

U-M's decision to build a new dorm is welcome

Impact on surrounding area is still unclear

The decision to move ahead with its first new dormitory since 1967 is welcome news and long overdue for the University of Michigan, where many students are squeezed into old dorms.

And locating the dorm at the intersection of State Street and Huron Street is an intriguing choice, which will trigger a set of ripples throughout the area.

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Early and predictable response from one slice of the community has focused the spotlight on historic preservation because the dorm will replace the Frieze Building, previously used as the Ann Arbor High School until 1956.

Preservation is an important value, particularly in areas where rapid growth and change risk erasing important community benchmarks.

While all old buildings are historic, not all of them have are historically significant. Instead of significance, the call to preserve the facade of Frieze largely seems grounded in nostalgia because of the building's former life as a high school.

Two other issues tied to the new, 500-student dorm seem to have far more potential for profound impact on the surrounding area.

One is the location of the dorm on one of the border streets between campus and community. And the second is the university's decision not to include parking as part of this project.

Both of these issues are closely wrapped, and will impact the nearby areas, including retail along State and other adjacent streets. Five hundred more students living nearby will infuse more vitality, but how this area will change over the long term is uncertain.

More parking is a critical component for Ann Arbor, and it should not be overlooked as the university moves ahead with its long-term upgrade of its dorms.