

# 5 big changes in the works at Missouri State as major construction projects continue



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Springfield News-Leader

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As the year 2025 unfolds, the Judith Enyeart Reynolds Performing Arts Complex will start to take shape.

Located along Grand Street, just west of National Avenue, the [\\$35 million project that broke ground](#) in mid-December will be one of the most visible this year on the Missouri State University campus.

There are many other projects, big and small, from the massive Blunt Hall addition and renovation — expected to finish in mid-2026 — to smaller updates at Greenwood Laboratory School and the Meyer Library.



"There are 212 projects right now with over \$245 million in construction and another \$13 million in contracts that are about to go out so a lot of momentum, a lot of exciting things happening," said MSU President Richard "Biff" Williams.

He noted the Kemper Hall renovation and addition is wrapping up and a ribbon-cutting will be scheduled soon for the Darr Agriculture Center's Agricultural Innovation Hub.

Williams, who became the 12th president of the institution July 1, said he was energized about the year ahead despite the challenging environment for higher education.

"There is a lot of momentum — the record enrollment, the exciting indicators that we'll probably have good enrollment next year," he said. "This climate right now in higher education, everyone is decreasing, but we're doing really good at being steady."

In a recent interview, Williams outlined some of the biggest changes in the works for the Springfield campus and beyond during the coming year.

## **Creating a new strategic plan**

By the time classes start for the 2025 fall semester, Williams and the MSU Board of Governors hope to have a final strategic plan that will guide spending, building, programs and other decision-making for the next five years.

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The campus and community have been invited to participate in crafting the plan. A committee doing the bulk of the work is led by Zora Mulligan, executive vice president, and Ken Brown, chief academic strategy officer.

Currently, work groups are focused on these areas: academic opportunities and innovation; branding and identity; community partnerships and economic development; institution of choice for employees and students; and the student and alumni experience.

More: [MSU strategic plan process will explore definition, role of public affairs mission](#)

"The strategic plan has certainly got people excited because it's our plan and we've had just tremendous support and participation," he

said. "The community has been really responsive to those meetings and having an opportunity to work together."

A draft of the plan is expected to go to the board in late April and could be approved as early as May. If that happens, there will be a workshop in August to put the plan in motion.

## **Building a new alumni center**

In April, Missouri State plans to break ground on the Clifton M. Smart III University Advancement Center. The two-story, 28,000-square-foot building will be constructed along National Avenue, just north of the Davis-Harrington Welcome Center.

It will be named for the recently retired 11th president.



"That's going to be instrumental in giving our alumni a home. Right now, the alumni center is off-campus," Williams said. "... It's really designed to be a home where faculty, staff, students and alumni can all come and congregate."

In mid-February, the MSU foundation sold the existing alumni center downtown to the Community Foundation of the Ozarks for \$5.8 million as part of its long-term goal of having a highly visible footprint on the main campus.

That imposing structure, a former bank at 300 S. Jefferson Ave., was named the Meyer Alumni Center in honor of alumnus and longtime supporter Kenneth E. Meyer, who died in 2022.

## **Preparing to join Conference USA**

Early in his tenure, Williams was asked by the MSU board to oversee the transition to Conference USA. He said with the hiring of new [athletic director Patrick Ransdell](#), he has been able to hand over some of those duties.



"He's still learning and meeting people and so where I can help, I am helping," he said.

The Bears have competed in the Missouri Valley Conference since 1990 but will join the more competitive athletic league as a full member by the 2025-26 season.

Upgrading athletic facilities is part of the switch. Williams said the university hired an architect to help, which includes more work to Plaster Stadium.

[More: Missouri State AD Patrick Ransdell shares plans to 'reimagine' Plaster Stadium](#)

