

## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

Thank you for downloading the League of Historic American Theatres' Rescue and Rehabilitation Manual. This learning tool will help you, and those you want for helpers, understand the process of reenergizing a historic theatre.

The manual contains a series of short articles, each of which may be read, printed and shared at meetings.

### **What Do You Want To Do?**

- ✓ Reinvigorate our community with the help of a historic theatre
- ✓ Save a historic theatre from demolition
- ✓ Decide whether to build a new theatre or restore an old one
- ✓ Operate an older theatre, maybe restore it someday

The League is a professional network dedicated to sustaining America's historic theatres for the benefit of their communities and future generations. Made up of representatives of more than 300 historic theatres and hundreds of other experts in the field, the League's membership is concerned with the tools, techniques and technologies of sustaining historic theatres at the center of their communities.

By focusing on sustaining operating theatres, the League is better able to strengthen the field and assist emerging theatres that are just beginning their journey toward revitalization.

While the League's "Rescue & Rehab Manual" is available to everyone who needs basic information, we encourage you to become a member of the League to access the full complement of valuable resources our network of theatre practitioners with extensive knowledge, experience and wisdom has to offer. The League facilitates information exchange among members through direct peer interaction through a cutting-edge online community and an annual conference, as well as many "on-demand" online resources.

### **More about becoming an LHAT Member.**



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### **T0. 10 STEPS IN HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION, AND ADAPTIVE REUSE**

Reinvigorating a historic theatre is a non-linear process that can be pursued in many ways, structured in many ways, and has differing outcomes. Each is as unique to your community as is your theatre. These 10 steps are going to be part of whatever process you undertake, although often in a different order, many being done at the same time.

Most successful leaders of historic theatre restorations say that they wish they'd spent more time and money in PLANNING, that money spent on better early planning would have saved much more money in execution.

#### **Assessing Project Potential**

1. Research and Goal Setting
2. Community Consultations
3. Financial Planning
4. Site Stabilization

#### **Developing the Project Plan**

5. Planning and Feasibility Studies
6. Implementation
7. Consultant Selection

#### **Implementing the Project Plan**

8. Architectural Services
9. Business Start Up
10. Project Communications and Opening Night

*This is an advanced course that has been taught at League regional and annual conferences. Resources from this session are available to LHAT Members through the LHAT website (See: Members Only > Theatre Resources).*



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### R1. WHAT ARE THE ODDS

Wouldn't it be great if your historic theatre were located in a city where multiple user groups long for a facility but none exists; funding is not only available, but abundant; historic buildings are revered and lovingly maintained; and the city has positioned the theatre as the centerpiece for downtown revitalization?

More than likely, your theatre currently does not enjoy such good fortune. However, your community has the power to make that ideal scenario a reality, through the efforts of a citizens' initiative. It requires vision, energy, commitment, and a willingness to learn from, and work well, with others. Don't wait for a "white knight" to ride up and save your theatre. It won't happen. It's up to you to lead the heroes.

*If you're reading this because "they're about to tear down our wonderful old theatre,"* the odds against you are pretty high. You'll need to get some people together who will need to work very hard, very quickly. Once you've halted demolition, the really hard work will begin. You'll have to begin the planning process after having already made some promises you might live to regret. But YOU CAN DO IT and NOW IS THE BEST TIME TO BEGIN.

*If you're reading this because several citizens or the city think "that closed theatre on Main Street is worth saving,"* the odds are very good that you'll be successful. Planning before promising is always more effective.

### WHAT LEADS TO SUCCESS?

A successfully rehabilitated historic theatre is the result of a succession of increasingly specific and detailed planning documents including feasibility studies, business plans, project management plans, and architectural planning studies (see "10 Steps in Historic Theatre Planning.") But success is driven and determined by:

- ✓ A vision for a better future for the city
- ✓ Consistent with the city's perceived needs
- ✓ Communicated effectively to the community
- ✓ Executed effectively, efficiently, and with style
- ✓ Operated expertly in a manner consistent with the vision.

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### **R2. UNDERSTANDING THE THREAT**

Before you begin to rescue a building you need to learn everything you can about the threats you are facing. You need to find out:

- Who owns the theatre?
- Who (usually plural) makes the final decision on its future?
- What is the threat -- slow deterioration, or is demolition planned?
- Is there already local support for saving the theatre or the neighborhood with whom you can join forces?
- Does the city have plans for the building?
- Are there local issues that may affect the building's future?
- What can you learn from your city, county and state websites?
- What is the condition of the surrounding area? How much parking is available nearby?
- Is the building listed on the National Register of Historic Places? Is it located in a historic district, or is it designated a local landmark?
- What's special about the building and its history?
- What community-changing things have happened in the building?
- How do people generally view the building -- A special place or that X-rated nuisance movie theatre?



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### **R3. SAFETY FIRST**

The theatre is exciting to visit, no matter what condition it's in. It is expert at revealing its own story. But a word of caution: old buildings, particularly those that have stood vacant for any length of time, can pose serious hazards. Electrical wiring may be frayed, plaster may be ready to fall from great heights, and your footing may be unstable. Theatre stages can pose specific risks. The roofs often leak long before those in the seating area, making spongy and rotten stage floors. When you walk on them they can easily collapse into deep holes below. Rigging, lighting, and safety systems require regular maintenance to remain safe. That maintenance is often left undone before a theatre goes out of business, so be extremely cautious about venturing on stage.

