

Support Growing for Campaign to Save Park Theater

By Cathy Tyson



Lafayette's Park Theater

Photo Cathy Dausman

A grassroots effort to re-open the Park Theater is just getting off the ground with Lafayette residents Chris and Natalie Lane spearheading the effort. Chris Lane grew up in Lafayette and has been very involved in the community with Rotary, the Art and Wine Festival Committee and as past president of the Chamber of Commerce; right now the focus is on the Park Theater.

He has started a Facebook page, "Save the Lafayette Park Theater," that is gathering momentum daily, and is in the process of getting a commercial contractor to investigate the soundness of the structure to determine the repairs necessary to open the doors to the public. The ultimate goal of the endeavor is to form a non-profit to buy and operate the theater.

For years, one of the wrinkles in revitalizing the vintage movie house was the city's parking requirements. Lane said he has spoken with the city manager and believes existing parking can be grandfathered in, so no additional spaces are needed. However there may be a difference of opinion. "If the theater were to reopen, it would require about 88 parking spaces," said Niroop Srivatsa, Lafayette's planning and building director. "Would the city waive that requirement entirely? I think that would be tough to do, but it is a City Council decision." Currently the the-

ater has a dozen parking spaces.

Srivatsa explained the city's effort for a public/private partnership to address the dilemma. "The Plaza Way overlay that was approved in 2012 offers property owners some relief from the city's parking requirements. A property owner opting-in to the Overlay District is required to enter into an agreement with the city and terms of the agreement are negotiated on a case by case basis. Thus far, the city has negotiated with the Poys (who own the Squirrels, Plaza Way Tailor, and Handlebar Toy spaces) and the Park Theater Group; the Poys signed the agreement, the Park Theater Group's agreement is still in draft form. In both cases, the owners were required to provide at least some of the required parking in site."

Key organizers, who include some members of the Lafayette Community Foundation, are in discussions with the building's owners. A business plan is currently being written with advice from the operators of the Rheem and Orinda theaters.

While the effort is very preliminary at this point, Lane has hopes that the jewel, circa 1941, of Lafayette can be restored and the theater can be self-sustaining. The "Save the Lafayette Park Theater" Facebook page already has over 1,300 "likes," now they just need some angel investors and possibly more parking spaces.

Preschool Gets Okay for New Location

By Cathy Tyson

After multiple public hearings in front of the Planning Commission, Building Bridges Preschool got a green light to relocate from Our Savior's Lutheran Church on Carol Lane to a home directly adjacent to the church property – a former parsonage owned by the church.

Contrary to some misconceptions, the approval of this conditional land use permit is not a re-zoning; certain uses of a residence require a permit because there may be impacts associated with the use. Operating a preschool is allowed by right in single-family homes in Lafayette. The city can specify certain conditions of approval like the hours of operation, recess space and landscaping to limit the impact on neighbors. "A use permit is a living thing," said J. Alan Sayles, planning commissioner, explaining that the applicant must continue to meet conditions or face its revocation.

Neighbors along Carol Lane, many of whom have lived there for decades, expressed their strong concerns about the relocation including the effect on their property values, noise and traffic. Others objected to a secular commercial entity renting the home, calling it "commercial over reach."

While it's true that small children can officially be considered "mobile noise sources," Sandra Swimmer, the owner and operator of the preschool, clarified that the maximum number of children on any given day is 30, with students divided into two groups of a maximum of 15 kids in each. She pointed out that not all the children come every day. The recess area they will use is in the front of the house that faces the church, and the house itself acts as a noise buffer. The commission would not allow the preschoolers to use the spacious back yard.

Because the school is shifting only slightly southward, and parents will still use the church parking lot for pick up and drop off, commissioners didn't see an issue there.

"I have trouble finding something to object to," said commissioner Will Lovitt. He acknowledged that day care facilities in residential neighborhoods are encouraged by the city's General Plan. Assistant planner Sarah Allen said the city has never received a complaint from the code enforcement officer about a preschool in a residential neighborhood. After much discussion, the land use permit was approved – with the condition that additional landscaping be done to function as a noise buffer from the adjacent neighbor.

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