



# News Release

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## **Community Forum Wednesday on Proposed Higher Ed Center**

RAPID CITY, S.D. – A community forum with Board of Regents' Executive Director Robert T. Tad Perry is scheduled tomorrow (Wednesday, Jan. 21) to discuss the Higher Education Center-West River facility planned for construction in Rapid City.

Perry will meet with community leaders and other interested citizens from 9-10 a.m. (MST) at a forum hosted by the Rapid City Area Chamber of Commerce in the chamber's board room (Room 207) at the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center. The public is invited to attend.

“Public higher education has served the Rapid City market for more than 50 years, primarily through an educational facility located at Ellsworth Air Force Base,” Perry said. “But with the Ellsworth facility no longer available to us, we have resorted to meeting in various locations all over Rapid City.”

Perry said it is critical to expand public higher education access in this region now. He pointed to U.S. Census data that show West River residents ages 25 and older have lower levels of bachelor's degree attainment than either the state or national averages. “These individuals tend to have families and hold down full-time jobs, so it is very important to offer convenience in educational opportunities,” Perry said. He said a single dedicated facility fits the bill, by providing easy access to students from the air base and other Black Hills communities, a highly-identifiable location just off the interstate highway, and one-stop services for students.

Perry said the Board of Regents has advanced a plan to construct the Higher Education Center-West River without state general funds. “In these challenging economic times, we have advanced a solid plan to move forward that does not request general fund dollars from the state,” he noted. He said Rep. David Lust (R-Rapid City) plans to introduce a bill shortly to authorize the project.

The proposed center will be located on 40.32 acres off Elk Vale Road at Exit 61 in east Rapid City. Twelve acres of the property were donated to the state last year, and the remaining 28.32 acres are to be purchased through a grant from the Great Plains Educational Foundation.

The financing package for the 54-thousand square-foot facility calls for \$13.4 million to be financed by revenue bonds repaid over 25 years from student fees deposited in the state's Higher Education Facilities Fund. Another \$2.6 million in funding is possible from non-public sources.