

City council: Give us shelter(s)

By GREG GILES NEWS EDITOR VENICE GONDOLIER

Venice City Council this week agreed to accept an offer from Sarasota County to utilize its more austere bus shelter designs at a small number of stops in the city.

The city has its own approved Mediterranean-style bus shelter design, but county officials placed the city on notice a few weeks ago that if the city intends to build the more expensive “value engineered” shelters, it will have to foot the bill, and pay for annual upkeep.

Council decided on Tuesday to go with the county’s offer, saving roughly \$171,000 in construction costs and \$45,000 annually in maintenance costs.

Two weeks ago council members deadlocked 3-3 over the issue with the mayor absent.

Council did, however, save one location for an enhanced shelter — in front of the Venice Public Library on both sides of Nokomis Avenue.

The other priority locations for bus shelters are: U.S. 41 Bypass at Ridgewood Avenue, U.S. 41 Bypass at Albee Farm Road, East Venice Avenue at Capri Isles Boulevard and East Venice Avenue at Live Oak Street. In addition these locations, county officials have pledged to provide at least four more shelters as federal grants allow. Those locations have yet to be determined.

City officials originally had hopes of getting property owners to foot the bill, as with the bus shelter on the bypass that was funded and is maintained by Florida Shores Bank. But in some cases the shelter locations are on public property. And in addition to a roof, the shelters include a slab, a bike rack, garbage cans and benches.

The city has \$84,000 available from a state grant to pay for the Mediterranean-style shelters, which cost an estimated \$40,000 each. The city would pick up the annual maintenance costs for the two shelters at the library. The city, which previously approved a handful of artistically painted bus stop benches, part of a county initiative called Beauty and the Bench, will now have to find alternative locations for those benches, since they’re too long to fit under a county shelter and still leave room for wheelchair access.

ggiles@venicegondolier.com