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## EIR, Design of \$122 Million City College Chinatown Campus Approved

New Facilities Will Help Serve the Educational Needs of the Chinese Community

By Paul Burton

Contributing Writer

The development of a new City College Chinatown campus moved closer to reality Oct. 19 when the Board of Trustees approved the Environmental Impact Report and design for a proposed tower for the campus. The Board voted 6-1 to okay the EIR and design of two new buildings &ndash; a 13-story, 172-foot tower at the northeast corner of Kearny and Washington streets, and a 5-story building at Columbus and Washington. The Board also voted 7-0 to exempt the tower from city zoning laws, which call for a maximum height of 65 feet in the Chinatown neighborhood.

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Originally, the project was projected to cost \$122 million, with \$48 million covered by state funding and the remainder coming from three bond measures passed in 1997, 2001 and 2005. Costs now are estimated to be about \$137 million. City College Board Trustee Milton Marks said that there is not enough money in the budget to cover the difference unless funds are re-allocated from other programs and projects or a new bond is put forward.

The project is covered under a Project Labor Agreement with City College and the building trades.

The development is part of the City College of San Francisco's 2005 District Wide Capital Improvements Plan, which originally called for the proposed tower to be completed by 2008 or 2009; construction is now expected to be completed by 2010, barring legal challenges by opponents of the tower.

A diverse coalition advocating a new campus includes Chinatown neighborhood groups, students and faculty at CCSF and San Francisco State University, as well as labor. Supporters of the Chinatown campus improvement have been

working for years to make the campus's facilities more modern in order to accommodate the needs of the Chinese immigrant community it serves.

The City College of San Francisco has been offering classes in the Chinatown and North Beach neighborhoods since the early '70s, using over 30 sites scattered around those neighborhoods to hold courses.

According to CCSF, 89 percent of the Chinatown campus students are Asian/Pacific Islander, with 70 percent over the age of 40. A large percentage are immigrants and individuals with limited English proficiency. The college offers an opportunity for students, including many who also work full-time jobs, to acquire English language skills, become U.S. citizens, enter the workforce, upgrade job skills, pursue new careers, or transfer to other colleges and universities.

Susan Hsieh, Communications and Membership Coordinator for Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA), said that CAA is involved in the coalition to support the new CCSF Chinatown campus. "It is a civil right for people to be able to get and education that is affordable where they can learn job skills they can use to support a family." CAA that been active in Chinatown for 38 years advocating for immigrants, she said.

"It's a huge issue for the immigrant community," Hsieh said. "Facilities are scattered throughout the Chinatown and North Beach area, and CCSF wants to build new facilities because the existing ones are run down. It's disrespectful and insulting to put adults in those kinds of buildings. They need to be improved to meet the demands of the 21st century, with computer labs and modern facilities."

Having educational programs spread out in leased spaces poses problems for City College because state funds can't be used to renovate deteriorating leased facilities, computer and technology training labs can't be housed in joint-use facilities, and the facilities are inadequate for providing student support services such as a library, learning labs, and career, financial aid and personal counseling. The leased facilities are also subject to rent increases, making some long-term planning impossible. Many of the facilities do not meet structural or seismic codes.

The new campus is designed to provide a quality learning environment with an expanded and improved program of classes, job training programs, and services. The building will be disabled-accessible and earthquake-safe and include classroom space, expanded offices, conference rooms, faculty work areas, and student activity areas such as a student lounge, library, bookstore and childcare center. An auditorium, multi-purpose space and art gallery are also part of the planned campus.

Services offered will include academic, personal, financial and career counseling, bilingual/bicultural support staff, disabled student counseling, Asian Pacific academic student success program services, computer and multimedia access, teleconference capabilities and educational and life skills workshops. Current classes put an emphasis on preparing students to learn new job skills and for employment in the Culinary Arts, Hospitality, Housekeeping, Home Health Care, Food Services and Customer Services.

The Chinatown campus has about 6,500 students, mostly from Chinatown, said Ms. Hsieh. "There are another 700 on a waiting list. There is always a demand for vocational training, English, clerical skills, construction. Working class immigrant families want to improve their job skills and classes have a high demand. Many earn less than \$11,000 a year."

Trustee Marks said, "The new Chinatown campus is a project that's been in the works for too long. Teachers, students, and classified staff deserve a better facility. People have been talking about it for 30 years, and working on it for at least the last 10 years." He said that there have been land-use issues and neighborhood concerns to deal with but that, "We are still trying to talk to people to see if they can be convinced of the benefits of the new construction."

The main opponents of the development are the owners of the Hilton Hotel nearby because the new tower would obstruct views from the hotel. Some neighborhood groups also have voiced concerns over increased traffic and congestion, Marks said.

The threat of lawsuits and further delays and costs to the District led Trustee John Rizzo to vote against approving the project. Rizzo said he didn't want the project killed because of lawsuits and that. "I think there is still more that we could do." He and others have said that the environmental impact report didn't explain how to avoid the problem of neighborhood congestion or the tower casting a shadow over nearby Portsmouth Square.

Hsieh of CAA said that development of the new campus was "the largest investment in Chinatown in decades. It will create lots of jobs and the trustees are committed to make sure local people are hired so it benefits the entire community—lots of different people." She added that, "People in Chinatown say it's one of the biggest movements people have seen in the neighborhood for a long time."

"We are happy that the unions have stepped up and joined us. It makes a strong coalition. In addition to the organizations, tens of thousands of people have joined in this fight by signing postcards and petitions." She said that Hilton would see huge community support for the new campus.

"We were pleased to join with the Chinatown community in speaking out on behalf of this project," SFBCTC Executive Secretary-Treasurer Mike Theriault added. "That community has given us many members, and the English as a Second Language classes at the new campus should bring us still more."

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