several measures including installation of roundabouts where appropriate and converting several internal streets and service drives into tree-lined pedestrian walks.

A particular strength of the plan, according to Associate Vice President for Facilities Susan Personette, is the flexibility it affords future leaders of the college. “Good campus design is the design of space – not buildings. Quadrangles, courts, streets and walks are the spaces that form our most enduring memories of campus life. Buildings shape these spaces, but their uses need to be free to change over time.”

**College/Town Relations**

The master planning process also provided many opportunities to draw the college and town closer together. Several town officials, including the chair of the planning commission, town and regional planners, and chair of the Middlebury Selectboard were all involved in discussions of how the college’s long-term growth can complement town development. The town and college are both currently involved in a variety of town development projects including a new bridge, renovations of the Town Hall Theater and exploring the feasibility of hydro-power from the Otter Creek dam in town.

“From my perspective as a professional planner with about 30 years experience, this generation of college master planning employed unprecedented levels of participation and collaboration from the college and town communities,” said Middlebury Town Planner Fred Dunnington, one of several town officials who participated in the process. “As a result, I believe it will be most successful and mutually beneficial.”

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