A mini-city growing in a campus

15-year plan for NTU includes rail system, shopping, cinema, bars and outdoor classes

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SINGAPORE — Nanyang Technological University (NTU) is no longer content to have just a 200-hectare university campus.

It wants to be a mini-city with its own light-rail system and a Holland-Village-styled vibrancy, set amid a network of ponds and lakes with pavilions and decks that can double as outdoor classrooms.

NTU president-designate and provost Bertil Andersson unveiled yesterday this 15-year plan for Yunnan Garden, Singapore’s largest university campus with 33,000 students and 3,000 faculty staff and researchers.

With those numbers still rising, though, Professor Andersson has a “dream” of an electric transport system there, for instance. “We’re in preliminary discussion (with the authorities). Nothing’s concrete, but I’ll make it a priority, and I hope in 10 years, this’ll be a reality,” said the Swede, who is taking over this year from NTU president Su Guaning.

NTU is not ready to put a price tag on the planned changes but Prof Andersson had already indicated in a previous interview that he wanted to bring in restaurants, bars, shops and even a cinema. These will be located at a new Campus Centre that will become the heart of NTU.

The plan to inject more vibrancy will be complemented by the addition of more greenery, such as plants and landscaping integrated with covered walkways and cycling lanes.

Two years in the making, the campus masterplan also envisions 5,000 new hostel places by 2015, a new graduate hall housing 690 postgraduate students by 2013 and a lot more informal and “interactive” meeting spaces “not only for leisure but also learning purposes as well”.

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Professor Bertil Andersson, NTU president-designate and provost

For instance, a road near the School of Art, Design and Media leading to NTU’s Administration Building will be transformed into a pedestrian promenade, creating an intersection of academic, social and residential facilities.

At yesterday’s press conference, Prof Andersson sought to make a distinction with the National University of Singapore’s University Town, which is opening in phases from this year and which will also have a residential experience designed to encourage interactive peer group learning.

It would be “stupid” to compare the two, he said, as “it isn’t about creating big buildings but about creating harmony (on campus)”.  

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