You can't hope to operate under the premise that "no news is good news" when it concerns possible hazards in the building. You need to know what you're dealing with, so you can take the appropriate actions to ensure safety. Good quality dust masks are a must, whenever you go exploring a long vacant building, for the following reasons:

- Lead paint - Refer to the EPA website for information: <http://www2.epa.gov/lead>
- Asbestos - It is possible there is an asbestos fire curtain still hanging in your theatre. It will need to be checked out by a professional, although it's likely a greater hazard will be asbestos insulation around pipes and boilers.
- Pigeons - Inhaling spores from dried pigeon waste can cause a fungal infection called histoplasmosis.

In addition, seismic concerns must be dealt with in earthquake-prone areas. For basic information, refer to the preservation brief "The Seismic Retrofit of Historic Buildings" at <http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/41-seismic-retrofit.htm>

Your city planning department can offer guidance and information concerning these issues.



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### **V0. THE PROJECT VISION - SAVE IT TO DO WHAT?**

The importance of planning cannot be overstated: it is the foundation for a successful theatre, now and decades down the road. Not having a clear vision of your project goals will allow your group to wander off the path, and deplete time, money, and morale.

#### **A VISION FOR YOUR CITY**

Although many of us initially decide to rescue the historic theatre because of its beauty or our personal associations with its history, we quickly learn that our city leaders will support us only if we explain how investment in this building will improve the future of our city. In fact, making the historic theatre the center of a big, compelling dream for the city is pretty much the best reason for doing the project.

**Dream big.** Cities want what well-planned operating historic theatres can provide, specifically:

- Mixed-use development
- Integrated facilities, i.e., buildings that are part of their surroundings
- Spirit of place, i.e., buildings that tell the unique story or their city

(This is not just physical, it's the stories that express the city's attitude, its roots, and even its divisions, which say, "it can't be anywhere other than my city")

- A unique service improving the city's quality of life
- An attractive destination
  - 365-day and evening usage
  - Vibrancy of visitors and their money
  - Comfort, convenience, and connection
- A pedestrian-active urban core.

Your compelling vision will bring others to join in support.





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### **VI. WHY RESTORE?**

Real estate consultant Donovan Rypkema noted that, “today historic preservation is the common denominator in virtually every sustained success story in downtown revitalization.”

The theatre can have a significant economic impact by spurring downtown revitalization. When a city spends money on its downtown, it signals to private investors that it’s safe for them to do the same, that their investment will be more secure.

Historic preservation has a positive impact on a community’s economic health, and local historic districts stabilize and often increase both residential and commercial property values. Rehabilitation of historic buildings requires more skilled labor, creates more jobs, and spurs more new business growth than new construction. Neighborhoods on the edge of downtown also enjoy increased investment as a result of downtown revitalization. Your theatre could be the centerpiece of this rebirth.

The arts are an important factor used by many businesses and individuals when deciding to locate to a community. They want to move into a healthy city, and healthy cities have vibrant downtowns that don’t fold up after 5 PM.

As well as bringing locals to downtown after hours, a boon for restaurants and retail, an operating theatre can be a draw for tourists, who are a major market for cultural offerings. Heritage tourism, a huge economic benefit, is often cited as the main reason they visit a city. Tourists visiting historic sites typically stay longer and spend more than other tourists.

Historic preservation helps save dollars and promotes recycling by using existing buildings and infrastructure -- "Sustainable development." It encourages migration back to existing neighborhoods by enhancing what’s already there.



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### **V2. MAKING THE CASE FOR SAVING THE THEATRE**

A case statement will tell who you are, what you are trying to do, and why. It gives a history of what's happened, your project's vision, and your plan for achieving its goals. With this information in hand, you can approach "investors" who want to see it happen.

Prove your project worthy of support by showing how the community will benefit. You need to show that it is in the donor's best interest for your group to succeed, and that others also are supportive of the project.

The need for the theatre must be made apparent. Explain why the organization cannot reach its goals without community support, understanding that donors need to feel confident these goals are realistic.

Tell them how much money you need, and why, and explain in detail how it will be spent. Describe what has been accomplished, and how much more can be done with their donation. While being very professional, share your passion and vision.

Investors will likely ask tough questions, such as "what real value will the theatre bring to the community?" Be prepared to answer those questions.

### **FEASIBILITY STUDY**

How is your vision for the historic theatre different from the vision that closed it in the first place?

You have to decide who will own, operate, and manage the theatre, and identify sources of money to maintain and operate the facility. These issues form the basis of your feasibility study, which will prove to investors that you've done your homework. The way to determine your options is through a professional assessment: of the building, your community's needs, the local market (both audience and those who will use the theatre,) what it will cost, and how you will secure the funds.

Your State Arts Agency, the National Endowment for the Arts (<http://www.nea.gov/>), the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), Statewide Preservation Organization, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation (<http://www.preservationnation.org/>) all have planning grants available, and your city can request funding on your behalf through the Certified Local Government Program (CLG).

The knowledge gained from this study will allow your organization to respond intelligently to the inevitable question "what will you do with the theatre after you've saved it?" The architectural component of the study will reveal the building's potential and limitations. The market study should indicate which groups in the area would be expected to use the hall and how often. Knowing the types of programs the building can accommodate will determine its design and technical requirements. In other words, how the building will be used should define what work is done to it.



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### **WHO IS THE STUDY TEAM?**

The Feasibility Study is first and foremost a Business Plan. Therefore, the study team should be experts in the business the building will serve. If your vision is for a performance venue or movie theatre, the key team member should be a theatre management consultant and/or professional theatre manager. S/he should be chosen for his or her revenue focus and broad vision, as well as knowledge of the evolution of the field.

