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Conditional Approval for Rheem Theatre Lift

By Sophie Braccini

Moraga's Design Review Board approved the installation of a lift on the outside of the Rheem Theatre to provide wheelchair users, and people with difficulty climbing stairs, access to the upper floor theaters. Additional permits and construction will push the opening of the lift into the summer.

A few months ago the Rheem Theatre had to close its upstairs theaters due to repeated failures of the interior lift that put the theater out of ADA compliance. After a few months of fundraising the community raised enough money to install a new elevator, and plans were submitted for approval.

Theater operator Leonard Pirkle said it's unfortunate that the new lift has to be on the building's exterior. "We've spent so many hours trying to find the best solution," said Pirkle. "For me it would have been inside, but it was just not feasible." The lift will be located on the side of the building facing the empty lot, next to the emergency exit stairs, so that the interior access point can be conveniently located between the two upstairs theaters.

The Design Review Board agreed May 13 that all design aspects of the project were compliant with Moraga's municipal code, but added conditions of approval regarding the lift's foundation, seismic attachment to the building and proper lighting.

After the meeting Pirkle explained how the elevator would be operated by patrons. "The lift is very easy to use, with a single button," he said. "Users will have to get their tickets and request access to the elevator. They will then proceed to the side of the building where the elevator will be located." An awning is being considered to provide shelter from the elements.

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