

ACTION ITEM #3

WSU Pullman

Proposed Chinook Student Center Mandatory Student Fee Rate Change Effective Fall Semester 2024

(Leslie Brunelli/Elizabeth Chilton/Romando Nash/Sean Greene)

April 19, 2024

TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF REGENTS

SUBJECT: WSU Pullman, Proposed Chinook Student Center Mandatory Student Fee Rate Change effective fall semester 2024

PROPOSED: That the Board of Regents authorize a rate change for the Chinook Student Center mandatory student fee effective fall semester 2024

SUBMITTED BY: Leslie Brunelli, Executive Vice President, Finance & Administration/CFO
Elizabeth Chilton, Provost and Executive Vice President and Chancellor,
WSU Pullman

SUPPORTING

INFORMATION: The Chinook Student Center is an important part of student life on the WSU Pullman campus, serving more than 85% of students throughout the year. The Chinook blends the amenities of a student union and a recreation center by offering study, fitness, community, and event spaces; food service; a popular esports lounge; and quiet areas for meditation, prayer, and rest. Students have said that the Chinook helps them improve both their physical and mental health, and research has shown that recreation centers positively impact recruitment, retention, and academic success.

To continue its mission to support student health and well-being, the Chinook is proposing a 5% increase in its mandatory fee. The fee would increase to \$103/semester, from \$98/semester. All Pullman-based undergraduate students enrolled in 7 or more credit hours during the fall/spring semesters pay the fee. The summer fee is prorated for students taking 1 or 2 credits.

	Resident	Non-Resident
Current Rate (Semester)	\$98	\$98
Proposed Rate (Semester)	\$103	\$103
\$ Increase	\$5	\$5

The proposed increase will:

- Assist in covering the \$1.92 million annual bond payment;
- Allow the Chinook to maintain/expand operations at standard levels, including hours of operation, maintenance, and custodial support; and
- Maintain student employment at existing levels during the academic year (the Chinook currently employs about 125 students each year).

The Chinook is proposing the increase to adjust for rising costs and declining revenues. The Chinook fee has not increased since the facility opened in 2017, despite ongoing increases in minimum wage, utilities, and general goods and services. In FY2023-24 alone, wage rates have increased 6%, salaries and benefits 2.5-4.0%, and general inflation 4%. Total fee collection has decreased by \$610,000 compared to five years ago due to declining enrollment.

This year, for the first time since it opened, the Chinook reduced facility hours to cut costs; it also reduced full-time staffing, program offerings, and goods and services. To reduce operating losses due to significantly decreased summer revenue tied to enrollment, the Chinook will be closed for summer 2024, and fees will not be charged.

Deferred maintenance and equipment replacement have been ongoing for several years, but the Chinook must prioritize equipment replacement and building maintenance as the building ages. These projects are funded through reserves, which have been negatively impacted by project costs, decreased fee collection, and increased expenses. It is imperative that the Chinook budget includes a transfer to reserves each year to support current and future equipment replacement and building repairs.

If the fee is not increased, the Chinook will be forced to further reduce services for students in the academic year, including additional cuts to building hours, closing the esports lounge, reductions in student jobs, and deferral of vital maintenance projects and equipment replacement that would negatively impact student experience and, particularly related to equipment replacement, compromise safety standards.

The UREC Advisory Board, which has majority representation from students (11 of 16 seats) and includes representatives from ASWSU and GPSA, supports the proposed increase.

Because the original referendum for the Chinook did not specify that a fee increase would be implemented with inflation, the increase was slated as a ballot initiative in the ASWSU General Elections on March 5 & 6, 2024 and passed. The general elections saw a 23% voter turnout, and the Chinook referendum passed with 88% approval. The initiative also gave the ASWSU Senate the authority to raise the fee by no more than 5% per year in the future, on recommendation by the UREC Advisory Board and a 2/3 affirmative vote by the Senate.