A market study will be a crucial sales tool. This may be part of the theatre management consultant's responsibility, or may be a different consultant, since this is a more general skill. A theatre preservation architect becomes important as the Business Plan takes a firm shape. The architect's job at this stage is to plan for acquiring and organizing space for earning revenue consistent with the vision and Business plan. That space may be found within the existing building, but more often than not at least some of the space will be created elsewhere.

### **RESOURCES**

**The League of Historic American Theatres (LHAT)**, a non-profit membership association, is a professional network dedicated to sustaining America's historic theatres for the benefit of their communities and future generations. [www.lhat.org](http://www.lhat.org)

**Theatre Historical Society (THS)** – Founded in 1969, THS is the only organization in the nation which documents and preserves the architectural, cultural and social history of American theatres. Its archives contain information on more than 14,000 theatres nationwide. [www.historictheatres.org](http://www.historictheatres.org)

**American Theatre Organ Society (ATOS)** – Organized in 1955, ATOS is an international society of over 5,000 members dedicated to the preservation the theatre pipe organ and its music. Their mission is to preserve, restore, maintain, and promote the theatre pipe organ. A few ATOS chapters own and operate historic theatres. [www.atos.org](http://www.atos.org)



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### **V3. RESPECTING YOUR OPPONENTS**

Your organization and the project itself will be judged by your behavior, so grace and composure under pressure will serve you well. No name-calling, no demanding, and never make threats of any kind. Any negative comments from the other side should be countered by a positive response from your group.

We've seen too many theatres torn down out of spite and anger, when the city (or the private owner) feels ganged up on and treated with disrespect. Eventually they feel the theatre embodies all that negativity, and tearing it down becomes almost a cleansing event for them. So, it's important to try to give them a gracious way of not looking wishy-washy if they change their mind about demolition -- an easy way out. Allow them to look heroic if they change their minds, and let them say things like, "we were given erroneous information, and that's why we voted for demolition" without correcting them. Figure out how to have positive reinforcement and praise ready if they show any sign of support. Be friendly, and have a sense of humor. Otherwise, if they feel threatened by your group, they will close ranks, circle the wagons, and stop listening.

As Abraham Lincoln pointed out: "I destroy my enemy when I make him my friend."

If a developer has plans to demolish the theatre and build there, determine what other parcels could be used instead. Do the legwork, and compile a list of alternative sites. Talk with the city planning department, as they have a great deal of knowledge about the local real estate situation. You can find out who owns surrounding properties, what the land values, etc. If the city supports your project, they can offer the developer incentives to relocate to another site. Remind the owner that donating the property to your nonprofit organization will provide considerable tax benefits. Even if they prefer not to sell the property, the donation of a preservation easement allows them to take a charitable contribution deduction on their income tax, while also protecting the building. For information on preservation easements, go to:

<http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/law-and-policy/legal-resources/easements>

If the owner wishes to convert the theatre into office or retail space, encourage building within the theatre shell without damaging the architectural or decorative features of the building. That way, the building could be returned later to theatrical use. If they refuse to sell the building, ask to help them mothball the building, to protect it.

Information on this process: <http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/31-mothballing.htm>



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### **V4. HOW DOES THE CITY FIT IN?**

Your city should be a leader in the preservation of your historic theatre, for all the reasons laid out in the article “Save It To Do What: A Vision for Your City.”

Much like a convention center or sports facility, a historic theatre can be an economic engine. It’s not just about “quality of life” and it’s certainly not about “halting progress.” Successful projects embrace the business life of your city and provide the nucleus for urban development. Your success makes the urban core pedestrian-active, a destination for visitors and their money.

Your city’s investment in historic preservation as a downtown development tool is both pro-sustainable development and anti-sprawl, which equals smart growth.

Donovan Rypkema, the real estate consultant, makes the point that, “Smart growth has become a broad-based citizen movement with support across the political and geographic spectrum. But any smart growth effort that does not have historic preservation and downtown revitalization as core elements of the approach is stupid growth, period.”

Cities are not monolithic, that is, they don’t speak or behave with one voice. You will typically find supporters and detractors among the city leaders and employees. Your job will be to turn most of the detractors into supporters. The city **MUST** be your best ally.

If the timing is right, during the next election ask mayoral candidates to make the theatre’s restoration a campaign initiative!



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### **V5. WHAT TO DO IF THE CITY IS THE PROBLEM**

Those city officials who support your efforts need to hear positive feedback and be thanked frequently. Encourage them to speak on the theatre's behalf to those who are not in your corner. Remember, you're not asking for a favor, you're asking to do the community a favor.

It's important to inform the city of your vision early in the process, and to seek their guidance in how to be more successful. It's important to frequently remind leaders that your success is the city's success. If your city has a Preservation Board and a Design Review Committee, they will probably be or become your early and loudest supporters. Know their stated purpose and duties. Keep them apprised of your planning process, and tell them honestly about the vision and challenges.

Take a close look at the city's redevelopment and comprehensive plans, if they exist. Your group can challenge any attempt by the city to use public funds to do anything (for instance, demolition) inconsistent with the stated goals of the plan. Monitor the agendas of the commissions and committees which approve construction and planning to catch hostile actions before they occur. For example, determine whether a Certificate of Review was approved by the Preservation Board or Design Review Committee before any work is done on the exterior of the building.

Ask to be put on the agenda of a city commission meeting. Make your presentation brief, discuss facts and figures, and thank them for the opportunity to speak. If you are allowed to have multiple speakers, organize those people ahead of time and plan who will cover what to avoid repetition.

