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# RDOS no 'cash cow' for college

By JOHN MOORHOUSE  
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**T**he regional district has said "no, no, no" to a requested \$2-million contribution towards the new Centre of Excellence at Okanagan College in Penticton.

Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen directors rejected a budget proposal on Thursday to provide \$2 million over three years to the college's \$5-million fundraising campaign. The board also said no to holding a referendum on the question, or making a commitment for such a vote during the November 2011 election.

Bill Schwarz, RDOS director for Okanagan Falls-Kaleden, said the regional district was in effect being asked to force taxpayers to help pay for the project, rather than contribute voluntarily to the fundraising campaign.

Schwarz also rejected suggestions that the RDOS should partner with the federal and provincial governments in the project. He said it would be more like a shotgun wedding, noting neither of the senior governments had asked for RDOS participation.

Ottawa and Victoria have approved \$22.6 million towards the \$28-million project, leaving the Okanagan College Foundation to raise the remainder.

The planned 7,000-square-metre Centre of Excellence will provide space for more than 800 students in a variety of programs, many of which will focus on new trades and technology training in sustainable building and renewable energy conservation. The building is due to be completed by March 2011.

## Centre of Excellence

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Naramata director Tom Chapman said although he supports the college expansion, the budget request is not fair to local taxpayers. He suggested some "very lazy fundraisers" were looking at the regional district as a "cash cow" for their campaign.

The RDOS board voted 14-4 against the college request, with directors Andrew Jakubeit, John Vassilaki, Garry Litke and Randy McLean the only supporters of the proposal. Vassilaki said the expanded college will save parents thousand of dollars in housing expenses by not having to send their children away to attend post-secondary education.

"There is nothing better than educating your children in your own area," he said.

The board also rejected spending \$30,000 to holding a referendum on the issue. Michael Brydon, director for Area F (West Bench-

Okanagan Lake West), said anyone who

donates to the college fundraising campaign would receive a tax receipt.

"Is it our job to bail them out of a financial hole?" he asked.

Donna Lomas, the college's regional dean for the South Okanagan-Similkameen, said she understands the tight financial situation facing the regional board and that they understand the importance of the college expansion.

Lomas declined to directly comment on the directors' remarks about the fundraising campaign itself. However, she said a major funding announcement is expected before the end of March.

"I believe our campaign is going really well," she said. "We have received significant support from the community, and we have had some wonderful donations — not all of which have been announced as of yet."

Last month, the college announced that RBC had contributed \$135,000 to the campaign, the largest single donation to date. That brought

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