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University Board of Regents committee recommends research center

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FAIRBANKS — A committee of the University of Alaska Board of Regents has recommended the full board foster plans for a proposed \$30 million energy research building in Fairbanks.

The regents' Facilities and Land Management Committee meeting Wednesday in Valdez, recommended the board authorize the University of Alaska Fairbanks to move ahead with design.

UAF interim chancellor Brian Rogers said the building, which the university has placed on the fast track, could see construction begin as early as August.

The board will consider the recommendation tomorrow.

The committee was split on whether the tentative choice of sites — next to the university's coal-fired power plant or at the campus' eastern entrance — presents the best option. Committee member Kirk Wickersham unsuccessfully lobbied to shift the proposed building to the campus' Tanana Loop area and closer to other research centers.

"This is clearly, unequivocally, a research facility and it should be on the West Ridge," he said.

Wickersham's request fell short by a 4-2 committee vote. Rogers said officials and planners at the university weighed all options before deciding the space near the power plant puts the proposed center near coal supplies and would make it a visual attraction to research at the school.

The proposed 31,000-square-foot center would focus on energy research of all types including coal, wind, hydrogen and geothermal, according to the university. It would house the 1-year-old Alaska Center for Energy and Power. The university hopes to split the estimated \$30.6 million cost between state funding and bonds, Rogers said.

Rogers said despite the fast-tracked schedule for the energy center, another proposed project, the Life Sciences Innovation and Learning Facility, remains the university's "top priority" among proposed new construction projects.

UAF has proposed splitting the cost for the energy center between state grants and bonds. Rogers said the university would need to formally ask regents in June for permission to issue bonds.