

The Post and Courier

Council OKs Gaillard renovation

By [Adam Parker](#)

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Charleston City Council voted Tuesday to approve the proposed renovation, with conditions being a payout of \$2.7 million for architectural and engineering contracts and financial consultations, for the Gaillard Municipal Auditorium, effectively kick-starting one of the city's most expensive capital projects in its history.



Rendering Provided by David M. Schwarz Architects

A George Street view of the renovation proposed for the Gaillard Auditorium. Charleston County Council has signed off on a plan to use tax dollars to help fund the auditorium makeover and other projects.

Council unanimously affirmed the renovation plans, with several members voicing strong support. All appeared relatively comfortable with the scope and cost estimates of the project, though Council moved to insert two amendments.

One amendment would ask project coordinators to deliver monthly reports on the number of minority- and women-owned businesses involved in the project. Another would ensure that the city is protected from unanticipated cost overruns or other problems.

An anonymous private donor, who has pledged \$20 million for the \$142 million project, paid for the design plans and project management estimate, a total of \$7.3 million.

City Council also approved extending the term of the Tax Increment Financing District by 10 years, following a similar vote by County Council last week. This would generate \$30 million, though millions of dollars in tax revenues earmarked for the county and the school district upon expiration of the current TIF term in 2013 now would be deferred.

School district officials approved the proposal to include the Gaillard project in the designated TIF district, but have not yet agreed to extending its term, according to Mayor Joe Riley.

TIF is a designation for a defined urban area slated for improvement where future tax revenues are used as collateral for borrowing.

It has become a common fundraising mechanism for municipalities.

The renovation plan would remake the out-of-date auditorium (\$96 million), improve exhibition space (\$23 million) and consolidate city offices within a single city block (\$23 million).

Additional funding would be secured through the accommodations/hospitality tax and new market tax

credits (\$18 million) and by issuing general obligation bonds (\$23 million). The remaining half of the bill would be paid through private donations.

Previous coverage

[County agrees to forgo tax funds](#), published 06/11/10

['New' Gaillard? Riley lays out plan for expansion](#), renovation, published 6/3/10



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Construction costs in 2011, when the project would begin, would be \$26 million less than costs were five years ago, and less than future costs, officials said.

Public comments on the project mostly were positive. Helen Hill, director of the Convention and Visitors Bureau, said, 'It's hard to sell the Gaillard right now.' A renovated building is needed, she said.

Bernard Buckley questioned the wisdom of spending \$71 million in public money on an auditorium complex when the city faces problems such as flooding and roads in disrepair.

Painter Jonathan Green noted that every city has its problems, but that shouldn't derail an opportunity to improve the cityscape with a beautiful building, take advantage of low building costs and private donations and bring people together to celebrate the arts, he said.

Currently, the Charleston Symphony Orchestra, Charleston Concert Association, Spoleto Festival USA, Charleston Ballet Theatre and Southeastern Wildlife Exposition are regular users of the Gaillard Auditorium.

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