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## A last-chance glimmer of hope for Lafayette Park Theater?

By Pippa Fisher



Image provided

theater.

Falk explained that in exchange for the deed to the theater property, the city would transfer the density rights for those properties to the developer to apply to the Golden Gate Way property, effectively preserving the theater as such and achieving one of the city's goals for ensuring the historic plaza area not be developed. "The density would be transferred from one side of First Street to the other," said Falk. It would allow the developer to build an extra 25 units along with the currently allowed 52 units on Golden Gate Way.

Additionally more parking could be created behind the theater and a park area could be created at the corner of Golden Gate Way and First Street.

Falk cautioned that this is no sugarcoated vision. He pointed out that such a residential development would be very large, requiring a 35- to 45-foot façade. Furthermore he said he could not support moving forward without an answer to where the money to operate the theater over time would come from. Preliminary budget estimates suggest it could cost somewhere in the region of \$600,000 annually.

The council's discussion focused on whether there is enough public enthusiasm for the project to merit exploring options going forward. Public comment from residents seemed overwhelmingly in favor of creative, out-of-the-box thinking to save the theater.

Several members of the Lafayette Community Foundation and the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation expressed the willingness of their organizations to be involved. LCF President Cheryl Noll pointed to the foundation's track record of partnering in the creation of the library and with the Lafayette Rotary in the creation of the stage at the reservoir.

The council agreed they needed clarity going forward both in terms of where the money would come from and what such a development would look like.

To that end they directed the city to work with a subcommittee of Mayor Don Tatzin Vice Mayor Cam Burks, the developer, members of the LCF and LLLCF as well as interested members of the public to explore all options and to ask the developer formally for drawings to get a better idea of the scale of the proposed new building.

Could a density transfer be an option for saving the Park Theater? Lafayette lawmakers have decided to take initial exploration of this as a creative solution further and plan to form a committee with the city, the developer and community organizations together with members of the public.

City Manager Steve Falk outlined the main points of the idea at the Aug. 13 city council meeting. Pointing to Moraga's recent density transfer to save the Rheem Theatre as an example, he said there may be a similar opportunity for the Park Theater in Lafayette.

The iconic theater, built in 1941, sits at the heart of the downtown and has been closed since 2005. Now Oakland residential real estate developer John Protopappas, who owns the one and a half-acre apartment complex at 3483 Golden Gate Way known as the Lincoln Property, has an option to buy the theater property, including the fourplex apartment behind the



Photo Pippa Fisher

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[back](#)

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