



10 Year Strategic Facilities Plan

March 2022

BACKGROUND

Act 74 of 2021 outlined expectations and requirements for the Vermont State Colleges to meet during system transformation, including:

*“The VSC Board of Trustees shall develop and implement a **10-year strategic plan** for managing its physical assets that is **fiscally sustainable, maintains reasonable net asset value, and meets the needs of Vermont learners.**”*

On or before March 1, 2022, the Chancellor shall present this Board approved plan to the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions and the Senate Committee on Institutions.”¹

Additionally, Act 74 of 2021 requires that:

*“VSC shall **maintain its present campus locations** as educational and student-support centers, recognizing that overall campus size, governance and operational structures as well as program and service offerings may change as circumstances require.”*

Addressed individually, these requirements are daunting. Together, the requirements pose a tremendous challenge as the Vermont State Colleges must seek to meaningfully transform, become fiscally sustainable, meet the needs of Vermont learners, and maintain its five primary campus locations at Castleton, Johnson, Lyndon, Randolph, and Williston.

With these requirements in mind, in August 2021, the Vermont State Colleges began the difficult work to assess the condition of its facilities, understand its current return on physical assets and overall utilization of its space in terms of condition, quality, proportion of teaching spaces in use, and the average seats occupied for each used space.

While in some cases, the results of the work confirmed our own internal assessments, in other cases, as with the space utilization work, the results were eye opening.

Foundational work

Between August 2021 and January 2022, the Vermont State Colleges completed the following foundational work.²

- **Facilities Assessments** for [Castleton University](#) and [Northern Vermont University - Johnson](#)
- **Updated Facilities Assessments** for [Vermont Technical College](#) and [Northern Vermont University – Lyndon](#)
- **[Return on Physical Assets Studies](#)** for Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College

¹ Act 74 of 2021

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/Docs/ACTS/ACT074/ACT074%20As%20Enacted.pdf>

² Vermont Tech’s last assessment was two years ago while Lyndon’s was approximately eight years ago.

- **Space Utilization Studies** for the Castleton, Johnson, Lyndon, Randolph, and Williston campuses
- **Completion of the *discovery* phase** of Facilities Planning
- **Creation of *design principles*** for Facilities Planning
- **Vermont State University’s *mission, and vision*** were developed and adopted by the Board of Trustees.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM FOUNDATIONAL WORK

The foundational planning work identified many key takeaways, used to ground the strategic plan road map, which serves as the foundation of the ten-year facilities plan. Additionally, the takeaways have identified a potential path forward to build a physical infrastructure that is fiscally sustainable, maintains reasonable net asset value, and meets the needs of Vermont learners – all while maintaining a presence in the current primary locations of Castleton, Johnson, Lyndon, Randolph, and Williston. They include:

- **Teaching spaces at the Vermont State Colleges are underutilized.** Approximately 26% of space system-wide is occupied between eight o’clock in the morning and five o’clock in the afternoon, Monday through Friday. There is no point in the week, at any campus location, where more than 50% of spaces are utilized in any given fifteen-minute time block. For fall 2021, the highest weekly utilization rate was 32% at the Williston location. The lowest utilization was 21% at the Lyndon campus. While there is an 11% difference between the high and the low, all campuses are underutilized.
- **The Vermont State Colleges underspends the amount necessary to sustain its current building envelope and mechanical systems by approximately \$7 million per year.** On average, the Vermont State Colleges funds 34% of the amount necessary to maintain its existing facilities at Castleton, Johnson, Lyndon, Randolph, and Williston.
- **The Vermont State Colleges deferred maintenance per square foot is rapidly increasing.** While the VSC’s investment in major renovation and construction ten to twelve years ago adjusted the risk profile, it has only delayed the inevitable. By 2029, the VSC’s deferred maintenance per square foot will grow by 23%, surpassing the cost per square foot of our regional peers.
- **Across the VSC, the average technology condition grade for teaching spaces is 64% or a ‘D’.** Only the Williston campus earned a modestly higher grade of 71%.
- **The Vermont State Colleges is heavily weighted toward general purpose classrooms at 49% of the total available spaces used in fall 2021.** The weekly utilization of these spaces is 29%. While the spaces are used more heavily than other spaces, in general, with the exception of the Castleton campus, the number of seats occupied are less than 45%.

