



Virginia Department of Planning and Budget  
**Project Request Justification**

2006-2008                      Biennium                      Date: July 22, 2005

**A. General Information**

1. Agency name: Virginia Tech                      2. Agency code: 208  
 3. Project title: Construct: New Visitors & Admissions Center                      4. Agency priority: 19  
 5. Contact Person: M. Dwight Shelton, Jr.  
 6. Contact's telephone number: (540) 231-8775  
 7. Contact's e-mail address: mdsjr@vt.edu

**B. Proposed Project**

1. Project Cost:

<b>General Fund/General Fund supported debt</b>	
<b>Nongeneral fund</b>	
<b>9 (c) revenue debt</b>	
<b>NGF supported 9 (d) revenue bonds</b>	<b>5,250,000</b>
<b>Total request</b>	<b>5,250,000</b>

2. Project cost changes:

NONE.

3. Description:

- This is a new project on the university's capital plan and is included in the first biennium as a high priority in order to solve long standing problems in assisting and directing visitors, especially prospective students, on the campus.
- The project request is for an 18,000 gross square-foot stand-alone building at the new main campus entryway off Prices Fork Road, as envisioned by the university master plan. This new entryway is on the opposite side of campus from the current visitors center.
- The project calls for the Undergraduate Admissions Office to be relocated from its central campus location in Burruss Hall to the more guest-friendly visitor's center. The co-location of admissions with the Visitor Information Center will result in a highly compatible use, since the visitors center is the main stop-off for prospective students and their parents, and will consolidate in a single location programs that support a full range of visitor needs.

- The life expectancy of the project is 80 years with proper maintenance.
- The proposed funding plan calls for \$5.25 million of nongeneral fund debt authorization that will be repaid with university revenues from operations.

**4. Project scope change:**

NONE.

**5. a. Approved Master Site Plan:**

Yes  No

If not, explain:

**b. 2004-10 Capital Outlay Plan:**

Yes  No

If not, explain:

- This is a new project on the university's capital plan and is included in the first biennium as a high priority in order to solve long standing problems in assisting and directing visitors, especially prospective students, on the campus.

**6. Equipment for a previously funded project.**

NONE.

**7. Supplement to a previously funded project.**

NONE.

**C. Project Justification**

**1. a. Existing condition:**

**Visitor Information Center**

- The current Visitor Information Center is located on Southgate Drive adjacent to a dairy barn, whose foul odors often permeate the center and is not consistent with the image of the nationally prominent research university Virginia Tech has become. The structure is a somewhat dilapidated 63 year-old, unimpressive, 4-room, converted frame house that was constructed elsewhere and moved to its present site. It reflects neither the traditional campus architecture, nor the traditional building material.
- The small size of the current center cannot accommodate the staff needed to perform requested services, particularly those related to receiving and hosting groups of visitors. The current facility is too small to provide adequate information displays, and when events, such as admissions open houses, attract a large number of people to campus, the center is so small that the line of visitors, who must stop at the center to secure the university's required—but free—visitor parking permits, extends outside the door.

- Further, the university master plan calls for relocation of the main campus vehicular entry to Prices Fork Road on the opposite side of campus from Southgate Drive where the center is currently located. Thus, the existing visitors center will lose its service function on a main thoroughfare.

**Undergraduate Admissions**

- The Undergraduate Admissions program is located in three different spaces in Burruss Hall, the main administrative building located in the most central part of campus, with storage in two other HVAC areas. These separated locations cause operational challenges in communications, unity, and efficiency.
- The space available in Burruss Hall is limited and the allocation available for Undergraduate Admissions severely constrains the operation. As an illustration, half of the interview staff must share offices, a problem when meeting with guests about personal issues and trying to maintain FERPA Guidelines (federal privacy laws) when reading thousands of application files. The program also lacks production work space for the many mailings, frequently tens of thousands in number (student search mailings to 125,000 students and decision letters to over 20,000 applicants).
- The program further lacks dedicated auditorium space and as a result guests must be led to auditoriums in other buildings. This is always a challenge with people generally unfamiliar with campus, arriving late, wanting to use facilities, etc.
- More important than the work situation in the office is the less-than-positive impression that prospective families receive from a world-class university when trying to reach the admissions office. While Burruss Hall is truly the signature administrative building of the campus, parking is not convenient. There are fewer than ten visitor’s parking spaces nearby, requiring the vast majority of guests to drive across the campus from the Visitor’s Center, find a space in the back commuter lot, and then wind their way several blocks past a myriad of buildings to Burruss Hall.
- Despite information on the Undergraduate Admissions website about the route from Visitor’s Center to Burruss Hall and the estimated time needed, guests consistently arrive late because they enter campus in groups at the Visitor’s Center when there is only one staff person to give the permits, because the parking took more time than warned, or because they could not locate Burruss Hall from the “back” of campus where they found parking.
- In 2004-2005 over 3,000 parking tickets were given to visitors, the great majority to people visiting Undergraduate Admissions. While all of these tickets were excused when reported, the very existence of the tickets is a substantial public relations problem. The combination of these effects creates poor impressions on our customers and fellow citizens.

