

UWM's Innovation Park gets key support from public and private sectors

by: Brad Stratton

Locating UW-Milwaukee engineering activities on the Milwaukee County Grounds will be “like pouring jet fuel” on the economic engine already running at the site. That was the assessment of Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker at the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents meeting held Friday morning at UWM. County Executive Scott Walker was one of several special guests who addressed the Regents at the invitation of UWM Chancellor Carlos E. Santiago and UW System President Kevin Reilly.

On Thursday, Chancellor Santiago presented to the regents several aspects of the university’s future growth plans. Key among them was a proposal to create the UWM Innovation Park. It would be home to biomedical engineering and advanced automation research activities being done by the university in cooperation with its regional for-profit and nonprofit partners. The development would also potentially relocate the UWM College of Engineering and Applied Science to a nearly vacant site on the Milwaukee County Grounds that is north of Watertown Plank Road and east of US Highway 45 (about eight miles west of the current East Side campus).



Supporters of UWM's Innovation Park plans. (L-R) UWM Chancellor Carlos E. Santiago, Michael Cudahy, County Board Chair Lee Holloway, Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker, County Supervisor Michael Mayo, Sr. and UWM Real Estate Foundation president Bruce T. Block.

Photo by Alan Magayne-Roshak

“One of the things I spoke about yesterday was the importance of public-private partnerships in moving forward,” Santiago said. “We have to do things differently than what has been done in the past.” To demonstrate the point, the chancellor organized a public-private group to address the Regents that included Walker, Milwaukee County Board Chairman Lee Holloway, Milwaukee County Supervisor Michael Mayo Sr., Milwaukee entrepreneur and philanthropist Michael Cudahy and UWM Foundation Chair Bruce T. Block.

Holloway pointed out that there are many legislative steps ahead to make the land available to be acquired for the purpose of expanding UWM, then added, “I plan on doing everything I possibly can to make this a reality.”

One of the first steps is with the County Board Economic & Community Development Standing Committee, which has on its Monday, June 11, agenda, “discussions with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, or its designee, regarding their interest in a portion of the Northeast Quadrant of the County Grounds in the City of Wauwatosa for the development of a school of engineering, and biomedical and advanced automation research and teaching campus.”

Supervisor Mayo, who chairs that county committee, said at the Friday morning Regents meeting, “We are very excited about UWM thinking about coming to our research park....This is a great opportunity for Milwaukee County and a great opportunity for UWM expanding within Milwaukee County.”

“This property is dynamite,” said Cudahy. To the audience, Cudahy related stories of economic success related to his experiences with corporations in Silicon Valley and Ireland and said, “There’s no reason in the world this can’t happen in Southeastern Wisconsin.... I am very enthusiastic and very interested. I think we can make this thing happen....This can be the single biggest economic explosion this state has seen in a long time.”

UWM Foundation President Block said the Foundation board is energized by and supportive of the

Innovation Park proposal, and added that he believes the region's private sector also is going to be very supportive as they work toward making it a terrific success.

Because the Milwaukee County Grounds already is home for the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center and several private research corporate headquarters, County Executive Walker called the UWM proposal the perfect spot and the right opportunity. "This would be one of the most remarkable advances we could make not only for higher education but I believe for economic development in this entire state and particularly this region," he said.

Walker said the presence of not only himself at the meeting but also of Chairman Holloway and Supervisor Mayo "shows the kind of overwhelming support I think we have in the community for UWM and for this project in particular."