Trustee seeks union labor for Measure G projects
By Tanya Mannes/Reporter Staff

A Solano Community College trustee surprised fellow board members Wednesday by making a motion to require union-approved labor in spending $124.5 million from Measure G, a taxpayer bond that passed last year.

Trustee Pam Keith's motion was not listed on the meeting's agenda, which had a scheduled vote on whether to "explore the development" of what is known as a project labor agreement.

Trustee Denis Honeychurch, calling Keith's notion "an end run," said he was willing to explore such an agreement - but not ready to commit to it without a draft.

"I don't feel we should be forced into a project labor agreement without any notice to the public, and without it being on the agenda, because of the adamant desire of one board member," Honeychurch said.

Keith said she was convinced of the value of union labor. "I'm not sure what would be gained by further exploration," she said.

The trustees' dispute followed a presentation by Mark Newton of Kitchell, the Measure G project manager. Project labor agreements can improve quality by requiring the use of highly trained union workers, he said. But bid costs can be 5 to 15 percent higher due to reduced competition, he said.

Local union representatives disputed Newton's findings, saying costs would not rise.

Louis Franchimon, business manager for the Napa-Solano Counties Building Trades Council, said any contractor - not just unions - must pay the prevailing wage on publicly-funded projects. Competition could be guaranteed by enlisting unions that promise to bid on all projects, he added.

Honeychurch noted that the board, by voting on Keith's motion, could become the target of a lawsuit. The Brown Act prohibits legislative bodies from taking action on items not listed on the agenda.

Keith later conceded that her motion would need to be re-worded. She did prevail on one point - bringing the item back in just two weeks for a vote. Trustees will be asked to authorize "negotiation" - not exploration - with the unions.

With some wordsmithing by trustee Phil McCaffrey, Keith's motion was changed so that the scheduled vote will not bind the college to a project labor agreement. The motion passed unanimously.

Tanya Mannes can be reached at schools@thereporter.com.
SCC to purchase land for campus

By Nada Behziz

ROCKVILLE -- In less than three days Solano Community College will be the new owners of 10-acres in the Northgate Business Park slated for a prospective extension campus in Vallejo as part of the Measure G bond project.

Measure G, a narrowly approved $124.5 million bond measure, will fund new campuses in Vallejo and Vacaville, as well as upgrade and expand the current Rockville campus. The new Vallejo campus will replace the existing SCC facilities in Vallejo and will bring 24 more classrooms and upgraded facilities to the city.

"This is a landmark event," said SCC President Paulette Perfumo. "We made it quite clear what we wanted and they gave it to us."

Members of the bond citizen oversight committee discussed recruitment options Monday night to help the college meet state requirements to enroll at least 500 full-time equivalent students at the Vallejo campus.

Although Vallejo will have significantly fewer classrooms than the Vacaville center, members are still concerned that students will continue to travel to Diablo Valley College or other nearby community colleges instead of SCC.

"We want students in Benicia to know that they are in our district and we want them here," said Governing Board President Bill Thurston. "We want to see if we can recapture students who are going across the bridge."

College officials are also working with Benicia High School to attract more students and have the option of using its facility after school hours.

The college, along with construction manager Kitchell CEM, is currently in the process of narrowing down prospective architects.

Kitchell officials are currently reviewing 40 submitted proposals and expect to narrow down the field in the next few weeks, according to Kitchell representative Mark Newton.

The firm has divided the applicants into two pools, based on their qualifications - projects over $10 million and projects below $10 million. They expect to hire at least two to three architects for the small projects and, at minimum, three to four architectural firms for the larger endeavors.

Kitchell representatives plan to have all architects on board by mid-February.

However, before deciding on architectural firms for the numerous projects under Measure G, the board must first decide if they plan to go with a highly controversial Project Labor Agreement, which limits their options to only union contractors.

The board is expected to discuss the potential project agreement further at its Nov. 19 meeting. The meeting will be held in the board room at SCC, room
Board votes for unions to do SCC construction

By Nada Behziz

ROCKVILLE -- Builders hoping to do construction work on Solano Community College's $124.5 million projects will need to hire union workers, the Governing Board decided Wednesday.

