News

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Jennifer Lease Butts, associate vice provost for enrichment programs and current program director, will serve as the college's inaugural dean, according to a press statement.

"These investments will build on the structure already in place within the Honors Program and strengthen UConn's competitive position among leading public research universities," Alpay said.

On the heels of local controversy, a refreshed budget proposal for a new UConn golf practice facility was approved by trustees in the order of $900,000. 6.5 acres of property at the UConn Depot Campus, approximately two miles northwest of the campus core, will serve as the new site for a driving range and a 6,000 square-foot-building with golf simulators, offices and team spaces. Until the complex underwent renovations, the golf team used space within Gampel Pavilion to practice.

The project has faced opposition regarding the original proposed location, which would have displaced a UConn-owned historic collection of conifer trees. According to the proposed resolution, written by UConn Vice President of Finance Anthony Rini, "the university assessed several potential locations for the practice facility" before shifting to the Depot Campus site.

According to Rini, the design of the new property will occur through the spring, followed by construction and an expected finish date in 2028.

Also at the Wednesday meeting, the Board of Trustees approved a $1 million budget for the design of infrastructure and utility improvements at UConn's main campus, marking a $600,000 increase over the previously approved planning budget.

The funding will be used to assess and begin designing infrastructure and features related to the ongoing UConn Tech Park and northeast campus expansion projects, including a new proposed commissary building near W Lot. The work will be funded through UConn 2000 bonds, according to the proposed budget information.

For UConn's Avery Point campus in Groton, trustees approved a revised $1.25 million budget to renovate space in the campus's Community and Professional Building for the UConn Ecosystem Contaminants Research Lab program, an increase of $755,500 from its previous budget. The lab, led by Dr. Jessica Brandt, studies the impacts of pollutants on aquatic ecosystems.

"The renovation will allow the Brandt Lab to operate from the Avery Point campus in addition to its existing operations... expanding Dr. Brandt's research capacity and supporting collaboration across campuses," Rini wrote in the report. "The project will also revitalize space that is currently vacant and in disrepair, resulting in improved utilization of university facilities."

The project will convert approximately 1,480 square feet into laboratory and "wet lab freezer farm" facilities. The board also authorized an exception to the usual three-stage budget approval process to allow construction to proceed after bids are reviewed.

Trustees also approved a $2.465 million revised budget for repairs to the Jorgensen Theatre and Performing Arts Center building exterior, a $1.2 million increase. The second phase of repairs will address deteriorating brickwork and other areas vulnerable to water infiltration. This follows roof-edge waterproofing work completed over the summer.

"The envelope repairs are crucial to safeguarding the integrity of the building, ensuring its continued preservation, and significantly prolonging its life as a valued asset for years to come," says the Jorgensen project brief.

According to Rini, the Jorgensen project aligns with UConn's Seven World-Class Campuses, One Flagship University and Student Success Journey strategic initiatives.

Some real estate agreements were also approved as part of larger budget proposals, including an amendment to the lease with Constitution Plaza to extend the lease term for the UConn Graduate Business Learning Center in downtown Hartford. Changes to the 2028 agreement with the owner of the new Urban Lodge Brewing location on Royce Circle, which formerly housed a Barnes and Noble-operated UConn Bookstore branch location, were also included.

The trustees also discussed naming recommendations for facilities and features at the Waterbury campus and within the law and nursing schools, including the "Adomat Nursing Simulation Center" and the "Cottage Classroom" within DeLuca Hall after a substantial monetary gift by UConn nursing almumna Elisabeth DeLuca.

For more information on the Board of Trustees and attachments related to their Oct. 28 meeting, visit boardoftrustees.uconn.edu.

A US CRUISE SHIP SUSPENDS A GLOBAL VOYAGE IN ASIA DUE TO FUEL COSTS, STRANDING 200 PASSENGERS

SIHANOUKVILLE, Cambodia (AP) — A U.S. cruise ship on an around-the-world voyage that touted its cabins as floating homes suspended its three-year voyage in Cambodia due to fuel costs, forcing hundreds of passengers to disembark.

The MV Odyssey set sail two years ago on a voyage to the seven continents marketed as combining long-term living at sea with global travel. Its operator had offered to "make the Odyssey your permanent home," with the purchase price of a suite for the lifetime of the vessel starting around $230,000.

For now, it is docked at the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville on the Gulf of Thailand, with no certain departure date.



