

WVU alumni center work to continue

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The West Virginia University Alumni Association can keep building a new alumni center as a lawsuit claiming the association didn't follow state bidding laws goes forward, Monongalia Circuit Judge Russell Clawges ruled Monday.

The Affiliated Construction Trades Foundation filed the lawsuit April 19, alleging state-funded WVU was paying for parts of the construction. State law requires that a public bidding process be used to select construction companies for public projects.

The WVU Alumni Association, a private organization, is leasing the property where the center is being built from WVU.

"We are disappointed, but we are still waiting for our day in court," said Steve White, ACT Foundation executive director. "Our feeling is this is a taxpayer issue and that it is all about whether there is an open and competitive bidding process when tax dollars are at use."

The Alumni Association says the project is completely funded with private contributions.

White said ACT officials felt compelled to file the injunction.

"At some point, a judge is going to ask, 'What do you want us to do now? It's already built,'" he said.

In denying the motion, Clawges said that he would issue a final order on the merits of the case long before the building is built, said Jim Walls, a lawyer representing the Alumni Association.

The continuing construction keeps plans for the old Erickson Alumni Center on track as well, he said. That building will be sold to WVU, which plans to renovate it and turn it into an art museum, he said.

"We are continuing to work on the facility and are pleased with the judge's injunction," said Tara Curtis, the alumni group's assistant director.

A trial should be scheduled before the end of September, Walls said.

"We are confident the judge will rule in our favor there as well," Curtis said.

The new center is being built on land owned by WVU and leased to the association, Curtis has said in the past.

Because the land is leased from the university, it is not a state construction project, WVU spokeswoman Janey Cink has said.

White says WVU's support of the projects includes site preparation and work on the new building's structural foundation.

Curtis has said work on the site by WVU is unrelated to the new alumni center. The work is to build a detention pond for storm runoff, she said.

WVU-funded work preparing the site for the center's construction will be paid back by the Alumni Association, she has said.