By a 7-1 vote the board mandated the use of project labor agreements - or PIA - for all endeavors under a lucrative bond measure narrowly passed by voters in 2002. The measure includes two extension campuses in Vallejo and Vacaville and a drastic renovation project at the existing campus in Rockville to include a new student learning center.

Boardmember Denis Honeychurch was the first to support the motion even before discussion began on the agenda item. A second to the motion wasn't far behind.

The boardroom was awash with the florescent green shirts of union members present to show their support of the labor agreement.

Carl Sanchez, a representative with the sheetmetal workers union, asked those in support of the PIA to stand up - nearly everyone in the room did.

Once everyone took their seats again, Sanchez continued with the positive attributes the agreement would bring to Solano County and the college community.

Supporters claim the agreements foster cooperation and reduce the risk of construction delays and increased costs from workers shortages or labor disputes. The deals typically contain a no-strike clause and agreement upfront on wages, benefits, working conditions and grievance procedures.

Opponents say such agreements are anti-competitive, drive up costs and effectively shut out 80 percent of the local workforce that doesn't belong to a union. They call the agreements a tool to coerce construction workers into joining unions.

A report by the project's construction manager, Kitchell CEM, said that some projects in other cities have experienced increases in bid costs of up to 15 percent due to the use of PLA.

But union officials dispute the findings and say that the SCC projects won't see an increase because the contractors will work directly with the college.

"It's just bogus," said Louis Franchimon, business manager for the Napa-Solano Counties Building Trades Council, an affiliate of the AFL-CIO. "Some areas have outside contractors to do administration duties, but that's not the case with the college."
Also, as part of the motion, it says that the negotiated PLA should not cost the district any funds to either administer or enforce the contract. Kitchell CEM reported at the meeting that they plan to have all the bids out by May 1 and for the board to hear a progress report at their last meeting in January.

PLAs aren't new, but they have gained wider acceptance in recent years. They were first used on big public works projects in the 1930s, including the Hoover and Grand Coulee dams.

Locally, a PLA was first adopted by the Vallejo School District in 2001. More recently, Fairfield city officials decided to add a PLA to contracts for government offices currently under way.

"It promises a streamline project," Franchimon said. "They eliminate the possibility of work stoppage - both union and non-union."

The problem, opponents say, is that PLAs cut competition from merit-shop contractors and take away workers' freedom of choice.

Kevin Dayton, government affairs director for the Golden State Chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors, a merit-shop group, said it's ludicrous to claim that PLAs stabilize the workforce.

"Contractors have no say in the negotiations for an agreement," said Dayton, who was the only speaker at the public hearing to oppose the labor agreement. "Unions negotiate it."

Nevertheless, once the decision was rendered the quiet boardroom rang with applause and contentment from union supporters. Dayton, however, said it isn't over until an agreement is negotiated.

"The board is going against common sense," Dayton said. "Now it's up to university staff to determine if they want to give unions what they want or listen to the taxpayers who voted for the bond measure."

Franchimon told the board before leaving, "When you look back at this meeting after the project is completed, you will know you made the right decision."

Nada Behziz can be reached at nbehziz@dailyrepublic.net.
Solano Community College will use union labor in its upcoming bond-financed construction projects, including a permanent Vacaville center.

The Solano Community College Governing Board voted Thursday to begin negotiating with the Napa-Solano Building Trades Council toward creating a project labor agreement for $124.5 million in projects under Measure G.

The vote was 7-1, including the student trustee's advisory vote, with trustee Jerry Wilkerson dissenting. Wilkerson did not return a phone call Friday seeking comment.

Governing board president Bill Thurston said the vote means the board "has committed to the concept of a PLA."

"We haven't signed anything yet, to my knowledge," he said. "It was the expression of the majority of the board that we would accept a PLA, and we authorized negotiations toward developing an agreement that we can approve."

The motion specified that the contract, after being negotiated, may not cost the college any funds to administer or enforce.