Know who in your city government is appointed, elected, and who is administrative staff. Most elected officials are concerned with getting re-elected, so they notice large number of citizens (voters) attending commission meetings, speaking on behalf of their cause at these meetings, conducting petition drives, and writing letters and sending emails to them. When you've been put on the agenda, have as many of your supporters as possible attend the meeting. It's even better if they spill over into the hallways or even outside wherever the commission meets. And, since often in these situations city officials bristle at the interference of outsiders, it's important that advocacy efforts have local strength.

If the subject of taxpayers footing the bill for the theatre arises, remind everyone that fiscal responsibility means maintaining an asset you already have. Taxpayer money will be wasted when all the costs related to demolition and landfill fees to remove a useable building are paid. That money would be better spent bringing the theatre back to life.

On the subject of taxpayer burden, libraries and public parks don't pay their own way, but some community services simply deserve support. If the plan is to demolish the theatre for more parking, remember that conventional wisdom dictates that, in pursuit of more parking, you not tear down everything worth parking for. Surface parking is incredibly wasteful, so encourage your city to turn several of the larger city lots into parking garages, which "read" from the street as another building.



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### **V6. WHAT THE CITY CAN DO TO HELP**

Even if your city has no funds available to help your project, it can still take action.

One of the greatest services your city can do is to include the theatre in its plans for downtown development, and protect it and other historic properties with a strong preservation ordinance. Without these protective ordinances, your city is allowing developers, who often live elsewhere, to design your community for you.

If your city is ready to enact a preservation ordinance, it's wise to provide the buildings in the proposed district with temporary protection from demolition. That will buy the city time to evaluate each building for designation, without pre-emptive demolition by property owners fearing future restrictions. One city told a theatre chain that they could not build a multiplex unless they donated the historic theatre they owned to the city. Another encouraged a developer to sell a threatened theatre to the city for \$1.00, in return for zoning and tax incentives on other properties the developer owned. Using more drastic measures, the city could seize the building by eminent domain, take ownership for back taxes, or the city can make repairs to a blighted building and put a lien on the property.

The zoning board can rezone the area around the theatre as a "special use district" arts and entertainment center, so alterations to the building to make it retail or office space are restricted.

If the city owns the facility, it can receive funds for approved preservation projects, from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO.) Survey and planning grants are also available from the state, so if a comprehensive historic building survey has not been conducted, ask that one be done as soon as possible. The SHPO has information on conducting these surveys.

The Certified Local Government Program is a federal-state-local preservation partnership your city can qualify for if they commit to addressing historic preservation issues at the local level. Sub-grant funding is available through the SHPO, and can be used for a variety of preservation-related activities. To find if your city has a program in place, go to: <http://www.nps.gov/clg/>

Cities can provide building code relief for historic structures, allowing more stringent code requirements to be modified, so the building can be put back into use. For instance, current zoning may require each building owner to provide a specified number of parking spaces, but a variance may be allowed for the theatre.

Cities may use their taxing authority to encourage or fund your project. These ideas are explored in more detail in the "Financing Your Historic Theatre Project" articles. Some vehicles include: Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Special purposes districts Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) TDR Banks and Landmark TDR Banks.

*(continued, next page)*



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Being pro-preservation can bring national recognition, if your city is eligible to apply for special designation as a Preserve America Community. This program, a White House initiative, recognizes communities that protect and celebrate their heritage; use their historic assets for economic development and community revitalization; and encourage people to experience and appreciate local historic resources through education and heritage tourism programs. <http://www.preserveamerica.gov/communities.html>

As part of the local preservation ordinance, your city can put in place a provision that punishes a property owner who demolishes a building without historic preservation commission approval by placing a multi-year moratorium on developing the site. One state requires developers who don't seek the required permits for demolition to compensate the city for the value of the building they destroy.

Many cities require a performance bond, which is a guarantee agreement a developer must post before demolition is allowed, to ensure the proposed new construction takes place. It's a measure to prevent demolition for parking lots or just clearing the land for possible future development. Before demolition goes forward, they may require detailed construction plans, a building permit, proof of construction financing, signed lease agreements from tenants of proposed development, that the building be photographed extensively, and that any exposed walls on adjacent buildings be refinished.

Thus, your city can make downtown development pro-preservation, instead of a potential threat to historic buildings.





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### **V7. ROOM TO GROW**

It may seem premature when you're struggling to just save the theatre, but look at the property surrounding the theatre. Consider what might be available to acquire for stage expansion, support facilities, lobby space, restrooms, food service area, theatre offices, or whatever won't fit in the existing building.

Some theatres own their own parking areas, and rent spaces during the day. Many have large lobbies or ballrooms that are rented to the public even when the theatre isn't in use.

Think like a developer. What other businesses make sense in the neighborhood? Would a mixed use development, including offices, residences, restaurants, and a health club, add to the pedestrian-active urban core and increase 24/7 usage? Perhaps the city or another developer might join with you to finance a broad vision more readily than to finance restoring a historic theatre.

There's a lot to be said for controlling your environment by owning it. Don't wait until the physical improvements you've made to the theatre increase the property values of these parcels to the point you can no longer afford them. You should be the ones profiting from your efforts.



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### **R4. PRINCIPALS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING**

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”— Margaret Mead

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, asking people for their advice and opinions runs a close second. Approach everyone in town for their ideas on how the theatre should be used. The importance of being inclusive cannot be overstated.

