

SD Community College District renovating historic theatre



Image courtesy of San Diego Community College District

A rendering of what the restored Educational Cultural Complex theatre will look like.

By Thor Kamban Biberman

Bid requests have been issued for the proposed \$35 million to \$40 million redevelopment of the San Diego Community College District's historic theatre at the Educational Cultural Complex.

As noted by Brenna Leon Sandeford, the district's public information officer, the theatre was originally dedicated in May 1976 and has been part of Black culture for decades.

Theatre headliners have included Stevie Wonder; the "First Lady of Gospel" Shirley Caesar; civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson; Coretta Scott King, who in 1985 addressed California's Martin Luther King Jr. Commission during a successful effort to mark her late-husband's birthday a state and federal holiday; heavyweight champion boxer Muhammad Ali; and poet Maya Angelou.

The theater at 4343 Ocean View Boulevard in Southeastern San Diego also has welcomed local community theater companies dedicated to showcasing high-quality works that reflect the experiences of communities of color. It also hosts a wide range of community events.

"The restoration will preserve and rehabilitate the iconic theatre to ensure its long-term viability," Sandeford said.

"Enhancements to the 275-seat venue will include improved accessibility, modern acoustic panels, updated sound and lighting controls, a new stage, revamped entries and foyer areas, and new seating.

"New spaces that welcome public use from the surrounding community will be incorporated into the project, such as updated exterior patios and a new large community room."

Construction is scheduled to begin around this summer with a target completion date of summer 2026.

The project has been designed by HGA in San Diego, which was recognized with a professional design award from the Community College Facility Coalition for the new theatre concept. HGA also oversaw the redesign of the Jacobs Music Center at Symphony Hall, home of the San Diego Symphony; and the 450-seat main stage theatre at San Diego State University's Performing Arts District.

The Educational Cultural Complex renovation is funded through a \$35 million state grant secured by California Senate President pro Tempore Emeritus Toni G. Atkins (D-San Diego) in the summer of 2021. HGA held numerous meetings with the community, students, faculty, administrators and professional staff to shape a shared vision for the theatre's future before

submitting its plans to the California Division of the state architect last spring.

“This project represents the best about the communities we serve, which is why everything about this effort has been first class,” SDCCE president Tina M. King said in a statement last November. “I want to congratulate everyone on our team and HGA for their extensive outreach. I look forward to the opening of the renovated theatre in 2026.”

The San Diego Community College District has posted bid packages for the Educational Cultural Complex theatre renovation on its PlanetBids vendor portal.

“The project will include revitalizing the existing theatre and surrounding support areas and building expansions for the theatre’s ‘back of the house’ and educational areas,” the PlanetBids solicitation states. “It will also include surrounding utilities and site work.”

PlanetBids added that work will take place on and around the operational campus.

Requests for information (RFI) are to be submitted no later than March 14. The final addendum, including RFI responses, will be issued on March 21.

Bids are due March 27 at 2 p.m.

Contracts of \$1 million or more for this project will be subject to the district’s Community Benefits Agreement (CBA). Successful contractors will be required to execute a CBA letter of assent (LOA), whereby their subcontractors agree to conform to all terms and conditions outlined in the CBA. Contracts under \$1million are not subject to the CBA.

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