A U.S. cruise ship, the MV Odyssey, docks at the Sihanoukville Autonomous Port in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, Wednesday, Oct. 28, 2026.
PHOTO COURTESY OF AP PHOTO/HENG SINITH

The ship has been carrying 203 passengers, mostly Americans, along with 156 crew members, according to Cambodian officials. It has a 650-passenger capacity.

Its Florida-based operator, Villa Vie Residences, said monthly fuel expenses per cabin that historically averaged $1,800 have reached an estimated $6,000 to $8,000 in parts of Asia due to the war in Iran. The company said it sought to reduce fuel consumption by slowing the itinerary and spending more time in port, but was unable to offset the surging costs.

Traffic has been curtailed in the Strait of Hormuz since the war in Iran began, squeezing supplies of all kinds of petroleum-based fuels, especially in Southeast Asia, and sharply increasing prices.

"We have been unable to continue carrying the resulting operating losses," Villa Vie Residences said in a statement issued Tuesday. "Passing the full increase on to residents is not a realistic solution. Our focus now is on supporting residents, crew, and employees" while it tries to restructure.

"The company is working with residents to coordinate disembarkation and identify temporary living arrangements," it said.

Those on the ship had hoped to sail for years to come

Passengers, however, said they received no support and had to make their own arrangements after being given seven hours notice on Tuesday to disembark. Some were devastated and expressed hope a new company could rescue the venture so life at sea can continue.

Paul and Lynn Montoya, a retired couple from Wyoming, said they bought a window cabin and had expected to sail for years. They boarded the ship 17 months ago in Panama.

Paul praised the concept of residential cruising but said the shipowner lacked the expertise to make the business financially sustainable. While rising fuel costs had been cited publicly as the reason for the suspension, he said the company had already been struggling. Changes to itinerary, unreliable internet access and declining food quality had pushed many residents to leave the ship in recent months, he said.

Lynn said residents were repeatedly asked to contribute additional money for fuel and other expenses, including a fresh call to raise funds for fuel to get out of Cambodia. She said the crew members were also not paid.

"We were tired of every two to four weeks being asked for money for fuel, money for everything," she said. "We had hopes but they just kept sinking further and further into the hole through mismanagement."

The company could not immediately be contacted for comment.

For some, the venture was a risk worth taking

Yet for some, even the financial and logistical turmoil couldn't outweigh the extraordinary experience of traveling the world and living at sea.

Carol Larson, 69, and her sister Crystal Lavering, 72, occupied separate cabins aboard the ship for 18 months. The siblings, from California, described the suspension as heartbreaking, and hoped the cruise would be resuscitated.

"I hope there is a movement for the residents to buy the ship and I am hoping that goes through because it's a dream to live on the ship and I don't want it to end," Larson said.

Lavering said her health improved during her time on the ship, and that she didn't need to use a cane to walk anymore. "You come to this ship to live ... it's just sad that it's all over."

Larson bought her cabin for $120,000, paid in installments, in addition to monthly maintenance fees, under a plan that had promised the possibility of living aboard for up to 15 years. She said she blamed U.S. President Donald Trump for the ship's woes as fuel costs spiked due to the Iran war, in addition to poor management. But she said she didn't regret her investment.

"Because it was a start-up company, I believe that it was a risk. From the very first day, I said to myself that if it lasts a year, I can walk away and feel like I got my money's worth ... I still feel that way. I feel blessed to have been part of the experiment of residential cruising," she said.

The cruise began in Northern Ireland in 2024

The ship arrived in Sihanoukville last Friday and was scheduled to depart Wednesday, according to a statement from Long Dimanche, the deputy governor of Preah Sihanouk province. He said it was now expected to refuel and depart Cambodia on Saturday, but the ship's operator has not yet publicly confirmed any date.

Built in 1993 and operated under different names by several cruise lines over the years before being becalmed by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the Odyssey was bought by Villa Vie Residences in 2023.

Its current cruise, originally intended to last 3 1/2 years, began in October 2024 in Belfast, Northern Ireland, where the ship had been refitted. A second cruise had been tentatively scheduled to end in August 2030.

The Odyssey is not the first cruise ship Sihanoukville has hosted in crisis.

In February 2020, the MS Westerdam was allowed to dock in Cambodia after being turned away at five ports in other nations because of fears of COVID-19, which just a month earlier had started to spread from China. It carried 1,455 passengers, more than 600 of them American citizens.

After being stranded at sea for two weeks, Cambodia's then-Prime Minister Hun Sen allowed it to dock for what he said were humanitarian reasons. Cambodia won plaudits as passengers were welcomed ashore and arrangements were made for them to fly home.

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