AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

1. NAME OF ITEM: Housing Initiative, UMA
2. INITIATED BY: Norman L. Fournier, Chair
3. BOARD INFORMATION: X
4. BOARD ACTION:

BACKGROUND & JUSTIFICATION:

The University of Maine at Augusta offers some unique academic programs that are attractive to students from outside the Augusta region and, in some cases, outside of the state of Maine. UMA believes, and information from prospective students suggests, the lack of housing on campus and limited options in the local market have and are adversely impacting enrollments, particularly for certain programs such as the Bachelor in Architecture program and the recently approved Aviation program.

UMA has researched various remedies, such as building and operating a facility on campus, having a private party own and operate a facility off-site, and potentially partnering with other University campuses where housing already is available. In 2011 the University of Maine at Augusta received a Strategic Investment Fund grant to study housing options in the Augusta area. The University used the funds to engage consultant Frank O’Hara to research public/private housing options in and around the Augusta campus. In doing his research, Mr. O’Hara sought out developers and contractors who might be interested in renovating or constructing housing for up to 70 students (70 beds), that would be owned and managed by the developer, and available to UMA students. The results of the study indicated that there may be a limited number of developers and property owners in the Augusta area that might have interest in this type of arrangement. UMA has also been contacted by another property owner with an interest in helping to provide an acceptable housing option to UMA students.

UMA is aware of the financial and facility challenges facing the University of Maine System and, based on its research to this point, strongly prefers a model in which the housing is off-campus, owned and managed by an external entity and in which the relationship is primarily between the student tenants and the property owner, with lesser involvement by the University. The University’s involvement might be limited simply to sharing information with students about housing availability.

To date, no actionable solution has emerged. To gauge the level of interest and in accordance with University practices, UMA as a next step is going to conduct a publicly-advertised process to solicit interest and ideas from potential developers. UMA has been working with the University procurement staff and plans to release a public solicitation as soon as May 2014. All submissions would be reviewed for compliance and evaluated by the University to determine if the proposal meets the needs of UMA students. This information item is being presented to the Committee to alert trustees to UMA’s initiative, which does not fit the traditional facility project approval process.