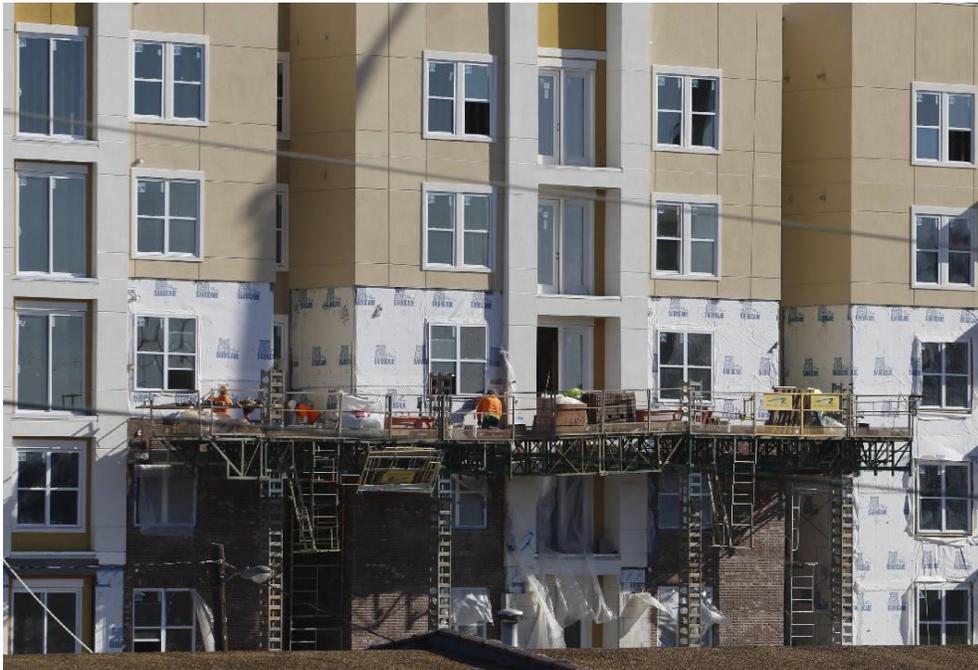


# UTC joins downtown resurgence with its own building boomlet

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## NEW CONSTRUCTION

Among projects recently completed, ongoing or on track for funding both on and just off the UTC campus:

- › **West Campus housing:** 600 beds, \$80 million
- › **New library:** \$48 million
- › **Douglas Heights:** 691 beds, \$40 million
- › **Lupton Library renovation:** \$35.9 million
- › **Vue at 5th:** 64 apartments, \$7 million
- › **Vine and Houston:** 68 apartments, \$5 million
- › **Fleetwood Building:** 30 units, more than \$3.5 million
- › **324 Vine:** 15 units, \$2 million

*Source: UTC, projects, news archives*

For years, the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga was seen as too disconnected from the renaissance that's taken hold in the central city.

But today, UTC and the area around it are experiencing a building boomlet in new construction, including an array of apartments which are adding more than 1,300 beds with more on the drawing board.

Solid UTC enrollment gains for much of the decade and enhanced community ties are seen as helping the area better share in downtown's resurgence, observers said. More than \$220 million in building projects are either recently completed, ongoing or on track for funding both on and just off campus.

"It's right in line with where the city is and the things happening downtown," said Roe Elam, development director for Walk2Campus Properties, a private company spending millions of dollars on new apartments near UTC.

On campus, the university last year officially marked the opening of a new \$48 million library after a long construction period. The 180,000-square foot, five-story building is 40 percent larger than the Lupton Library it replaced.

Last week, renovation of the old library was included in Gov. Bill Haslam's new budget. Haslam's proposed 2016-17 spending plan calls for \$35.9 million to put the building to new uses as well as renovate portions of the university's Fine Arts Center.

Also, already underway at Vine and Houston streets is an \$80 million project to add 600 more beds at the university along with a new 700-space parking garage.

Bryan Rowland, UTC's vice chancellor of development and alumni affairs, said community ties are key.

"A lot of it has to do with the community looking at us to be a partner in economic development," he said. That doesn't just include new buildings but also research and development, such as ties with Erlanger hospital and Siskin Hospital for Physical Rehabilitation, Rowland said.

The vice chancellor also is executive director of the University of Chattanooga Foundation, which helps raise money for UTC programs and building projects, such as \$1 million to renovate space in Fletcher Hall to house the Joe Decosimo Success Center.

"It's something that was very much needed," he said about the site named for the prominent Chattanooga accountant and businessman. It helps to provide better career services, advising and placement for business students, Rowland said.

Off campus, immediately surrounding the university, is more new construction.

The biggest single building is Douglas Heights near M.L. King Boulevard and Douglas Street, which is slated to add 691 new beds. The \$40 million project is the first phase of two proposed for the area.

Kim White, chief executive of the nonprofit downtown redevelopment group River City Co., said a new study shows there's more room for student housing downtown.

"There's still a demand," she said.

Meanwhile, a pair of projects are going up on or near Vine Street. At Vine and Houston is a \$5 million venture expected to hold 68 apartments. A couple of blocks away, at 500 Lindsay St., Walk2Campus is raising 64 units.

Adam Green, president of Green Real Estate Group, said recently completed apartments his group built at Vine and Lindsay are 100 percent leased, and he's looking for another project in the area.

Green said The River City Co. has a plan for the area that includes Unum Group, the Chattanooga-based insurer that's a big landholder downtown and on Vine. A big apartment developer is being sought for Vine Street, he said, to put up non-student housing units with rents going for more than \$1,000 monthly.

Elam said a lot of what's going on around UTC "has to do with the recent success of the school. People are taking notice of that."

The Lindsay project, dubbed the Vue at 5th because of its perch on Brabson Hill, is aimed at UTC students, faculty and Unum employees, with rents slated from \$650 to \$950 monthly, he said.

"We're excited about the area, where the school is headed," Elam said. "And certainly the city. Hopefully, the market will be excited about the project."

However, UTC's freshman class of recent high school graduates fell about 13 percent in the wake of the Tennessee Promise scholarships at community colleges.

Chattanooga State experienced an increase of about 60 percent, while the number of recent high school graduates enrolled at Cleveland State is up by about 17 percent.

UTC is having to rethink its recruitment strategy.

But the executive director of Tennessee Promise said the program eventually could channel students to the state's universities.

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