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# PLAIN TALK

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## Company planning SD refinery lets options expire



Protestors gather outside Hyperion's office located in downtown Elk Point on Earth Day in late April 2008 to demonstrate their disapproval of the company's plans to construct a \$10 billion oil refinery in Union County. (Photo by David Lias)

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP)—

A company that planned to build a \$10 billion oil refinery said Monday it has allowed land-purchase options to expire for thousands of acres of southeastern South Dakota farmland.

The move does not mean the project has been canceled, officials with Texas-based Hyperion Refinery said.

"We did not extend land options in Union County on Sept. 30, and we are evaluating our various options and opportunities," Hyperion spokesman Eric Williams said in a statement. "We appreciate the longstanding and continued support of the landowners in Union County and are continuing to dialogue with them."

The move comes just days before the South Dakota Supreme Court is scheduled to hear oral arguments in a case involving a state air quality permit for the refinery. The statement said Hyperion still plans to argue the case.

Williams declined further comment.

Union County Commission Chairman Doyle Karpen said

Monday he was surprised by the report.

"I really don't understand why they would allow the land options to expire," he said. "I believe this lingered on longer than they anticipated."

Asked if he thought it meant the end of the project, Karpen said, "If it is, it is."

The proposed refinery north of Elk Point would process 400,000 barrels of Canadian tar sands crude oil each day into low-sulfur gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and liquid petroleum gas. It would be the first new U.S. oil refinery built since 1976.

The project would include a power plant that produces electricity for the refinery. It would use a byproduct of the refinery process, solid petroleum coke, which would be turned into gas and burned to produce electrical power.

Environmental groups have complained that the refinery would emit too much pollution and hurt the quality of life in the rural area. Hyperion contends the refinery would be a clean, modern plant that would use the most advanced, commercially feasible emission-control technology.

## Vandals strike wide area of Vermillion

BY TRAVIS GULBRANDSON  
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Vermillion police are investigating a series of vandalism incidents that occurred last weekend.

According to the Chief Matt Betzen, an unknown suspect or suspects slashed tires, broke windows and mirrors and stole small items out of at least 22 cars late Friday night or early Saturday morning.

The area affected stretched from "the alleyways behind Pine Street, behind Plum, north University, which is north of Main — from that general area to Clark," Betzen said. "It's several blocks wide and several blocks deep."

It was reported in other news outlets that DNA evidence was collected in the early stages of the investigation.

Betzen confirmed this in an interview with the Plain Talk,

but added, "What value that evidence will have is yet to be determined."

"Obviously, it has to be processed," he said. "With any kind of DNA or fingerprints, it's possible that you've collected stuff that's there innocently, so it'll be some time before we know (the value)."

The Vermillion Police Department is welcoming any pertinent information regarding the incidents, he added.

"Most of these cases are solved because people come and tell us who did it," Betzen said.

If residents have information, they are encouraged to call Detective Robin Hower at 677-7070 or e-mail him at [rhower@vermillionpd.org](mailto:rhower@vermillionpd.org).

As of press time, there are no suspects in the incidents.



A proposed expansion of the Muenster University Center on the USD campus would add 31,000 square feet of additional dining space. It now awaits approval from the state Board of Regents, which is scheduled to discuss the addition next week. (Photo by David Lias)

## USD building project clears hurdle

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF  
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A building committee approved Monday an \$11.6 million expansion of the University of South Dakota's student center, sending the project to the full Board of Regents next week in Vermillion.

Only three years old, the Muenster University Center (MUC) cannot keep up with campus growth, said Cathy Wagner, USD director of planning and construction. "The MUC was built for what we had at the time. Now, we have more freshmen," she said during Monday's telephonic meeting. "If you are here (at the center) near noon, you know what we have ever day."

USD enrollment has returned above the 10,000-student mark, reaching school record levels. The university's

enrollment stands at 10,284 this fall, an increase of 314 or 3.15 percent.

The MUC expansion would add 31,000 square feet of additional dining space. The seating capacity will triple, from the current 450 seats to 1,200. In addition, USD is working on agreements with national food franchises.

Rising student usage, as well as growing enrollment, is fueling the need for expanded space, said President Jim Abbott. He noted the growing popularity among students for eating and studying in the link connecting the MUC and I.D. Weeks Library.

"If it gets kids to stay there and (remain) connected to the library and work there, that's good," Abbott said. "Other dining halls in the past, they go in only for the meal and then it's not used for the rest of the time. That's not the case here (with the MUC), and it's a

good thing."

Regent Jim Hansen said he was aware of the cramped facilities. "I'm not arguing it — the project is needed. There's no debate there," he said.

However, USD officials found themselves defending the project's cost of \$11.6 million — \$9.75 million for construction and the rest for other services.

"How did you come to the conclusion for what you did?" one committee member asked. "You had different estimates from the architect and construction manager. Who determines what is more right than the other one, if it hasn't gone to bid yet?"

Abbott and Wagner explained the large difference in initial cost estimates among the parties. USD officials worked with the architect, construction manager and an independent consultant to formulate a final cost figure.

By using alternate features, nearly \$3 million was trimmed from the high estimate, Wagner said. USD officials moved away from "high-end" building stone and kitchen equipment, and they also looked at the amount of glass used for the building.

However, the design and square footage hasn't changed, Wagner said. The impact on utility cost is estimated to be \$64,832 for the first fiscal year of operation, according to the USD website. Operational costs have not changed since the Facility Program Plan.

USD officials noted, if bids come out lower than expected, the university can use the difference any way it wants on this project.

Besides the cost issues, USD officials were also questioned about the delay in construction, slated to begin last summer.



Sgt. Sam Nelsen of the University Police Department shows off one of the three recently-acquired Specialized Rockhoppers that promise to make patrols on campus much easier. (Photo by Travis Gulbrandson)

## USD police use Rockhoppers to roll on campus

BY TRAVIS GULBRANDSON  
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While the University Police Department has used mountain bikes to patrol the USD campus since 2005 or 2006, it was a small program for much of that time.

That all changed in August, when eight UPD officers became certified to do bike patrols, and three Specialized Rockhoppers equipped with headlights, front suspension and disc brakes were acquired.

That gave the department four bikes in all, with a fifth that has yet to be assembled.

"We had the opportunity to really invest in the program, (raise) our numbers, get the extra bikes and gear that we needed to get everybody rolling," said Sgt. Sam Nelsen. "It was always something in the back of our mind, where we really wanted to step it up. It's something we've been working on for quite a few years. It just

all came together this year, so to speak, and snowballed."

Nelson said the bikes are ideal for patrols, both in terms of interacting with students and accessing different areas of campus.

"I think the number-one advantage is, officers are a lot more approachable than they are in a car, because they're just riding around campus," he said. "Obviously, it's a lot easier to get around the inner part of campus on a bike than it is a car. We try to stay off the sidewalks with a car unless it's an emergency."

The bikes also make it easier to do the same necessary tasks in less time.

"We do lock-up every night on bikes, too, so you can just ride up to a door and give it a shake instead of having to drive