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Law dean responds to critics

By Christopher Cokinos

ids Staff Writer 2/4/82

The IU School of Law took into account astronomy department concerns over its proposed addition's impact on Kirkwood Observatory, but neither the astronomers nor those opposed to the intrusion into

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the Old Crescent woods contacted the law school, law school Dean Sheldon Plager said this week.

In a statement read to law school students and faculty Tuesday, Plager said, "The plans for the addition have been posted on public display . . . since the beginning of the semester and well before the controversy appeared in the press."

Plager said no one who has complained about the planned law library expansion into the Old Crescent contacted him before critics launched their "public attack."

The statement outlined some of the proposed plans for the law expansion and said the concerns of the astronomy department were considered.

But Hollis Johnson, chairman and professor of astronomy, said Wednesday, "I violently disagree with that. No one contacted us. And I call to mind a statement made by (Arthur) Lotz (law school assistant dean for administration) calling Kirkwood a 'museum.'

"I don't know how they can note our concerns if they were acting on that kind of misinformation," he said.

In the statement, the law school's

first public comment on the controversy, Plager said other plans were rejected for a variety of reasons, including impact on the woods, inconvenience to the law school and the cost of buying the Phi Delta Gamma property.

Johnson reacted angrily to Plager's comments that the law school expansion plans were public and that he was not contacted with concerns. "The Daily Student had run an article saying the expansion would go to the south, so we all had relaxed. It does look a little like a surprise attack," Johnson said.

But Plager said in the statement the final plan was "approved by the Board of Trustees, concurred in by Chancellor (Herman B) Wells and many others whose concerns very much include the preservation and protection of the campus environment."

He also said the addition's impact on Kirkwood Observatory does need to be addressed. Plager mentioned relocation of the facility as an alternative.

"That's a smooth way of being kind to us," Johnson said. "To do something for the observatory is fine, but that takes a lot of money. And it functions fine as it is."

"We're not arguing that they don't need the library but that it could still be placed in such a way as to minimize the impact on the woods and the observatory," he said.

But Plager said, "Stopping the law building addition is not the only solution, nor is it the one that best balances the interests of the academic programs and the environment of the campus."

The statement said the 57,000-square-foot law school library addition will integrate the building and woods together "so that the academic program of the University and the environment in which the building is set will complement each other."

Currently, the astronomy department is investigating design options for the possible relocation of the observatory. Martin Burkhead, associate professor of astronomy and Kirkwood Observatory director, would not say when the astronomy department will finalize its recommendations and present them.