

Published June 12th, 2019

Nonprofit builds momentum in bid to 'Light up the Park Theater'

By Pippa Fisher



The Park Theater Trust hopes to be able to purchase the historic building. Photo Pippa Fisher

(according to the Motion Pictures Association of America 2018 data) movie attendance is up 4 percent since 2016, despite Netflix and other home streaming options. TPTT looked at other independent, small theaters around the country and saw the benefits to local businesses in these locations.

With a vision of seeking a self-supporting model as an artistic and cultural venue that would help revitalize the downtown and serve multiple generations through a wide array of programs from film screenings to live music and theater to kid programs and as a venue for special events, TPTT is working with multiple community stakeholders. Its plan includes having a commercial kitchen.

The theater would be owned by the nonprofit and run by a for-profit operator.

TPTT found out early on through a building assessment that the theater is structurally sound. Some work, including a new roof will be required. First steps will be acquisition of the property and the fourplex residences behind the theater for the \$2.95 million price tag followed by renovations that are expected to be in the region of \$1.5 million.

And it was with that in mind that Farrell finished her presentation by delivering the trust's three "asks" to the council.

Farrell asked for the council's recognition and endorsement of the work they are doing and as part of that she asked that the city consider participating financially, exploring various ways to do that.

"We know there are many worthwhile projects the city is considering," said Farrell, "but we believe that, based on what we have heard these many months, bringing the Park Theater back to life in the way we envision has, perhaps of all of them, the most potential to positively impact the entire Lafayette community."

Farrell explained, "We are very grateful for the recent financial award from the Lafayette Community Foundation. It was a huge vote of confidence in our efforts. A city contribution would significantly boost our momentum even more as we prepare to launch our general fundraising activities and greater community outreach."

The trust also asked for the council to support the density transfer concept that was first proposed last summer as a way to facilitate TPTT's ability to purchase the property.

Finally Farrell asked that city staff be allowed to meet with them and discuss TPTT's potential participation in the Historic Overlay District, allowing staff to waive requirements of written permission from the sellers so they can in good faith gather the information they need to address parking guidelines for discussions with potential operators.

Following the council's generally receptive comments and a point made by Council Member Steven Bliss that this project would hit many of the city's current goals including downtown vibrancy, community input and engagement as well as multi-generational inclusion, the council agreed unanimously for city staff to respond to the three requests by TPTT and bring it back to the June 24 meeting.

TPTT expect to have their website up very soon at www.parktheatertrust.org/.

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