A project labor agreement will require union-approved labor on the bond-financed projects, which include Vacaville and Vallejo centers and a new student learning center to house a library and classrooms at the college's main Suisun campus. Construction is scheduled to be completed by 2009.

A progress report on the negotiations is due in January. Willard Wright, vice president of administration for the college, will head the negotiating team.

Unions say that having a PLA guarantees a well-trained work force that is more likely to
complete projects on time and with a minimum of errors. Critics argue that the agreements drive up costs by limiting competition to a small pool of union contractors and other contractors that are willing to meet union requirements for training and benefits.

Union officials have said that healthy competition could be ensured by getting commitments from many unions to bid on every project, no matter how small.

Thurston said the PLA would provide a "better quality of worker."

"With a union you get people who are trained and certified," he said.

*Tanya Mannes can be reached at schools@thereporter.com.*

**Board passes teachers' contract**

*By Tanya Mannes/Reporter Staff*

The Vacaville school board unanimously approved Thursday a 2002-03 teachers' contract that included no raise, an increase in bereavement leave and more prep time for third-grade teachers.

The Vacaville Teachers Association did not insist on a raise because teachers were aware of the school district's shaky financial situation, said union president Ed Santopadre.

Both sides are heading back to the negotiating table today to begin working on the present year's contract, Santopadre said.

"Hopefully, this next one won't take as long," he said.

All teachers will have one more day of bereavement leave, or two additional days in cases involving long-distance travel.

Third-grade teachers also will have more time to prepare for lessons. The new language regarding prep time was included because of the school board's recent decision to end class-size reduction in the third-grade due to a lack of funds.

Due to the change, class size has gone from 20 students to 32 - meaning more work for third-grade teachers, who still have had the same amount of time for correcting papers and planning activities as teachers with just 20 students. Under the new contract, third-grade teachers will have nearly as much prep time as teachers in fourth- and fifth-grade.

"We're hoping this is only a one-year problem and that the board will restore class-size reduction," Santopadre said. "If they don't, this language takes care of that."

The contract also clarifies procedures regarding teacher layoffs, Santopadre said.

*Tanya Mannes can be reached at schools@thereporter.com.*

**Fund-raiser to help victim of accident**

A fund-raising effort to help the family of a Vacaville man paralyzed in a tractor accident will be held Saturday at Pacifica Pizza, 141-D Elmira Road.

Chris Marks was injured in October when a tractor accidentally fell on him. He cannot walk, though he is participating in physical therapy. His family hopes to retrofit their home to include wheelchair access.

To help with the financial burden, Pacifica Pizza will donate proceeds from pizza sales Saturday to the family.
Vallejo campus builders to be union-friendly

By Sheri Broussard
A & E Editor

Bright, neon green T-shirts decorated the board room of Building 600 on Wednesday, Nov. 19 as union construction workers appeared in their garb to support Solano Community College's use of Project Labor Agreements (PLA's) to build their new Vallejo campus.

Competition from construction, plumbing, electrical, and other companies associated with the building projects will be fierce. Several companies in the Bay Area will bid on the Vallejo project. The use of a PLA will decide which companies do bid on this massive project.

"I am making a motion that the district initiate negotiations," said District Governing Board trustee, Denis Honeychurch. Honeychurch made this motion before the board heard from representatives on this issue.

This was quite a turn around from the last
meeting's confusion, where Honeychurch had been strongly opposed to negotiations without further information on PLA's.

A PLA is a contract that requires workers to be hired through union halls and non-union workers to pay dues. Union supporters and representatives for companies that were both for and against PLA's packed the boardroom.

"The unions will do their best with a PLA," said Lou Franchimon, business manager for the Napa-Solano Counties Building Trades Council. Franchimon and other representatives supporting PLA's were heavily applauded by attendees.

Kevin Dayton, a representative from Associated Builders and Contractors said that ABC's do not employ union workers and would give SCC more construction for their money.

"This is a battle among special interest groups," said Dayton, who later commented that PLA's "cut competition and increase costs."

However, the board decided that a PLA would be best and the majority of trustees voted in favor of it.

Now that this issue has finally been put to rest SCC will move full speed ahead with plans to carry out Measure G.