Listen to your community, involve them early on, and they will invest emotionally in the success of the project. Build relationships that will serve the project now, and after the theatre is open. If you have any hopes the community will rally around saving the building, will vote for a bond issue benefiting the project, will donate their time and money, and become ticket buying theatre patrons, you must sell them on your vision, and bring them along for the ride. They must develop a feeling of ownership, that this is “their” theatre. This includes people from neighboring communities, and those who have moved away. It even includes those people who contribute nothing.

There are some key things to remember when organizing a citizen initiative:

1. Define Your Objectives – Clarity of purpose and consensus are absolutely essential. Your group must agree on what your ultimate goals are, and how you’ll attain them.
2. Go Through The System – Attend your city council meetings, budget work sessions, zoning and planning meetings, and let people know why you’re there. Learn all you can about the process.
3. Get The Word Out – You can’t gain support without telling your story over and over, to gain public and political support. Make sure your group understands and buys into the vision before taking it public.
4. Work To Find Solutions – Compile information on funding sources, look into alternative sites for a proposed development that threatens the theatre, and keep the lines of communication open with your opponent.
5. Have One Spokesperson -- It’s essential you speak with one voice, so choose one spokesperson for consistency.
6. Delegate Responsibilities – Divide up tasks according to interest and expertise. Burnout will quickly become a problem if only a few people are carrying too much of the load.
7. Present a Unified, Dignified Front –Your group may have internal disagreements, but you can’t very well fight the good fight if you’re busy squabbling among yourselves. You need to be perceived as a cohesive group that has permanence, never as a group of angry, humorless zealots, standing in the way of progress. If you act like reasonable adults, you will impress even your opponents, and you will more likely succeed.

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## HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL

- A. Don't put flyers on people's car windshields. It will irritate quite a few people, and you'll be a litterbug when they start blowing all over the place. Hand them out by asking people if they'd like to learn more about the theatre and your efforts. This gives you an opportunity to answer any questions and get them excited about your plans.
- B. Conduct a petition drive. This gives you tangible proof of community-wide support, and it allows you to talk face to face with people. Bring copies of vintage interior photos to excite them about the project.
- C. Keep volunteers busy. Volunteers need tasks to feel productive, so use them to promote the project. Ask them to help with petition drives and recruit new members.
- D. Join with others. Consider partnering with a visual arts organization and creating gallery space in your lobby areas. Ask them to help set up and fund an exhibition of theatre photographs.
- E. Show, don't just tell. Include vintage photos of buildings in your city that have been torn down is a good way to remind people what can happen if no one stops demolition.
- F. Include young people. Ask the local Boy Scout troupes for volunteers for the project. Involving children in the preservation effort helps insure their long-term interest in the theatre. Most high schools now require community service hours for graduation, so contact the schools for guidelines on involving students. Contact the history, urban studies, and historic preservation departments at local colleges and universities to involve interested students.
- G. Involve community leaders. Write notes (not long letters) or send emails to city officials who might be in a position to lend support. Ask your state legislators for their help early in the process, and consider approaching the person with the deepest pockets in town for their help. There are many examples of theatres being saved by an "angel" and turning it over to a nonprofit group or the city. There are even more cases where the theatre was saved in part because a state legislator stepping in to help.
- H. Prepare a PowerPoint presentation or slides to show off the theatre's physical attributes and help illustrate your vision. The advantage to these methods, as opposed to showing a video, is that you can adapt what you say to each situation, and also encourage questions from the audience at any time. Arrange to present this to all the local civic and community service organizations: Rotary, Kiwanis, Junior League, Lions, etc. Then ask them to take the theatre on as a project.
- I. Use the media. Have your spokesperson appear on local news shows and do radio interviews.
- J. Attend community gatherings. Pay attention to the local events calendar, and have volunteers out in force at street fairs, festivals, parades, etc., distributing information and answering questions. If you have brochures, make sure all your volunteers carry some at all times for recruiting purposes.

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## HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL

- K. Enlist high profile supporters. If there is a celebrity who hails from your city, try to enlist her or him to express support for the theatre or participate in a special fundraising event.
- L. Business leaders should be your best friends. Make a presentation at a Chamber of Commerce breakfast meeting, explaining how a revitalized theatre will promote economic development. If your case is compelling enough, your Chamber could organize their own opposition to demolition. You need to convince them, and everyone else in town, that your group will be the best stewards of the building.
- M. Let the theatre tell its own story. If you are allowed access the theatre, and it's safe, arrange hard hat tours. Educate volunteers as guides. Have a sign-in book to capture the names of people who may later donate or volunteer. Do not allow self-guided tours, as you miss an opportunity to sell the project and it's also wise to keep an eye on people, for their own safety. Schedule tours with school groups, community service organizations, city officials, state legislators, Chamber of Commerce members, and the local press. If possible, arrange for a preservation architect or historic theatre consultant, someone with credibility and a positive vision for what you want to accomplish, to tour the theatre with members of the press.
- N. **Tease them.** Having a decorative painting firm restore a small area as an example of what the original colors and finishes were can whet the public's appetite and spur donations by showing what the funding will accomplish. It also "proves" that you're serious and can't be stopped.
- O. **Talk directly to your audience.** As goodwill ambassadors for the project, you can influence peoples' perceptions of the project by "selling them what they'll buy." If they have small children, talk about how the theatre can do first-class children's programming; if they have teenagers, there will be something to keep them from leaving

### HALTING DEMOLITION: SOME POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

- P. Let the theatre tell its story. If possible, put a message like "Don't let the wrecking ball bring the house down" on the theatre's marquee, and include the web address or email address for your group, so people can find out how they can help.
- Q. Energize the community. Remind everyone that your city is not for sale to the highest bidder, and that its heritage and unique architecture should not be destroyed without citizen input. If you can't get some people excited about how wonderful the theatre can be, then scare them by reminding them how downtown will look when there's nothing left but some big box high-rise condo, a chain drugstore, a chain grocery store, etc.
- R. Show the damage. One theatre had a streetscape photo digitally enhanced to show the building missing from the block, to illustrate the visual effect of tearing it down.
- S. Document all correspondence and communications (date, time, and content) It might prove useful in making your case in court.

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## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

- T. Monitor public records - applications for demolition permits, building permits, and site plan applications in zoning, planning, and building departments at your city. Find out if demolition permits require public notice before being issued. If some deterrent to demolition, such as Section 106 Review, (see below) applies to your building, make certain the person who issues city demolition permits knows, so they don't issue a permit and then plead ignorance after the fact.

Enlist the help of local, regional, and statewide environmental organizations. In California, there is a statute, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) that requires an environmental impact study be conducted on a site of cultural or historical significance before demolition permits will be issued. And, if the building's significance can be reasonably argued, it doesn't have to be listed on the National Register for this to apply. If the theatre will be torn down for a chain drugstore, alert the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Regional Office in your area. The Trust has commitments from CVS, Eckerd, Rite Aid, and Walgreens not to demolish sites individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places. They will also discuss plans with these chains when buildings not listed in the National Register, but still of historical or architectural importance, are threatened by their plans.

- U. Delay. Cities can enact a measure to protect buildings for a specific period until a preservation zoning ordinance can be put in place, either by enacting a demolition delay ordinance, or allowing city council to adopt interim designation for a proposed historic district (which can be just one building.) This allows a moratorium on demolition, with the historic district commission having review powers as if the district had already been designated.
- V. Improve the building. In some cities, legislation allows for municipalities to make "municipal improvements" to blighted property, rather than condemn or demolish it. Once they've made improvements, they can place a lien on the property. The lien's redemptive process is similar to a mortgage foreclosure, so the city can gain ownership of the property this way. This is one way to discourage "demolition by neglect," which is where a property owner allows a building to become severely run-down, then requests permission to demolish the structure for reasons of public safety. Cities can enact "affirmative maintenance" provisions to their preservation ordinances to prevent this, by requiring minimum maintenance standards

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## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

- W. Section 106 review. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires review of any project funded, licensed, permitted, or assisted by the federal government for impact (construction, demolition, rehabilitation, or repair) on significant historic properties. The agencies must allow the State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, a federal agency, to comment on a project. Some states have a provision similar to Section 106 which mandates that any project with state involvement be reviewed in a similar manner. These reviews won't necessarily prevent the "impact," but will buy time for citizens and government to make a case for saving the building. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation has information about Section 106 Review available at <http://www.achp.gov/citizensguide.html>
- X. Enlist aid. Contact your SHPO, Statewide Preservation Organization, and the National Trust Regional Office in your area to ask about intervention funding to help you hire an attorney. The Trust has attorneys on staff who can advise local counsel on details of preservation law, if you decide to file suit. Although you can often get free legal advice from lawyers who do pro bono for nonprofits, you may feel the need to have a more formal arrangement under these serious circumstances.
- Y. Be proactive. Too often, preservation efforts arise only after a building is demolished. Working to have the theatre included in your city's comprehensive plan is your best chance of success.

The great Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith wrote: "The preservation movement has one great curiosity. There is never retrospective controversy or regret. Preservationists are the only people in the world who are invariably confirmed in their wisdom after the fact."



## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

### **R5. ALLIES: STAKEHOLDERS AND USER GROUPS**

Credibility is important, so aligning your group with established and well-regarded arts, preservation, or community organizations will not only increase your visibility, but also the number and size of donations you receive. Main Street Programs can be a great resource for start-up businesses downtown, so work with them to build local partnerships.

Your local arts council can receive NEA funding if your theatre is rehabilitated by them as part of a community-wide cultural enhancement project, if the need for the theatre is established.

Make a list of potential user groups in your area. Is there a community theatre group that's outgrown their current venue? Where do the dance and music schools currently hold their recitals? Is there a local film society?

Does the local college or university have a film studies course? If so, perhaps the college would be interested in screening those films the students are required watch at the theatre instead of on campus. The university would avoid the cost and hassle of acquiring the rented films, projection equipment, and projectionist, and the students could see the films in a real theatre.

Your group should approach each downtown business owner in person, tell them what you hope to accomplish, and ask them to sign on as supporters. Think globally about who will benefit from the theatre's revitalization:

- Local retail and restaurants will see more foot traffic
- Local hotels will benefit when people visit and stay overnight
- Caterers will receive work when the theatre holds events
- Students will have increased access to the arts
- Service groups can use the facility for their fundraisers
- Special interest groups can arrange a special lecture series

The list is endless.

Don't be dismayed if there already are other theatres operating nearby. In much the same way that McDonald's, Wendy's, and Burger King are usually found clustered together to create a fast-food destination, having multiple operating theatres can create an entertainment destination, a cultural crossroads, and create a critical mass of arts-related activities in the downtown. Bring this message to the other operating facilities, and begin to build partnerships. Learn what the other theatre venues in the area are presenting, and not presenting, and you may find there is a market segment not being served. This process, made comprehensive, is one of the key components of your feasibility study.



## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

### **R6. DEFINE YOUR BRAND AND TAKE IT TO MARKET**

#### **GETTING THE WORD OUT**

It's crucial for your organization to speak with one voice, to share a clear vision, and present itself as unified in its goals. A set of talking points, with core positions, should be developed and embraced by the group, but having one official spokesperson ensures greater continuity of message.

Work to get information about your project into the local newspaper as soon as you're ready. You will appear more proactive than reactive, will build support faster, and be more effective at influencing the outcome.

Branding, or creating a brand identity, is a concept borrowed from the corporate world. See the Nike "swoosh" or the Volkswagen "VW" and you know what company they represent. Your project will benefit from this strategy, by increasing visibility and public awareness. A simple, easily identified logo should be used in all press releases and correspondence. A local public relations or advertising firm may help you with a design. Money spent on good design delivered on time is money well spent, but some may do so for a reduced fee or even as a donation.

Do not inflate claims: everyone thinks their theatre has "perfect" acoustics and that it is the one building that can save downtown single-handedly.

#### **EMAIL and WEBSITE**

In today's media environment, web and email marketing are the most important of your initiatives. A well designed website, updated frequently, tells the public that you are a going concern, a credible "expert." It lets you share your vision in your words with everyone in the world!

We learned from hurricanes Katrina and Rita that people will give money and provide personal effort because of a vision eloquently expressed, on the web.

Your website should clearly explain the situation, be updated frequently, and let the public know how they can help. If you'd like them to voice their support, include email and mailing addresses for the mayor, city manager, director of planning, city commissioners, state legislators, chamber of commerce heads, and "letters to the editor" at the local newspaper. Include a sample letter they can sign and send electronically.

Don't do an online petition. It may seem like a good idea, but often you'll find names like Minnie Mouse included, and local decision-makers may not be swayed by the opinions of people outside your region. Your potential supporters get the idea that they've done all they need to do, and you'll have a useless tool.

Do make it easy to donate online. While you have them, ask them for their support.

You might ask an experienced web designer to build a website for your effort, as a donation. But this is a critical communication tool. It's most important to have it easy to use, attractive, express your vision, and be constantly updated. Web design is a maturing expert-driven industry. Often it's done by assembling components and

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## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

personalizing them with your branding. Talk with others who have similar functional units on their web sites and get suggestions. Your state arts agency is likely to help with either technical assistance or funding.

### **PUBLIC RELATIONS**

Build interest in the project by bringing the public along for the ride, making supporters feel like partners. People find old theatres endlessly fascinating. Use their curiosity to your advantage, and keep them interested in what comes next.

### **WORKING WITH THE LOCAL PRESS**

Build friendly relationships with the local newspapers, radio, and television stations. Having at least one “media buddy” at the newspaper can be a huge help. If you regularly receive lots of publicity, businesses will be more receptive to requests for sponsorship, as they can see the extent of exposure they’ll receive.

Regularly issue press releases promoting your meetings, special events, fundraisers, etc. Newspapers often respond to suggested features, such as interviewing past employees who can reminisce about the theatre’s glory days. Ask if you can write a guest editorial promoting the project. Whatever is unique or interesting about the building should be pointed out to the media. You should be willing to share photographs if they’ll use them.

If you know the building is sound, but the people in your community tend to regard it as so run-down that it’s past saving, you need to change that perception. Whether it’s because no one has been inside for ages, or because the opposition is trying to paint a negative image of the property, a perception adjustment may be necessary. To do this, invite a reporter and photographer from the local paper to join a structural engineer, two or more architects, someone local with a solid background in historic preservation, or those with similar expertise, for a tour of the building. The building professionals may agree to do the walk-through for free, particularly if they realize it’s good publicity to be part of a team asked to render its expert opinion.

If you feel the newspaper is giving your efforts short shrift, ask supporters (who are subscribers) to write to the editor, asking why this important initiative isn’t being covered.

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## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

### **RADIO**

For any ticketed event, give the local radio station free tickets to give to people who call in, as that's great free publicity. Then buy advertising. Then ask the stations to run a public service announcement (PSA) to advertise your fund raising events. When the project is further along, consider having the radio station do a tour of the theatre, with your spokesperson describing the architectural details, etc.

### **CREATING A NEWSLETTER**

You will need to print a newsletter you can hand out and mail. Similar to the website, your newsletter should educate readers about what your plans are, and allow them to share a sense of accomplishment when good things happen. It should be well designed, informative, and attractive. The look and feel, just as much as the content, represent the quality of your organization and the importance of your vision. Include the names of contributors in each and every newsletter, thank them, and spell their names correctly. In addition to a hard copy newsletter, have your newsletter available online to download.



## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

### **R7. STRUCTURE**

People are attracted to structure. Debating structure provides us an opportunity to argue about something comfortable, rather than confronting the hard questions: What is the vision? How do we define success?

Successful historic theatre rehabilitations can be for profit or not-for-profit corporations, partnerships, or even sole proprietorships. There can be a combination of ownership entities and operating entities – often several of each – or all businesses can be combined. Cities, counties, and states can be involved, even the federal government. The building can change ownership several times during the rehabilitation process.

The structure should be considered as part of the Business and Project Management Planning process. Experts will help you understand the options.

Leaders who plan to operate the theatre for the public good, or leaders who primarily intend to make money for a company or individual, should be open to using any or all types of entities for furthering those ends.

