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.

By Tony Teglia

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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 2nd Street.

"We are excited for the opportunity to engage and present to our community a first-class African American museum," said Tom Lipsey, executive director of the museum.

The funding is part of an ongoing project aimed to reinvigorate downtown St. Petersburg. Mayor Rick Kriseman announced the "Downtown Rising" initiative, which committed $11 million and a parcel of city land toward the design and development of a new facility for the Woodson.

Last year, the council approved the initiative along with an agreement with Tom愠s Matterner Janes Architects, Inc. to design the building.

With that, $300,000 was allocated for the project, including the surveying and geotechnical testing, as well as another $400,000.

Thursday’s vote fulfilled the remaining $500,000 of the city’s commitment, after design for the new museum were presented to the council.

The lot where the new museum will be built is on 2nd Street and across from the historic Manhattan Cigar, 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 1888, John Donaldson started 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 told council members it was named "Pepitone," after the variety of peppers grown in the community near what is now 10th Avenue and 5th Street.

Lipsey, a city business leader, said decades passed families away from downtown and towards 2nd Street. "The busiest and most vibrant black community was developed," said Lipsey.

And in the same area, he hopes the new museum can revitalize that energy.

"We’re familiar with being black-owned," Lipsey said of African Americans in St. Petersburg. "We were also familiar with growing wherever we’d plant it. The new facility will boost African American history and culture in a place where we were planted and where we’d thrive," he said.

Inspired by African American history, the 29,000-square-foot facility will include three galleries, a sculpture garden and a resource center, which can be used to host community conferences as well as art or an educational space. Artworks will be able to move through all the galleries without interrupting their stays.

The museum includes the works in which African American history and culture are tied to African American history and culture," said Matthew Grimes, 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 use."

The design provides enough space for additional additions to be made to the design and into the court of the criteria to host national exhibits locally.

The upgrade from the current 2,800-square-foot museum is estimated to cost $5 to $6 million, which will be funded largely through donations, grants and fundraising. The city’s investment will also go toward fundraising efforts.

The new museum will reflect African American history well and contributions and culture, but its home in the heart of all of us," said Deputy Mayor Kamala Tendron. "It’s trying to take the contributions of everyone that’s been in the city that’s speaking currently about equity and talking about how to advance diversity and inclusion."

"This is a chance to invest in your values."

The Foundation for a healthy St. Petersburg provides partial funding for the museum to operate. It does not solicit any Property and is not involved in the reporting or editing.