

St. Pete completes \$1 million pledge to Woodson African American Museum

The funding will go toward a new facility celebrating the history, art and culture of the city's African American neighborhoods.



A rendering of plans for a new Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American Museum shown to St. Petersburg City Council members Thursday. [Courtesy of Jason Jensen of Wannemacher Jensen Architects, Inc.]

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ST. PETERSBURG — The City Council on Thursday unanimously approved \$700,000 in funding for the planned new location of the Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American Museum on 22nd Street S.

“We are so excited for the opportunity to engage and present to our community a first-class African American museum,” said Terri Lipsey Scott, executive director of the museum.

The funding is part of an ongoing project started in 2019 when Mayor Rick Kriseman announced the “Deuces Rising” initiative, which committed \$1 million and a parcel of city land towards the design and development of a new facility for the Woodson.

Last year, the council approved the initiative along with an agreement to hire Wannemacher Jensen Architects, Inc. to create the design. With that, \$200,000 was allotted for the project, including site surveying and geotechnical testing, as well as another \$100,000.

Thursday’s vote fulfilled the remaining \$700,000 of the city’s commitment, after designs for the new museum were presented to the council.

The lot where the new museum will be built is on 22nd Street S, across from the historic Manhattan Casino, just north of Interstate 275 and a few blocks from the museum’s current location.

That area of the city has a rich history.

In 1868, John Donaldson arrived in St. Petersburg and, with his wife Anna, found a home in what historians have credited with being the first of several predominantly African American neighborhoods in the city, Lipsey Scott told council members. It was named “Peppertown,” after the variety of peppers grown in the community near what is now 18th Avenue S and 31st Street.

Later, as city business grew, leaders pushed Black residents away from downtown and towards 22nd Street S. There, “the busiest and most vibrant Black community was developed,” said Lipsey Scott. And today, in the same area, she hopes the new museum can revive that energy.

“We’re familiar with being displaced,” Lipsey Scott said of African Americans in St. Petersburg. “But we’re also familiar with growing wherever we’re planted.” The new facility will house African American art, history and culture in a place “where we were planted and where we’ve thrived,” she said.

Inspired by American Jazz history, the 29,000-square-foot facility will include three galleries, a sculpture garden and a justice center, which can be used to host community conversations as well as serve as an educational space. Attendees will be able to circle through all the galleries without retracing their steps.



Leaders of the Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American Museum at 2240 Ninth Ave. S in St. Petersburg are planning a larger facility that would be built several blocks away. The St. Petersburg City Council on Thursday approved \$700,000 toward the project. [WAVENEY ANN MOORE | Times]

The design “exemplifies the ways in which African American history and culture are indeed American history and culture,” said Mario Gooden, an architect for the project.

Jason Jensen, another architect added: “This is an events-oriented museum. Every space in this museum can be used for more than one purpose.”

The design provides enough space for additions to be made over time and took into account the criteria to host national exhibits locally.

The upgrade from the current 4,000-square-foot museum is estimated to cost \$18 to \$20 million, which will be funded largely through donations, grants and fundraising. The city’s investment will also go towards fundraising efforts.

The new museum “will celebrate African American history and contributions and culture, but it has to live in the hearts of all of us,” said Deputy Mayor Kanika Tomalin. “It’s going to take the contributions of every corporate entity that is headquartered in the city that is speaking currently about equity and talking about how to advance diversity and inclusion.”

“This is a chance to invest in your values.”

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