

Published November 13th, 2019

Rheem Theatre addition gets green light from Planning Commission

By Vera Kochan



Photo Wendy Scheck

Cinema West partners Dave Corkill and Kyle Conner's plans for their newly purchased Rheem Theatre met with approval during the Oct. 21 Planning Commission meeting. Planning Department Senior Planner Steve Kowalski's presentation had no hiccups.

Located at 350 Park St. in the Rheem Shopping Center in Moraga, the circa 1957 building will see a transformative facelift in keeping with its historic integrity.

The applicant plans to construct a new 4,113 square foot ground-level addition onto the back of the existing four-screen building. The addition would add two new screening rooms, one containing 82 seats and the other containing 41 seats. The new addition would not be visible from the front of the theater. The existing screening rooms are currently undergoing renovations that will include reclining seats and a state-of-the-art

sound system. The newly remodeled theater would contain 559 proposed seats as opposed to the prior 658 seats.

The new addition to the rear of the building would require a reduction in 14 parking spaces to the immediate theater lot; however, Kowalski stressed that the theater side of the shopping center shares all of the parking spaces, allowing for theater patron parking throughout that side of Rheem Boulevard.

Of great concern to the Planning Commission and the Planning Department was to keep the historic character and features of the building. The applicants gave their assurances that in keeping with prior renovations to historic theaters throughout California, the Rheem Theatre's charm would continue.

A Historic Property Report was prepared primarily by Kara Brunzell M.A. and secondly by Nancy Elizabeth Stoltz, AIA, both of Brunzell Historical. Their report concluded that "the Theatre was eligible for listing as a historic resource" on both the California Register of Historic Resources or the National Register of Historic Places. As such, under the California Environmental Quality Act there are certain guidelines allowed for the modification of historic buildings while preserving their historic integrity. In the Rheem Theatre's case this involves certain features like the marquee, the ticket booth and any murals on the walls of the main auditorium.

Any public comments during the meeting were of a favorable nature and most likely echoed the Moraga community as a whole that the Rheem Theatre will experience a new breath of life and help to revitalize commercial interest in the Rheem Shopping Center. However, former Mayor and Town Council Member Dave Trotter, while out of town, sent in his concerns regarding Condition of Approval No. 7 of the Draft Resolution.

Trotter stated, "As drafted, Condition No. 7 expressly refers to some, but not all, of the historically significant and character-defining original design elements that are identified and exhaustively analyzed in the Sept 9, 2019 `Historic Property Report: Rheem Theatre', prepared for the Town of Moraga by Kara Brunzell, M.A. of Brunzell Historical and Nancy Stoltz, MAI."

His concerns were that the exterior box office, the terrazzo flooring at the theatre entryway or the lobby area were omitted. He also felt that future town staff and planning bodies must be properly guided in the event of a future use or building permit application in regards to the theater property.

The Planning Commission unanimously voted to adopt a negative declaration that was prepared in accordance with CEQA requirements and the approval of an amendment to a conditional use permit with accompanying design review to allow construction including an amendment to Condition No. 7 of the Draft Resolution as proposed by Trotter which had previously been thoroughly vetted by the planning department prior to the evening's presentation.



Back side of Rheem Theatre Photo Vera Kochan

Reach the reporter at: vera@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA