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Historical museum hopes stimulus will fund expansion

Because of falling state revenues, the agency lost \$5 million appropriated for the \$15 million project.

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State budget woes have stalled an expansion plan by the Idaho State Historical Museum, but officials hope to get federal stimulus money to revive the \$15 million project.

The project was put on hold earlier this month when the state Historical Society returned \$5 million in state-appropriated funds because of falling state revenues.

Historical Society Executive Director Janet Gallimore said the expansion is on the state's list of possible projects to receive stimulus money.

"Certainly it would be a huge benefit to be a part of the benefits Idahoans are going to get from this," Gallimore said.

Society officials say the expansion is one of the few state building projects that is "shovel-ready."

The 38,000-square-foot addition to the Boise museum has been in the works since the late 1980s.

Gallimore said the society will continue efforts to collect a third of the cost through fundraising.

Rep. Walt Minnick, D-Idaho, voted against the U.S. House stimulus package this week, contending it has ballooned from a targeted approach to creating jobs into an unfocused plan that attempts to pump money into the economy wherever it can.

On Friday, Minnick spokesman John Foster said the plan to expand the Boise museum "sounds like a fantastic proposal," but that it should be judged on how well it creates jobs if it is to receive any federal stimulus money.

"That may be better done through a traditional appropriations bill, Foster said.

"With regards to a stimulus bill, Walt will only support those kinds of things that create jobs right now," he said.

"We're not casting any kind of judgment on any program. He's simply looking at this as a businessman and an economist."

Gallimore also said the society will reduce its community grant program because of the state's 8 percent cut in the society's budget. During the last fiscal year the society distributed almost \$80,000 to 16 grant recipients.

Gallimore said almost 80 percent of the society's museums are in rural areas most likely to receive the grants.

"We often hear about the importance of science and math for fields like engineering, but history ... really is the basis for good work," Gallimore said.