

University of Maine System
Board of Trustees

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

NAME OF ITEM: UMaine Forest Biomaterials Innovation Center

CAMPUS PRESENTER(S): Joan Ferrini-Mundy, President and Vice Chancellor for Research & Innovation; Kelly Sparks, Vice President for Finance and Administration & Chief Business Officer

INITIATED BY: Roger J. Katz, Chair

BOARD INFORMATION: X

BOARD ACTION:

BOARD POLICY:

701 – Budgets, Operating & Capital

UNIFIED ACCREDITATION CONNECTION:

The construction of the Forest Bioproducts Innovation Center at the University of Maine aligns with the University of Maine System’s mission and leverages the opportunities afforded by unified accreditation. NECHE **Standard One** emphasizes the importance of aligning institutional actions with mission and purpose, and **Standard 6.20** affirms that “Consistent with its mission and purposes, the institution provides support for scholarship, research, and creative activities.” The Forest Bioproducts Innovation Center will expand system wide access to research, innovation, and experiential learning, promoting recruitment, retention, and success of undergraduate and graduate students throughout UMS.

The project directly supports unified accreditation by enabling cross-campus participation in cutting-edge research in forestry and bioeconomy sectors, which are strategic priorities for the State of Maine. It complements the **National Science Foundation EPSCoR FOREST** program and other externally funded initiatives that broaden access to research learning experiences for students and internships across UMS universities. This center will not only advance applied research and workforce development (through student internships and professional development) in forest-based innovation but will also strengthen collaboration, resource sharing, and integration across the System without the need for merging or closing programs. In doing so, it exemplifies how unified accreditation enhances both academic quality and operational effectiveness across UMS institutions.

UMS STRATEGIC PLAN CONNECTION:

The Forest Biomaterials Innovation Center supports Research Action 1, Goal 1.2: Grow external funding from government, industry, and philanthropic sponsors; and Goal 1.5: Increase System commercialization outputs, including invention disclosures, revenue, corporate and industry partnerships, intellectual property-based spinoffs, and student entrepreneurship activities, and measure and report these results annually.

BACKGROUND:

The Forest Biomaterials Innovation Center (FBIC) project includes constructing an approximately 7,200+/- square foot stand-alone research building, including a new sidewalk and loading dock

area. Funding of \$7,425,000 is from a National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) 2024 construction grant secured through the Congressionally Directed Spending process by U.S. Sens. Collins and King at the request of the University of Maine System.

The FBIC site is adjacent to (less than 20 feet from) the Process Development Center (PDC) and Jenness Hall on the University of Maine campus in Orono. The Process Development Center is a 37,000-square-foot facility that houses a pilot paper machine, commercial-scale mechanical refiners, four 3,500-gallon processing tanks, and various other equipment. In addition to housing the PDC, Jenness Hall is a 3-story building with classrooms, offices, laboratories, conference rooms, and a lobby. Direct access to the FBIC, the Process Development Center, and Jenness Hall is required to accomplish the planned tasks efficiently.

The FBIC will consist of an ample, open space to accommodate new equipment that will allow innovative processing of forest fiber at a demonstration scale. The new FBIC will include a temperature and humidity-controlled room, a walk-in cold room for storing samples, and, if funding allows, a conference room for hosting students and professionals for training.

The FBIC aims to enable researchers, entrepreneurs, and industry to demonstrate forest-based innovations and support sustainable products for a national circular economy. Forest biomaterials are increasingly crucial in replacing products typically made of plastics derived from fossil fuels. The activities that will be conducted in this building include technology demonstrations, product testing, and hands-on training for students and industry.

NEXT STEPS:

The university seeks to engage a firm to design and construct the FBIC facility through a competitive process this spring. Once selected, the firm will engage the university to complete the programming and design of the facility, with construction estimated to start in the summer to fall of 2026, with completion in late 2027. Due to recent changes in the market, potentially higher than expected annual inflation, and potential tariffs on most construction materials, the university will monitor the likelihood of cost increases and their impact on this, as well as all capital projects at the university.

On the June 25, 2025, Finance, Facilities, and Technology Committee meeting and the July 14, 2025, Board of Trustees meeting, the University of Maine System, acting through the University of Maine, will seek authorization to expend up to \$7,425,000 for the design and construction of the Forest Biomaterials Innovation Center.