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RCC board says yes to expansion of auto, diesel facilities

By Chris Bristol of the Daily Courier

The Rogue Valley needs more mechanics, and Rogue Community College is stepping up to help meet the need.

The RCC board of education on Monday effectively gave the greenlight to a pair of new auto and diesel shops — one for the Redwood Campus in Grants Pass and the other for the Table Rock Campus in White City.

The board approved a contract with Integrus Architecture of just under \$1.6 million for architecture and design services on the new facilities. At 14,000 square feet each, the "Transportation Technology" facilities will be almost mirror images of each other but configurable depending on the needs of each campus.

RCC President Randy Weber said the Table Rock Campus already has a diesel shop and the Redwood Campus has an auto shop. Now, he said, "Both will have both."

The construction cost is estimated at about \$15 million, and the money is not completely in hand yet. RCC is looking to unlock \$7 million in state capital bonds as matching funding. Weber said the college is scrimping to put together the funding from reserves after voters last fall rejected a \$60.3 million bond measure designed to let the college aggressively ramp up training facilities for a host of trades, like welding and emergency medical services.

The bond also would have paid for safety and security upgrades to all three of RCC's campuses, including Riverside in downtown Medford. RCC officials had hoped to capitalize on the success of the school's 2016 bond, which was about to be paid off and raised about \$20 million for a host of improvements, including construction of the health professions center at Table Rock, the science building at Redwood and the tie-in to city water at Redwood, which formerly relied on wells.

For now, those projects will have to wait.

In other business Monday, the RCC board met in executive session and then publicly declared itself highly satisfied with Weber's performance since he became president in 2022.

Weber was hired with the express task of stabilizing enrollment after a precipitous drop during the COVID-19 pandemic, as was true across the state's community college system.

Weber has done that. He told the board Monday that new data from the Higher Education Coordinating Commission showed RCC has had the fastest enrollment growth, 36%, in the state over the last two years. The state average was 11%.

"A lot of our growth the last couple years has been in our workforce training strategies," Weber said, referencing programs like Transportation Technology and the various offerings for nursing and medical technicians.

The board tasked board president Gary Plano with negotiating an updated contract with Weber, for consideration by the full board next month.

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