MENOMONIE — The UW System Board of Regents on Thursday approved nearly $67 million worth of construction projects at west-central Wisconsin universities, including a new dormitory at UW-Eau Claire.

In addition to the proposed dorm, the projects include revamping Garfield Avenue on UW-Eau Claire's lower campus and renovating two residence halls at UW-Stout in Menomonie.

The projects were part of the Regents' 2013-15 capital budget, which the board passed Thursday in Madison.

The Regents' approval was only the first step in the funding process. Next, Gov. Scott Walker must put the projects in his 2013-15 capital budget. Then they must be OK'd by the state Building Commission, the Legislature and be signed into law by the governor.

UW-Eau Claire
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The proposed four-story, 350-bed dorm at UW-Eau Claire would include "semi-suite" style housing, with clusters of four-person single-room suites and four-person double-room suites, with each suite of rooms sharing a bathroom. It would be built on upper campus, west of Hilltop Center and north of Towers Hall.

The dormitory is needed because of consistent overcrowding in campus housing, said Mike Rindo, UW-Eau Claire's assistant chancellor for facilities and university relation. This fall, about 130 students will live in an off-campus hotel, and others will bed down in study lounges, Rindo said.

"We want to go down to 100 percent capacity rather than be around 108 percent capacity," Rindo said.

While there are only 4,080 beds on campus, a market study found demand for as many as 4,700 if more of them offered suite-style living and other amenities, the university says.

If built, the dorm could be the first part of a two-phase project, which might include the demolition of nearby Horan Hall, Rindo said.

Because it would be entirely paid for by student housing fees, the dorm wouldn't require any tax dollars.

If approved, the construction could begin in September 2014 and be completed by August 2016.

Meanwhile, the Garfield Avenue project's $12.4 million price tag would be roughly split between university program revenue and tax dollars.

The project entails rebuilding the street between the Ecumenical Religious Center and the foot of the hill that leads to upper campus. The road and underground utilities, including a steam tunnel and a natural gas line, would be replaced; the approach to the Chippewa River footbridge would be altered; and bike parking, plazas and other landscaping would be added.

Construction could begin on the Garfield Avenue project in June 2014, with completion by June 2015.

**UW-Stout**

The two projects at UW-Stout are a $7.9 million renovation of McCalmont Hall and a $13.3 million renovation of North Hall. They are part of a 16-year residence hall upgrade plan that already has included improvements to Hovlid, Fleming and Wigen halls.

"It's a heck of a lot better to remodel existing facilities than to go out and build new ones," said Doug Mell, UW-Stout's executive director of university communications. "We're trying to be cost-conscious."

The 1960s-era dormitories would undergo significant improvements, including remodeled toilet and shower facilities; improved kitchens and lounges; completely replaced plumbing, heating, ventilation, electrical and telecommunications systems; and the addition of fire sprinklers.

The projects would be paid for with student housing fees.
If approved, construction on McCalmont Hall could begin in January 2014 and be finished by the following August. The North Hall renovation could begin in January 2015 and be completed by December 2016.

On the Agenda

At its Oct. 4-5 meeting at UW-Stout in Menomonie, the UW System Board of Regents will consider UW-Eau Claire's portion of the Confluence Project, a public-private plan to build a new arts center, student housing and commercial space in downtown Eau Claire.

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