

Published May 12th 2021

Park Theater on path to reopening

By Lou Fancher



Photo provided

Marking a notable stride forward along the path to restore and reopen the city's iconic Park Theater building, Tracey Karsten Farrell reported at the April 26 city council meeting that the Park Theater Trust is successfully in contract for an Aug 31, 2021 purchase from the seller. An \$8 million capital campaign is poised to launch and is aimed at renovations in anticipation of a projected late 2022 reopening. Of that overall project amount, roughly \$3 million is for purchase of the building. Minimal fundraising after the opening will be just enough to maintain the trust's nonprofit status.

Farrell noted the announcement's fortuitous timing—the day after the 2021 Academy Awards Night included Oscars for Lafayette community members Madeline Sharafian (best animated short film for "Burrow", a 2D film written and directed by Sharafian and produced by Pixar Animation Studios) and Pete Docter (winning the longtime Pixar director a best animated feature film award for "Soul").

Celebrating the return of movies to the Park Theater shuttered since the film "Happy Feet" aired in 2005, Farrell outlined work performed and the process followed during the last two years by the all-volunteer community grassroots organization. A combination of extensive research, community input meetings, the successful completion of an application for 501(c)3 public benefit

corporation status (granted in February 2020), the award of three Lafayette Community Foundation Excellence Grants as well as private donations collectively position the Park Theater Trust closer to the organization's ultimate goal: to purchase, protect and preserve the theater building as a performing arts center for generations to come.

Along with the search for a for-profit partner to lease and operate the site as a movie theater, Park Theater Trust board members and the volunteer task force come with a mission to present multigenerational, multi-ethnic and racially diverse performing arts events. Farrell's PowerPoint presentation displayed early architectural renderings for the new theater and community hub. "This will be a multipurpose venue for young and old," she said, "with two intimate theaters with flexible seating, a concession area, a commercial kitchen to serve patrons of the theaters, a mezzanine community space, a rooftop terrace, and the opportunity to create an inviting green space along Lafayette Creek."

Farrell said every community "needs a shining light" and the refurbished building will provide the city of Lafayette, its citizens, and visitors with three things: a signature sense of place and culture, additional visual texture and variety in the downtown core, and a location where people bond through a shared history.

Work projected to rehabilitate the building requires the roof must be replaced and HVAC and electrical issues addressed. Improvements to reach ADA compliance are necessary and asbestos abatement is likely, along with other aesthetic and code issues. Parking in the downtown core is always a hot button topic; the Park Theater Trust website reports that the city recently developed a surface parking lot with 23 spaces within a 5-minute walk of the Park Theater and an agreement with the city will allow for re-development behind the property to create 33 parking spaces. The Park Theater in the past has also been accessible by foot traffic, ride share, BART, and County Connection bus service.

Reaction from the council and public comments following Farrell's presentation were overwhelmingly enthusiastic.



Image provided

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA