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University of Alaska regents authorize new energy research building at UAF

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FAIRBANKS — The University of Alaska Board of Regents on Thursday authorized the Fairbanks campus to complete designs for a proposed \$30 million energy research building.

The proposed 31,000-square-foot center would focus on energy research, including nonrenewables and alternative energy. It would host 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. UAF interim chancellor Brian Rogers said the university would need to formally ask regents in June for permission to move ahead.

“We have to come back to the board for approval of the design and for approval of any bond or bank financing of the project,” he said.

Gov. Sarah Palin’s proposed statewide construction budget tentatively lines the university up to accept financing for one-half of the project’s budget. Sen. Joe Thomas said it seems unlikely the Legislature, which is nearing the end of its spring session, will fund the other half directly. It is considering changes to that bonding authority that could open the project up for direct federal support.

“We’re just trying to do our piece on this end,” Thomas said.

UAF hopes to construct the building near the university’s coal power plant, at the campus’ east entrance. Rogers said approval for financing would be enough for the university to start constructing the building’s shell, possibly as early as this fall.