Combined, these takeaways from the foundational work provide a strong message – and while it is one that is easy to state, it will be difficult to implement.

Problem Statement

The Vermont State Colleges:

- Owns too much physical space; and its
- Owned space is poorly maintained, because it lacks the operating and non-operating revenue to maintain 2.2 million square feet; and its
- Facilities are inappropriately scaled and lack the equipment to support the *hybrid campus* model; and it
- Must “maintain its present campus locations as educational and student-support centers, recognizing that overall campus size, governance and operational structures as well as program and service offerings may change as circumstances require”³

To solve this problem the Vermont State Colleges proposes a rigorous strategic facilities planning process.

Gathering Data Phase

Already, the team has completed the majority of the “gathering data” phase of the project. Necessary to complete this phase is final approval of the academic program array with anticipated teaching location adjustments, if any. Another primary input into this phase of the project is approval of a student experience model that will describe changes to the co-curricular and student life aspects of Vermont State University.

Beta Learning Environment

In March, the team will kick off a project to develop prototype models to test the *hybrid university* concept. This will allow faculty, staff, and students to trial different methods of engaging in hybrid learning by fitting up one to three spaces at each campus location to develop models for teaching that are engaging to learners and support the work of the Teaching and Learning Initiative.

³ Act 74 of 2021 <https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/Docs/ACTS/ACT074/ACT074%20As%20Enacted.pdf>

Right Sizing

In May, the team will launch a series of initiatives that will begin the process of right sizing the campuses to better match the Vermont State Colleges current and anticipated space needs. Buildings that will be targeted first will be those unrelated to academics, and/or those that have been tagged for divestment as part of previous master planning activities. These initial activities will include obtaining the necessary permits to subdivide land where necessary.

Future phases of right sizing will take cues from the academic program array as well as the co-curricular and student life needs of Vermont State University students. A proposed phase for this plan is to engage both public and private stakeholders in a request for proposal for the use and/or reuse of facilities. The divestment phase will repeat four times throughout the ten-year planning cycle.

Campus Master Plan

The campus master planning activities will launch in earnest in February 2023 with the final approval of academic program and student experience options. The plan, once complete, will be the guiding document that provides a roadmap for physical alterations of VSC space. Projects selected as part of the campus master plan will be selected based on evaluation of curriculum needs, deferred maintenance, space utilization, and return on investment.

The first phase of the campus master planning activities will be the development of *gamma learning environments*. These learning environments will build off the *beta environments*, and the Teaching and Learning Initiative, by implementing solutions that meet the needs of the *hybrid university*.

Plan Implementation

Three rounds of implementation are planned between August 2024 and May 2031. With each round, selected projects for optimization will be designed. These designs will then be executed and in most cases, additional space will be divested through sale, lease, or demolition.