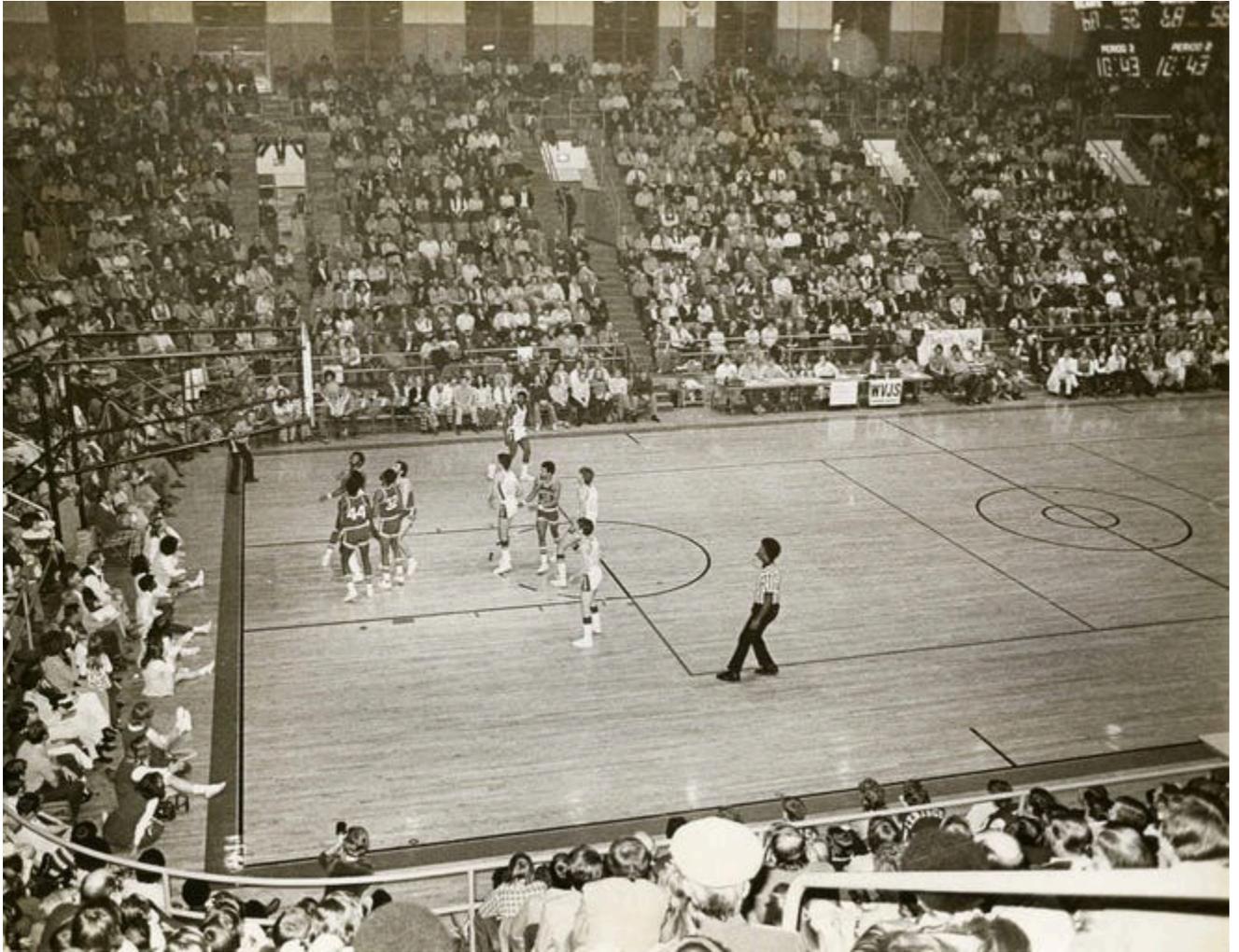
"This year, we're going to have to replace the turf, it's lived its life, preparing for Conference USA. We're going to need to put data and fiber up to the press box. We'll have to improve our lighting," he said.

## **Deciding future of McDonald Arena**

Going forward, Missouri State is trying to figure out what role the [McDonald Hall and Arena](#) will play on campus.

The structure, built in 1940, has been the home of multiple academic programs, from exercise science and physical education to sport and recreation administration. It also has offices and fitness and recreation spaces.

"We've really tried to exit McDonald Arena because it doesn't have the adequate cooling and heating that it needs and we need to figure out funding to redo that entire building," Williams said. "I'd love to keep it on our campus."



Used as the university's central indoor arena until Hammons Student Center opened in 1975, Williams said the building is part of the campus history.

"We're trying to figure out how we can repurpose it and what we can do there but it will be a hefty price tag because we're really going to need to bring it up to code," he said.

Williams said the building needs a new roof and HVAC, as a start.

## Hiring new university leaders

Williams said there has been "tremendous interest" in the provost job at Missouri State. At least 84 people applied.

The [early departure of John Jasinski](#), hired for the job in 2022, prompted Williams to recently name Tamera Jahnke, dean of the College of Natural and Applied Sciences since 2006, to serve as the interim provost.

Jahnke, who is well-respected on campus and in the community, will remain in the job until a permanent replacement is able to start.



A search committee chaired by Brad Bodenhausen, vice president for community and global partnerships, and Marjorie Shavers, associate dean of the College of Education, is expected to identify top candidates soon. Finalists will be invited to interview on campus.

Williams said in addition to the provost job, two other other key jobs will need to be filled.

Tom Peters, dean of library services, retired in December. The search for his replacement is in the early stages.

Julie Masterson, associate provost and dean of the graduate college, is also planning to retire. Williams called her a "tremendous asset to our campus" with more than three decades of experience.

Williams said he wants the new provost to be involved in selecting the replacements for Peters and Masterson.