Provost Steve Allred called the meeting to order at 3:30 PM in Commons 305. He introduced Kathy Monday, Vice President for Information Services, who presented a slide show on a project to improve cellular and emergency communications at the University of Richmond.

The University designed its emergency alert system to meet the recommendations of the Virginia Tech Review Panel in response to the April 2007 tragedy in Blacksburg. The Panel emphasized that in such situations alerting the entire campus community by multiple channels of communication was critical. A survey of University students, staff and faculty revealed that a substantial majority of these constituencies preferred to be notified by cell phone and text messages. Cell phone communication was particularly preferred by students, who rely increasingly less frequently on land lines. Student organizations favored the project and, according to national polls, campus safety is a “significant factor” in college choice by students and their parents.

Since the campus and surrounding area are beset with poor cellular coverage, the project’s goal was to significantly improve outdoor and in-building cellular coverage for multiple carriers. Challenges for finding the best communications facility included the “bowl” effect of campus topography, the size of the campus itself, the presence of numerous trees and the size and density of University buildings, of which parts of most are below ground. An independent telecommunications consulting firm was engaged to assist with analysis. Options considered were additional rooftop installations (e.g., Modlin Center), distributed antenna systems (DAS), multiple short monopoles, a monopine (monopole designed to look like a tree) and a 195-foot monopole on a single site. All of these solutions, save the last, were found wanting in important respects.

The sites evaluated for the monopole were Robins Stadium, the intramural field area, a space between Modlin Center and the apartments, a space near the Westhampton entrance and the parking lot across from stadium. The best location for coverage, access and space (among other reasons) was found to be a location near Pitt Field by the chiller. Verizon was selected to serve as the lead carrier; it will construct and maintain the tower as well as lease it out to other carriers. The company, which would fund the construction of the facility, would sign a fifteen-year lease with the option of a five-year renewal. After the renewal, the University could dismantle the tower if desired.

Information Systems held open information sessions on campus and met with city and county representatives, homeowner association presidents, student government associations, the alumni board, UFC and USAC, neighbors, and interested community members. It is intended that a solution be in place by fall 2010 when students return to campus.

Discussion of the presentation raised questions about the location of the monopole, possible health effects from the facility and the lease with Verizon. Although the lease was to be signed after today’s meeting, Information Systems agreed to consider an alternate site suggested by Mike Spear (Journalism) and to explore the possibility of a buy-out of the lease by the University before the end of twenty years, suggested by Johann Stegmeir (Theater), before doing so.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Gene Anderson, Substitute Secretary