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“Now the college can move forward in hopes of getting these students into a genuine campus.”

ALAN SPARER, lawyer for City College of San Francisco



EHDD rendering

The Chinatown campus of City College of San Francisco would be in two buildings rising behind the Colombo Building of 1913 (in foreground).

SAN FRANCISCO

Chinatown campus go-ahead

Judge denies move to block City College construction plan

By Bob Egelko

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A judge refused Thursday to block construction of a high-rise campus in Chinatown for City College of San Francisco, a project that has withstood opposition from some local businesses and residents in the decade since the school first proposed it.

Judge Paul Alvarado of San Francisco Superior Court denied an injunction sought by Montgomery Washington, which owns commercial offices in a building near the planned campus. The company argued that the project would be out of scale for the neighborhood and detract from some of its historic buildings.

The company will have another chance to block construction when its lawsuit against City College goes to trial in April. A separate lawsuit by

a group called Neighbors for Preservation, Land Use and Community Education, challenging the college's environmental review of the project, is scheduled for a hearing in December.

Construction is due to begin next summer, with a tentative completion date in early 2011.

The campus will consist of a 14-story, 215-foot tower on the northeast corner of Kearny and Washington streets, and a four-story building down the block at Washington and Columbus Avenue. It will house 42 classrooms and laboratories, administrative offices and a community auditorium to serve 6,500 students.

Now in a dozen sites

City College students now take classes at about a dozen sites scattered around Chinatown.

“Now the college can move forward in hopes of getting these students into a genuine campus and genuine college community and not just be spread out in these old buildings,” said Alan Sparer, the college's lawyer.

The ruling is “great news for the

community,” said Vincent Pan, executive director of Chinese for Affirmative Action, which mobilized community groups last year to submit 20,000 signatures to the college trustees in support of the long-debated project.

Montgomery Washington's lawyer was unavailable for comment.

The trustees used their legal authority in October 2007 to exempt the project from the city's 65-foot height limit for buildings in the area. The lawsuit contends that the college illegally exempted itself from the city's planning process and hid the impact of the project from the public.

City College contended that as part of the state community college system, it was exempt from San Francisco's planning rules.

In hearings before Alvarado, Michael McKeeman, lawyer for Montgomery Washington, argued that a settlement of a previous lawsuit required City College to submit its plans to a preservation architect to make sure they were compatible with the neighboring Jackson Square Historic District and the Colombo Build-

ing. He said the college had never obtained that review and had falsely stated that it did so.

College's argument

Sparer, City College's lawyer, told the judge that the settlement contained no such requirement and that an architectural expert hired by district officials had concluded that the high-rise was compatible with all nearby buildings.

An injunction requiring further architectural review would be “a catastrophe,” Sparer said, costing the district \$49 million in state bond funds and delaying completion of the campus for at least three years.

In Thursday's ruling, Alvarado agreed with Sparer's reading of the settlement, and also said the design of the campus “includes architectural details ensuring its compatibility with the Colombo Building and Jackson Square.” The judge said the college would probably lose millions of dollars if he granted the injunction.

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