**Higher Education Only**

**b. Facility Condition Index:**

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c. Space deficit:

Yes  No

**2. Programmatic information:**

- The current main campus entry from the U.S. 460 Bypass is onto Southgate Drive. This requires a circuitous and confusing route to the actual campus. Completion of the university's new Alumni/Conference Center/Hotel will shift the university's primary campus entry point from Southgate Drive to Prices Fork Road. These new facilities will attract the majority of campus visitors to this area of campus and the entry from Prices Fork Road. This entry location is a short, direct route to the central campus.
- This project calls for moving the university's Visitor Information Center, which issues visitor-parking permits and provides visitors with directions and other information, from its site on Southgate Drive to the new entry point off Prices Fork Road. The project also calls for the Undergraduate Admissions Office to be relocated from its central campus location in Burruss Hall to this more visitor-friendly Visitor Information Center and to a space which will house all their operations in one location.
- The Undergraduate Admissions Office had over 28,600 prospective students and their family members attend daily information sessions from May 16, 2004 through May 15, 2005. This is an average of over 550 per week. Nearly 5,000 of these guests attended sessions in the two weeks surrounding Easter, 2005 (spring break for high schools.) Another 6,500 attended the four Saturday-Sunday Open Houses in the fall 2004, and over 4,500 attended the two spring *Senior Focus* for students offered admission in April, 2005.
- The Undergraduate Admissions Office is the most popular destination for campus visitors outside varsity athletic events. The number of families attending the daily information sessions has been increasing steadily and increased 25% this past year from the 2003-2004 year.
- Co-locating admissions with the visitors center will be a highly compatible use and will consolidate in a single location programs that support a full range of visitor needs, from issuing parking permits and providing information about the university to conducting campus tours.
- With a new main campus entryway, dissemination of parking passes will be needed at this new entry location so that visitors will not be required to travel from this site across campus for their parking permits.
- The proposed Visitor Information Center/Undergraduate Admissions Office, with its information desk and visitor parking permit issuance functions, visitor orientation functions, and admissions counselor offices, will be a center for university displays and can serve as the university's "living room," fulfilling a need not currently met for the general university community. The new visitors center will contain ample bathroom facilities, a medium-size presentation space, and lounge space that will provide a waiting area for students and parents scheduled for campus tours.

**3. Alignment to strategic plan:**

This project will support Virginia Tech's strategic plan in the areas of Research and Scholarship, Graduate Education, Undergraduate Education, and Outreach. A more prominently located Visitor Information Center with convenient access to undergraduate admissions will help the university achieve its objectives in recruiting students and faculty and will provide a welcome to the general public more in keeping with the university's reputation as a major research university. Making a better impression on first-time visitors to the university will help Virginia Tech attract more talent and diversity and will result in more efficient operations for the Admissions Office.

#### **D. Options Considered**

Other options considered but not selected include adding on to the current visitors center facility or delaying the project entirely. Constructing a new visitors and admissions center is the selected option because it will provide increased functional space at a more effective location.

Constructing an addition to the current facility is not a feasible option because it would not be cost effective to renovate and expand the old structure, which was converted from a frame house built in 1942 and later moved to the current location. In addition, the location of the current facility, far from the center of campus, is not easily accessible to visitors without motor vehicles, and is, in fact, often missed by visitors, who are left to find their own way around campus—and to face parking tickets when they do not have the appropriate parking permit.

Delaying the project to a future biennium is not a viable option because the current facility is ineffective in meeting the needs of visitors, including prospective students and parents, and will become even more so now that the new Alumni/Conference Center/Hotel attracts visitors to that campus entryway.

#### **E. Project Schedule Changes:**

NONE.