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Venice approves arts hall at school

EDUCATION: City will contribute \$7.5 million to Venice High project

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After debating whether the planned performing arts center looked "Northern Italian" enough to match the city's standards, the Venice City Council on Tuesday unanimously approved an agreement with the school district to build a \$12.8 million auditorium on the grounds of a new Venice High School.

It is a project that area arts groups and city officials had dreamed of for more than a decade.

The joint project includes a \$7.5 million contribution from the city's 1 percent sales tax money.

This is "the most exciting project I've ever been associated with," said council member John Moore, who was the council's liaison to the district.

Venice High Principal Candace Millington hugged school district members after the vote.

"I'm thrilled," said Millington, who is retiring this year. "It's

something we've been working on for a long time. It's going to be great for the city."

Groundbreaking on a new school begins this fall with construction on the performing arts center beginning in 2014. Opening is set for 2015.

Despite the Venice Taxpayers League objecting to the use of city money, council members said city support was never in doubt.

"It's going to be an enormously positive" asset, said Mayor Ed Martin. "I fought off the people who have not wanted us to fund it."

Before the vote, architect Kenneth Dean, who helped build the original Venice High, showed the council renderings of a soaring, modernist-looking glass performing arts center with an "event lawn" near the main doors and separate school and public entrances.

"It doesn't look Venetian or Northern Italian to me," said council member Sue Lang. "Where are the arches?"

Dean said the architects used Northern Italian elements and colors.

"You need to expand your mind" to what is considered Northern Italian, Moore said to Lang.

The council also discussed the recent Federal Aviation Administration letter advising the city that it would not allow the airport to be downgraded.

Several speakers urged the city to "resist the FAA."

"Safety should be priority No. 1," said resident Bob Dennis. "Why would we want you to fold on this issue?"

Another speaker told the city to avoid costly, prolonged litigation and accept the FAA's determination.

"We believe this letter from the FAA is clear," said Chuck Schmieler, president of the Venice Airport Business Association.

"We think it's time to move forward, this has been going on for

years now."

An airport workshop is scheduled for Jan. 28.

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