Dome receives state commitment

Gov. Dave Treen came to Lafayette this week to remove what City Council viewed as the last obstacle to appointing a Cajundome commission: he promised to seek another $3.75 million to help finance additional costs in the civic center’s construction.

The $3.75 million is most of the $5 million that the city says it needs to complete the project. The other $1.25 million will be paid by the city. The $5 million brings the cost of the project up to $54 million.

The Cajundome was originally budgeted at $40 million. The state has always picked up 75 percent of the cost of the project.

Most of the $5 million will go to two things: $1.3 million for the construction of a parking lot and $1.6 million for acoustics.

City Council has been waiting for Treen to make a verbal commitment to funding the overrun before appointing a commission which would oversee the dome’s operations. A commission was proposed back in September and has had the continuing support of Council president Al Simon, but the proposal has been tabled a number of times over the past four months. The local legislative delegation assured the city that the governor was committed to the funding, but council members didn’t want to act until they knew the money was forthcoming.

Mayor Dud Lastrapes said in December that he expected Treen to make his announcement, within a few days, but the pledge has only come two months later.

Now that the governor has made his announcement, local members of the legislative budget committee, Sen. Armand Brinkhaus and Rep. Mike Thompson, will introduce the proposal into committee, probably during the first week in March. “We’re totally committed to work hard to get the funds,” said Rep. J. Luke LeBlanc, speaking for the delegation.

Rep. Ron Gomez, who has been a prime mover of the Cajundome, said he was happy about the funding, but added that “it really comes as no surprise. We’ve witnessed a media event in the last few months waiting for whether or not he would fund it.”

Gomez said that by waiting for the governor’s formal announcement, the city has delayed the progress of the Cajundome. Various officials, most notably Simon, have taken the same position, saying that an appointment of a Cajundome commission should have been made a long time ago, in order to expedite the policy-making process.

Bob Domingue, one of the four city council members who voted to
Treen told The Times Tuesday that he had made no definitive promises about the $5 million in new funds until last week. “We’ve been talking about it and I said I wanted to help, but I didn’t make the final decision until about 10 days ago.”

—B.Y.

Ron Gomez

“We’ve witnessed a media event”

postpone appointing the commission until the city received a commitment from the state, disagreed, saying that “the progress of the dome has not been delayed by not appointing a committee. The schedule of the project is way ahead.”

Domingue said that the council was “definitely” more likely to appoint a commission now that the governor has pledged the state’s financial support.

City Council will vote on appointing a commission at next week’s meeting.

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