



FAQs

Why is the University of Chicago ending its activities at Yerkes Observatory?

Despite its important history, the Yerkes facility and its instrumentation no longer contribute directly to the research mission of the University of Chicago, which has made major investments in the Magellan and Giant Magellan telescopes in Chile. The University's operation of the facility could no longer be justified from a programmatic or cost standpoint.

When will the current schedule of events and programs at Yerkes come to an end?

Activities will wind down over the next six months, and the University will formally cease on-site operations by Oct. 1, 2018. The upcoming summer season will therefore be the final season of University activities at Yerkes.

What is the University's process for deciding on the future of the Yerkes property?

In late April the University posted a call for Expressions of Interest. The University recommends that any party planning to submit an expression of interest do so by June 15. At this stage we expect to have confidential conversations with interested parties. We will share more information about proposals with the Village and others as the process unfolds, in coordination with the parties that submit proposals.

What is the University looking for in an Expression of Interest?

The University is looking for proposals that balance a number of priorities, including the need for a sustainable operational model, the interest in continued public programming, and suitable financial terms. The Call for Proposals lays out components of an effective Expression of Interest: 1) Names of the interested parties; 2) An overall vision for future use of the property, including proposed subdivisions, potential uses, community benefits, and any requested zoning changes; 3) Expected leadership and process for developing a full proposal; 4) Financial terms, with a high-level financial plan for programming, operations and maintenance, and 5) Requests for additional information from the University to develop a full proposal.

How has the University engaged with local stakeholders on this issue?

Representatives of the University have been in contact with numerous local stakeholders, including the Williams Bay Village Board of Trustees. The University gave an initial presentation to the Village Board on March 19 and hosted a public meeting dedicated to this topic on May 18. About 300 people attended the May 18 meeting; the University addressed comments from about 30 attendees, and collected more than 40 written comments and questions. We anticipate ongoing engagement with the Village Board during the process of evaluating proposals. Members of the public can submit questions or comments at any time through the Yerkes Updates website.

Will the University take local input into account?

Yes. Many members of the community have expressed the view that the University should not approach this as an ordinary real estate transaction, and the University is proceeding with that viewpoint in mind.

Will the University consider delaying the Oct. 1 date for ceasing its activities at Yerkes?

No. This was announced in advance so the University could engage with Yerkes staff and nearby communities in considering long-term plans for the property. We hope we can make substantial progress in that time.

Will the University and Yerkes staff honor existing commitments for events scheduled before Oct. 1?

Yes.

How will Yerkes respond to new requests for events or programs?

We will accept new bookings on a case-by-case basis.

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