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The center will be L-shaped, in what designers call an urban curve. Stainless steel shingles and metal panels, with brick, will allow the building to meld into historic Over-the-Rhine.

SCPA project set to begin, though \$6M still needed

School district to loan funds so work can start in spring

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A bright, new sign stands tall at the future site of the new School for Creative and Performing Arts in Over-the-Rhine, signifying a decade of work becoming a reality.

School fund raisers are still \$6.3 million away from their \$31 million goal, a figure that matches investment from Cincinnati Public Schools and the state. But that sign means the 250,000-square-foot performing arts center, touted as the nation's first K-12 performing arts school, is actually happening.

CPS in December negotiated a special arrangement with the Ohio School Facilities Commission. Calling SCPA a special project, it exempted the school from a state law that prevents districts from entering into contracts until the entire match is raised.

"That took the time frame off our backs," said Tom Klinedinst, chairman of the Greater Cincinnati Arts and Education Center (GCAEC), the private group handling fund-raising for the project.

"We feel a huge responsibility to our donors to make their dream fulfilled. We had to find a way to recognize that and let the project continue without a lot of roadblocks," Klinedinst said.

The \$72 million arts campus centered around Washington Park and Music Hall was envisioned in 1996 by Cincinnati Pops Orchestra Director Erich Kunzel.

The plan evolved in 1999 when CPS chose to merge SCPA and Corryville's Schiel Elementary, creating a joint school that would anchor the performing arts center, serving 1,350 students and the larger community. That's when the GCAEC committed to partner with the district and raise half of the total project cost. At the time, that meant \$26 million.

Plans progressed for a new building on the site of a parking lot adjacent to Music Hall. But as the Cincinnati Center City Development Corp. (3CDC) evaluated ways to expand Music Hall, it encouraged the school to move to the corner of Central Parkway and Elm Street, to free up the old site for the Music Hall Square parking garage.

CENTER STAGE

The School for Creative and Performing Arts has raised \$26.7 million toward a new campus.

The new center, the first K-12 performing arts school in the country, will be 250,000 square feet.

The project was envisioned in 1996 by Cincinnati Pops Director Erich Kunzel.

"We were very excited about a brand new school in OTR for performing arts. We needed the garage to serve Music Hall, but it will also serve SCPA parents and guests when complete," said Darrick Dansby, 3CDC's director of development for Over-the-Rhine.

Cincinnati Public Schools purchased the 2.9 acre site, raising the project cost to \$72 million to fund a more architecturally significant building and account for an additional \$10 million for CPS to acquire land and prepare the site. Overall, the revised project required the GCAEC to raise an additional \$5 million.

Last April, the project and design plans were finally approved. That momentum encouraged CPS and the GCAEC to find a way to move forward despite the fund-raising challenge.

CPS has now agreed to loan the remaining dollars so the project can begin. That means demolition of a parking lot on the site will begin this spring. Turner Construction is preparing construction documents so the project can go out to bid within months.

And ground breaking will happen in the fall, with completion scheduled for the start of school in 2009.

"The landscape in that area will be changing. We're moving from a vision and a concept and a design to the concrete," said Janet Walsh, spokeswoman for CPS.

But the remaining dollars are still a concern. So far, \$23.7 million in capital has been raised, as well as \$2 million and \$1 million grants. For now, the two grants cannot be used for the construction of the building. That leaves \$6.3 million left to be raised.

Klinedinst plans to appeal to the state of Ohio for additional funding.