News

Second phase of Gampel Pavilion renovations to roll on with $63.4 million boost



UConn's Gampel Pavilion during warmups for a basketball game, where many fans are in attendance. The arena's lighting is blue to coordinate with UConn's colors.
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The University of Connecticut Board of Trustees approved a proposal to use a total of $99.4 million to fund a second phase of upgrades to the Harry A. Gampel Pavilion, the on-campus home of the school's basketball programs, in December. The project marks the largest renovation since the arena's opening in 1990.

The new allocation, from the state's "UConn 2000" bonds, will be used to "modernize the facility and create more revenue-generating facilities." The project received a $63.4 million increase over the first approved budget.

"The goal is to upgrade Harry A. Gampel Pavilion to enhance the daily experience for student athletes and visitors by instilling a sense of Huskies pride by offering first-class facilities that support player development and recruitment, as well as to introduce new premium clubs and concession options for fans," the project description said.

The new funds were requested to allow UConn to hire a dedicated construction manager to oversee the project and to replace the facility's original HVAC and ventilation system — a cost that was not a part of the project's original scope, the budget proposal that went before the Board of Trustees states.

"Gampel is a great college venue, and we want to keep it that way," athletic director David Benedict said when the project began. "In order to do that into the future, it's time to invest some money in it."

The first phase of large-scale renovations began in 2024 and entered service in time for this year's basketball season, seeing the addition of new, larger video screens and an overhaul of seating in arena's the lower bowl, alongside smaller structural repairs. That slate of upgrades cost just $10 million, funded by state general obligation bonds. The most recent facility project saw the reinforcement of the arena's distinctive roof in 2017.

An aspect of the pavilion's second phase design is the expansion of concessions and merchandising space and "premium" offerings, like loge seating and club spaces for season ticketholders and donors.

"We need to try to address our premium offerings, which we have very little of, which means, how do we create some club spaces?" Benedict said. "How do we create better points of sale and options from a concession standpoint? And the biggest thing is how our fans can move in and out and around the building, which is difficult, because we don't have an outer concourse, so it really clogs things up. We want to be sold out and that creates problems with bathrooms and points of sale and concessions."

The updated budget also includes an additional $750,000 for telecommunications upgrades. As part of the 2024 implementation, Wi-Fi access points throughout the arena were replaced and fine-tuned; It's always been a difficult task due to the building's construction and with the increase in device usage compared to earlier years.

"We are steadfastly dedicated to enhancing our facilities for the benefit of both the student-athlete and fan experiences," Benedict said at the time. "We will continue to examine the addition of appealing, fan-friendly elements to make future game days even more enjoyable."

While it is unclear if the additional funds will specifically support improvements that are readily apparent to fans and visitors, various technologies are in use within the facility —connected with offices and athletic facilities as well as academic and research programs, including the Korey Stringer Institute.

The budget request makes note that the Gampel renovations do not qualify for LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification, a "green" building program, "as the scope of work does not include facade replacement or full mechanical and electrical system upgrades throughout the facility." The brief notes that UConn is nonetheless focused on improving the building's energy efficiency as part of the renovations.

"This is just bringing the arena up in line with what we would consider to be a championship facility," William Peterson, assistant athletic director of communications, told the Daily Campus last year regarding the project. "If you've noticed around campus, all of the other facilities have gone through major upgrades over the last five-ish years and we want to bring this facility kind of up to that standard."

Major construction as part of the second phase is expected to begin once the basketball season, and UConn's hosting commission during the postseason, finishes.

The attached Greer Field House, which has been open since 1950, will be seeing a major expansion as part of the new Bailey Student-Athlete Success Center. Ground broke on the expansion in Spring 2025, which will see a full overhaul of the Guyer Gymnasium space and the construction of the Nayden Center for Academic Excellence.

Described as a "transformative project," the 12,000-square-foot academic center "will become the home for holistic development, academic accomplishment, and well-being for every student-athlete at UConn," UConn officials said at the groundbreaking.

The complex, named after former UConn student-athlete and UConn Foundation board member Trisha Bailey, includes plans for new locker rooms for various teams and changes to outdoor access in connection with the adjacent Sherman Field area.

An earlier vision for the greater renovations to Gampel Pavilion and the Bailey Center from Populous, the sports architectural firm which designed the Werth Champions Center, came with a $300 million price tag. It is possible that we may see elements from that concept, such as a skywalk between the arena and the South Garage, the replacement and expansion of office space and a much-larger new concourse, redesigned as part of future construction plans.

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