

Grant fuels Kingsburg train depot remodeling

Site to be preserved as education center, museum.

By Eddie Jimenez - The Fresno Bee

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The restoration of the Kingsburg train depot is back on track toward the goal of developing a museum and education center.

The Fresno Council of Governments board approved more than \$1.1 million in federal funding for the project last week.

The money is welcome news for city officials and Friends of the Historic Kingsburg Depot. Both have been working for more than a decade to preserve the depot, which was built in 1876.

"We're going to have this beautiful building in Kingsburg for all to enjoy," said Jolene Polyack, spokeswoman for the depot restoration group.

The funding became available when a project to renovate the second floor of the Santa Fe depot in Fresno was delayed, said Melissa Garza, a COG associate regional planner.

The federal money had to be used within a certain time period or be returned, Garza said. Instead, Fresno officials notified COG of the project's delay, allowing the money to be allocated to the Kingsburg project, she said.

Ironically, the Kingsburg depot renovation lost funding from the same federal program in 2003 because the restoration group had not yet received the title to the building from Union Pacific Railroad, Polyack said.

The railroad eventually sold the depot to the city of Kingsburg in 2005.

The prospects to save the depot appeared dim in 2008 when architects said the decaying building -- sunlight peeked through holes in the roof and moss grew atop spots -- probably would not survive many more winters, Polyack said.

A new roof was built in the fall of 2009 thanks to fundraising and donated work from Fresno Roofing Co., buying time for renovation plans, she said.

Kingsburg Mayor Bruce Blayney said the patience and persistence of the restoration group kept the project alive.

"Some local people had a vision, and when things looked gloomy, they persevered," he said.

The depot was constructed in Monson, a Tulare County community, and moved to Kingsburg in 1902 to replace the original train station, which was destroyed by fire.

The last passenger train runs ended in 1968. It was last used in 1988 as a freight station.

The 5,500-square-foot depot on California Street just south of Draper Street also will house the office of the city's dial-a-ride bus system and a Fresno County regional bus system.