

WPCC continuing education site backed by county commissioners

New \$2.2 million facility is expected to be completed within a year

By SHARON McBRAYER
The News Herald

MORGANTON — Western Piedmont Community College will get its new continuing education building.

In four motions Wednesday night, the Burke County Board of Commissioners put the \$2.2 million facility, which is expected to be completed within a year, into motion.

Commissioners Maynard Taylor and Tom Johnson opposed approval of an administrative agreement with the college for the facility, the reimbursement resolution for financing the center and the approval of the architect, Mistri Associates Architects.

Johnson, though, did break party lines by voting for a pub-

lic hearing May 15 for a financing plan for the building.

Before the public hearing was set, Paul I James, assistant county manager, told the board that quotes from the bank for the financing should come in a few days before the hearing.

Because of the motions passed by the commission, the county will assume ownership of the building until financing is complete but the details of the building will be handled by the college.

The college's board of directors will turn over a tract of land near the new Burke Agriculture building in order for the county to secure financing of the new facility.



Taylor

The county will lease back the building to the college for the duration of the loan. After the loan is paid, the county will transfer the building and land back to the college.

The building will house the literacy program, English as a second language and human resources, as well as classrooms, offices and laboratory space for those programs.

Taylor asked why the college is not using the old Morganton City Hall for the continuing education building, which college officials originally said would be used.

Richard Greene, executive vice president of Western Piedmont, said the building would not meet the needs of the college. He said even when the old City Hall on Meeting Street was purchased, the college knew it would not adequately meet its needs.

"But at the time, we did not

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see any other facility available," he said.

He added that though the old City Hall would not meet its needs, if the commissioners did not approve the new facility the college would not turn down the old building.

Before the approval of the architect, Taylor, though he voted against every motion, told Greene, "I compliment your board for getting a building built for \$90 a square foot. I've been told you can't get a building built for \$90 a square foot."

After all of the motions were approved, Commission Chair-

man Trossie Wall said, "We're moving as fast as we can to provide the students of Burke County an adequate facility."

Greene thanked the board for the approvals and added, "We want to be good stewards of the county's money and hope to have a facility you can be proud of."

Cyndie Callaway, vice president for Institutional Advancement, said on Wednesday, "The continuing education program is important in light of the economic downturn. We feel like this complex will meet the increased demands."

She added, "It provides a

great resource for local industry as well to help re-train their workers."

Greene estimated the continuing education programs serve almost 5,000 students a year.

In other decisions, the board:

- Approved, 4-1 with Taylor opposing, a public hearing on May 15 for the financing plan for the purchase by the Local Government Commission of the old Morganton City Hall.

- Approved a single prime contractor for the renovation of the Lazarus building.

- Approved a local match of \$20,835 for a \$750,000 grant for a runway extension at Foothills

Regional Airport. The county's budget already allocated \$19,150 for capital expenditures at the airport.

- Approved combining two part-time positions into one full-time position at the Morganton-Burke Senior Center.

The approval means an increase in fringe benefit costs of \$4,900.