

EP school upgrades get financial backing

City Council approves sharing tax revenue for \$13 million project

EAST PEORIA —

The plan to refurbish and rebuild the high school here took one step closer to reality Monday night after the City Council voted unanimously to provide the school a portion of its sales tax revenue for up to 20 years.

If the plan is approved at the council's next meeting, the city would pass along a percentage of revenue generated from its sales tax to School District 309, a funding technique that Illinois cities and counties have begun embracing instead of remaining reliant on sporadic state funding. The money - an estimated \$6 million over the next 20 years - would be tied to building or capital projects within the district.

The measure will likely pass at the council's Aug. 19 meeting. The council stated its intent to support the revenue-sharing plan back in December.

District 309 Superintendent Cliff Cobert said the money would cover about half of the costs for roughly \$13 million in renovations and additions at East Peoria Community High School. The project would include new classrooms, cafeteria and kitchen, a fine arts center in the current cafeteria's space and a new main entrance. The project should break ground before the end of this year.

Cobert and School Board President Michael Joseph added the district will soon seek bonds to pay for the construction and then pay off the bonds with the provided sales tax money.

"Personally I view this as a landmark day for the city, the school and the community," council member Gary Densberger said before the vote.

In the past, the city had a 30-month deal to share the profits from a quarter-cent sales tax increase with District 309 and Grade School District 86. That agreement expired June 30, 2007.

A similar agreement between the city and Grade School District 86 was already formalized in early July.

In other business the council agreed to pay R.A. Cullian & Sons \$1.74 million for street improvements and repairs. Midwest Asphalt Repair will receive \$144,150 for spray patching roadways.

Council member Dan Decker said next year the city intends to go out for bids earlier in an effort to gain less-expensive offers from road repair companies during their off-season.

"We are really starting to look at ways to stretch our dollars," he said.

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