Title	Start date	Due date
10 year plan	6/1/2021	6/2/2031
<u>Gather Data</u>	6/1/2021	2/1/2023
<u>Mission and Vision</u>	6/1/2021	10/20/2021
<u>Gordian ROPA</u>	9/1/2021	1/10/2022
<u>Gordian Space Utilization</u>	12/1/2021	2/7/2022
<u>SAS Facilities Assessments</u>	8/2/2021	2/11/2022
<u>Program Array approved</u>	10/21/2021	5/2/2022
<u>Program details approved</u>	5/3/2022	11/1/2022
<u>Student experience aproved</u>	10/21/2021	2/1/2023
<u>Beta Learning Environments</u>	3/2/2022	8/18/2023
<u>Procure Design Team</u>	3/2/2022	6/2/2022
<u>Design 1 to 3 spaces at each campus</u>	6/3/2022	9/5/2022
<u>Bid Work for Spaces</u>	9/6/2022	10/6/2022
<u>Fit Out Spaces</u>	10/7/2022	6/7/2023
<u>Test and Train</u>	6/8/2023	8/21/2023
<u>Right Sizing</u>	5/2/2022	5/14/2031
<u>Permitting of Subdivisions Phase 1</u>	5/2/2022	11/2/2022
<u>Divestment Phase 1</u>	11/3/2022	5/5/2023
<u>RFP for excess space</u>	5/8/2023	9/8/2023
<u>Divestment Phase 2</u>	9/11/2023	3/11/2024
<u>Divestment Phase 3</u>	8/6/2026	5/13/2027
<u>Divestment Phase 4</u>	8/8/2028	5/14/2029
<u>Campus Master Plan</u>	2/1/2023	8/2/2024
<u>Gamma Learning Environments</u>	8/18/2023	8/18/2024
<u>Phase 1</u>	8/2/2024	5/13/2027
<u>Design optimization projects Phase 1</u>	8/2/2024	8/4/2025
<u>Execute optimization projects Phase 1</u>	8/5/2025	8/5/2026
<u>Lease/Divest vacated space Phase 1</u>	8/6/2026	5/13/2027
<u>Phase 2</u>	8/6/2026	5/14/2029
<u>Design Optimization projects Phase 2</u>	8/6/2026	8/6/2027
<u>Execute optimization Projects Phase 2</u>	8/9/2027	8/7/2028
<u>Lease Divest vacate space phase 2</u>	8/8/2028	5/14/2029
<u>Phase 3</u>	8/7/2028	5/14/2031
<u>Design Optimization Project Phase 3</u>	8/7/2028	8/7/2029
<u>Execute Optimization Project Phase 3</u>	8/8/2029	8/8/2030
<u>Lease Divest vacate space Phase 3</u>	8/9/2030	5/14/2031
10 Year Master Plan	8/2/2030	11/2/2031

FACILITIES PLANNING PRINCIPLES

In October 2021, the Facilities Planning team, a multi-disciplinary and cross-institutional group of faculty and staff, launched *discovery*. The discovery process included identifying what the VSC is doing well in regards to facilities, and where it could do better. Additionally, the group identified a series of *design principles* aimed at guiding the facilities planning work throughout the rest of transformation.

The group completed the *discovery* and *design principles* work in January. The following are the key principles they feel should guide the facilities planning work as we develop our strategic facilities plan.

Building Usage Principles

- There will be a focus on making decisions using data and financial analysis that will support the Vermont State College's need for financial sustainability all while meeting the needs of Vermont learners.
- The plan must lower the total cost of ownership of our facilities or increase the revenue potential.
- The buildings must be accessible to all.

Maintenance and Renovation Principles

- When considering maintenance and renovation projects we will choose projects that will reduce our deferred maintenance and allow us to move to a proactive, instead of reactive, stance.
- We will incorporate systems that will allow us to collect data such as the installation of meters that will support our financial analyses.

Energy Consumption Principles

- An energy management plan with clear goals and objectives will reduce our energy consumption.
- A utilities master plan will ensure that we upgrade systems proactively to increase efficiency.
- Where possible we will partner with outside experts, such as Efficiency Vermont, to make decisions that are grounded in best practices and research.

NEXT STEPS

The Board of Trustees of the Vermont State Colleges system approved the 10 Year Strategic Facilities Plan in February 2022. The System is now poised to begin execution on this plan, beginning first with the work of creating *beta learning environments* to support hybrid learning, and second to begin the process of subdividing and permitting parcels for future rightsizing. Simultaneously the System will complete further analysis and review of residential and co-curricular spaces to assess their level of utilization. Combined, we expect this work will require approximately \$1M between March 2022 and June 2023.

Our next major step will be creating *gamma learning environments* capitalizing on the learning from the initial environments established during the first half of FY2023. Additionally, the Vermont State Colleges will identify and begin the scoping process of our longer-term projects to right-size our physical footprint in alignment with our academic programs and educational needs at the current locations of the Vermont State Colleges.

