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HCC board approves settlement with Ybor groups

By [CHRISTIAN M. WADE](#) | The Tampa Tribune

Historic preservationists are claiming victory in a hard-fought battle to force a state-funded community college to adhere to Ybor City's strict architectural guidelines.

On Tuesday, Hillsborough Community College's board of trustees approved a settlement with a group of Ybor City property and business owners that will force the school to reduce the height of its new student services building and follow the district's zoning restrictions.

Under the deal, HCC will reduce the height of the building from four to three floors and abide by Ybor design standards for future expansion projects at the Ybor campus.

In exchange, members of the Cuban Club and other property owners who objected to the building's modern design have agreed to drop their opposition to the project.

Because the new designs exceed the 45-foot height limit for YC-3 zoning — a special code for HCC's Ybor campus — the college will need a variance, but of only 2 feet.

Previous designs called for a four-story, 63.5-foot building.

Tampa lawyer Mark Bentley, who represents the Cuban Club and several other property owners, said the settlement will help preserve the architectural character of the historic district by requiring the community college to follow local building standards and codes.

"These measures will ensure that 100 years from now when someone visits the Ybor City Historic District that they will be impressed with its character and say "what a beautiful place, Tampa did a great job in preserving its unique history," he said.

HCC spokeswoman Ashley Carl said the college would have preferred a four story building, but agreed to concessions because they want to be a "good neighbor."

The community college ran into opposition last year from Ybor preservationists unhappy with the contemporary design of the 63,000-square-foot building.

Ybor City is listed on the National Register of Historic places.

Members of the Cuban Club, across from the HCC campus, wanted the college to follow the national Historic District guidelines so the building blends in with the neighborhood.

HCC officials argued that state law exempts them from the guidelines.

Although the college is subject to Tampa's building and zoning codes, the city does not have authority to send in its building inspectors to ensure the regulations are followed.

The settlement will require staff from the city's Historic Preservation Department and the Barrio

Latino Commission is the volunteer board that regulates building designs in Ybor City to review blueprints for the new building and HCC's future expansion projects.

Work on the project ground to a halt last month after HCC officials learned that architectural plans for the partially constructed building, at East Palm Avenue and North Avenida Republica de Cuba, were 15 feet taller than permitted by city codes.

Carl said construction was halted as the contractor was completing the concrete and steel frame for the third floor, so HCC won't be forced to dismantle the building.

HCC officials have since unveiled new blueprints that incorporated many of the design changes sought by preservationists, including replacing an exterior glass wall facade with individual, paned windows and using blond bricks instead of precast concrete.

The college is expected today to submit a variance request with revised plans to the city.