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## visitor center

# County OKs \$1 Mil. for FSC Visitor Center

**New facility planned for buildings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.**

By [Tom Palmer](#)  
THE LEDGER

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BARTOW | County commissioners voted 4-1 Wednesday to commit \$1 million to help build a visitor center at Florida Southern College for its collection of Frank Lloyd Wright-designed buildings.

The funding will still depend on developing an agreement between Polk County and the private Lakeland college to ensure the money is spent for a public purpose.

FSC has the largest collection of Frank Lloyd Wright-designed buildings in the world.

College President Anne Kerr requested \$2 million, but commissioners granted only \$1 million, citing the financial shortfalls the commission budget is suffering as a result of state- and voter-mandated tax cuts and the economic downturn.

"We're thrilled," Kerr said after the vote. "We have an opportunity to really have a great cultural and historic venue to add to the intellectual and cultural climate of the community. With USF Polytechnic hiring a noted international architect for its campus, this area will be one of the greatest centers for architecture in the country."

She said the center will help turn Lakeland into a major cultural venue, bring in tourists and money, and stimulate visitation to other local cultural sites, such as the Polk Museum of Art.

"You couldn't find a better investment," Kerr said.

The center would be located across from the northwest corner of the campus, Kerr said, and buying that property is part of the cost. It would be built using plans Wright designed in 1938 for faculty homes in his famed "Usonian" style.

State Rep. Seth McKeel, R-Lakeland, told commissioners he supports the project, whose plans have been circulated in recent months for support, and he pledged to get marketing money from state tourism funds.

Commission Chairman Sam Johnson, who had to step down from the chair to second the motion, said he had struggled with the request before realizing the historic significance of the Wright buildings and their potential to attract more tourism.

Johnson said he hopes the county's commitment will encourage private donors to come up with the rest of the money Kerr sought.

Commissioner Randy Wilkinson, who seconded the motion initially and then withdrew his second because he wanted to delay consideration of the motion, said he supported the project because he envisioned the redevelopment of the area around Palmetto Street off Lake Morton as an arts district.



*RICK RUNION | THE LEDGER*  
Florida Southern College President Anne Kerr stands before the Polk County Commission with a card board cutout of Frank Lloyd Wright during the commission meeting in Bartow, Florida.

Commissioner Bob English, who moved to approve the money, said the complex will make Polk County more attractive culturally to the faculty that is expected to move to Lakeland because of the planned development of the USF Poly campus east of town.

"In the long run, it will make us much more of an economic power," English said.

The lone dissenter was Commissioner Ed Smith, who said he was uncomfortable committing \$1 million in tax money when it was still unclear how commissioners are going to deal with the expected \$49 million deficit in next year's county budget, though he said he thinks the visitor center is a worthwhile project.

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