

LODE ARTS CENTER KILLED IN EMOTIONAL VOTE

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SAN ANDREAS - The Calaveras High School band will never play the national anthem in a 500-seat performance hall once proposed for the campus in San Andreas. The school's choirs won't raise their voices there. And drama students won't stage "Annie" or "Oklahoma."

In an emotional vote Tuesday night, a divided Calaveras Unified School District Board of Trustees finally put an end to plans for the arts center.

The vote was 2-3 against a motion to proceed with construction of a \$5.4 million arts center design already approved by the state. That construction would have been funded, in part, with \$1.2 million in state money.

Trustees Sherri Reusche and Zerrall McDaniel voted in favor of building the center. Trustees Gregory Gustafson and Evan Garamendi and board Chairwoman Karan Bowsher formed the majority that voted against it.

The vote Tuesday night during a meeting in the multipurpose room at Mokelumne Hill Elementary School guarantees that the 500-seat design won't be built and makes it unlikely that a smaller arts center will be constructed.

Trustees were forced to come to a decision because time was running out to use the \$1.2 million state contribution toward the 500-seat design.

By rejecting the plan now, that money is no longer available.

And coming up with a new, smaller design and getting it through the state approval process would eat up roughly \$1 million of the \$4 million in bond money remaining from a measure Calaveras Unified voters approved in 2006.

"I am very disappointed," McDaniel said after the vote.

McDaniel represents the trustee area that includes San Andreas and Calaveras High School.

She noted that in addition to the various arts programs at the high school that need performance space, there is also the Calaveras Children's Repertory Theatre program,

whose many members must be driven to Angels Camp for productions because San Andreas lacks an appropriate venue.

McDaniel and Reusche have long said that an arts center was promised to voters when they approved the bond measure in 2006.

But a board majority and many critics of the 500-seat center said that in bleak economic times amid layoffs and a shrinking school population, it didn't make sense to spend so much money on an arts performance hall.

"Times change," said Jean Gonzalves, a member of the district's bond oversight committee. "Everything changed four years ago," she said, referring to the housing market collapse that ushered in an era of economic recession and high unemployment.

Trustees did not decide Tuesday what to do with the remaining bond money. Options include spending it on other district renovation and construction projects or returning it to taxpayers.

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