### **WHAT'S A NOT-FOR-PROFIT?**

Not-for-profit organizations are very useful for hosting the public campaign to save a theatre from demolition, and for structuring the planning process. That's because a corporation organized under section 501-c-3 of the Internal Revenue Code, a not-for-profit educational institution, is exempt from paying sales or income taxes on profits related to its exempt mission, and it can receive tax-exempt gifts from individuals, corporations, and foundations, as well as grants from government entities. 501-c-3s are also very easy and cheap to organize and incorporate, and their IRS reporting requirements are not onerous as long as they remain small.

Like all corporations, they are run by a board of directors. The minimum size is defined under state law. If you decide to organize a not-for-profit to save the theatre, choose directors who display a mix of enthusiasm and expertise. They should be knowledgeable enough about the organization's goals to be effective advocates, and make a convincing case for your project. Keep in mind that, once you've crafted the vision and case for saving the theatre, the outcome will hinge on you and your board's ability to get political decisions made and raise the money. Make certain that you recruit board members with a firm understanding that, once it is saved, the theatre is likely to be run by other people and may have a completely different structure.

Consider naming your organization after the theatre: Rialto Theatre, Inc. or Paramount Theatre Foundation, so people aren't confused about the focus of your organization.



## HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL

### IRS DOCUMENTS AND RESOURCES

IRS Publication 4220, “Applying for 501(c)(3) Tax-Exempt Status”: [www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p4220.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p4220.pdf)

Publication 557: Tax Exempt Status for your Organization: <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p557.pdf>

The Internal Revenue Services offers a resource page entitled “Tax Information for Charitable Organizations”:  
<http://www.irs.ustreas.gov/charities/charitable/index.html>

### OTHER RESOURCES

There are many Internet resources that contain information on how to start a nonprofit organization. The following sites are resources that will help you in your search:

**The Foundation Center** offers information on the process of establishing a nonprofit organization and seeking grants: <http://fdncenter.org>

**The Internet Nonprofit Centers** offers "Frequently Asked Questions" for start-ups in non-profit which can be found at: <http://www.nonprofits.org/npofaq/keywords/11.html>

**The Alliance for Nonprofit Management** is a "professional association of individuals and organizations devoted to improving the management and governance capacity of nonprofits - to assist nonprofits in fulfilling their mission." The Alliance for Nonprofit Management's website can be found at: <http://www.allianceonline.org/>

**Board Source**, formerly the National Center for Nonprofit Boards, has a section on its website titled “Knowledge Center”: <http://www.boardsource.org>

For more books and articles on starting a nonprofit organization, search the **Catalog of Nonprofit Literature** at: <http://lnps.fdncenter.org/>.



## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

### **R8. THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE (If we knew then what we know now...)**

The following are testimonials from leaders who have gone through the theatre rehabilitation process. All contributed in one way or another to the contents of this Rescue and Rehabilitation Manual. All are League of Historic American Theatres (LHAT) members.

LHAT members are a generous lot who share a vision of energizing communities using as a vehicle operating historic theatres. If you share that vision you will benefit from joining the League, participating in the Annual Conferences, workshops, seminars, reading the publications, and asking questions of your colleagues on the LHAT Network, our cutting-edge online community (formerly the popular LHAT-CHAT listserv).

[Click here to join LHAT.](#)

Everyone has to be brought into the process. Compromise has to be reached. Everyone thinks they know what's right and the truth is that no one does, and we all need each other. Even if you "win" the building will lose over time.

The fastest way to STOP raising money is to restore the lobby and auditorium of the theatre first. As soon as patrons see a beautifully restored, comfortable space, they will think you've finished and they can put away their checkbooks. Understand the reason those hidden items (wiring, plumbing, HVAC) and the stage upgrades are dealt with first, and explain them to the public, who will be disappointed that "nothing is happening." When you educate them concerning the logic behind the process, and explain that the correct order of things dictates you deal with building safety first followed by comfort, then aesthetics, they should regard your organization as responsible and practical, and get their checkbooks out again.

Remember that many people find restoration fascinating, so share all the day to day discoveries (good and bad) and describe every historical detail you uncover.

As soon as you have access and control of the building, set aside a locked room or secure place where you can inventory and store artifacts found in the theatre. People often will take items they don't consider valuable (old posters, wooden nail kegs, etc.) or that won't be used again (brass fire hose nozzles.) Either way, if it isn't bolted down, it may be considered a souvenir and disappear.

Don't throw anything away, at least not for awhile. Until you have looked at every photograph and understand how all the pieces of the building originally fit together, there is the potential to discard something you'll later recognize was original to the building.

If you plan you use volunteers to do major demolition work in the theatre, have a building professional on hand, someone from whom they'll take direction.

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## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

Moth-eaten original carpeting scraps can be used to create new carpet with the same design. Moldy poster board signage can be copied by a local artist on to new stock. So instruct volunteers during clean up days to bring their “finds” to you before they hit the dumpster, no matter what condition.

Be obviously inclusive. Your organization is not a secret society, and the theatre is not a country club. You know this, but make certain the general public understands this.

Understand that the board that is involved in saving the theatre must evolve into a different entity when the theatre is restored and operating. New people must be brought in during this transition, but the original core of volunteers should not feel slighted. This is a natural evolution, and shows that you’ve accomplished what you set out to do: bring the theatre back for your community.

A beautiful, historically accurate building that the public may visit only for tours does not energize your community. It is at best an architecture museum. Begin your rescue and rehabilitation process with a vision of people filling the room, of your friends sitting in the chairs bolted to the floor looking at a huge hole with something going on inside. What’s going on? How often? How is that different from what led the theatre to close in the first place? What combination of things will guarantee that your friends will view the theatre as so important to your community that they’ll set aside time and money to participate? The answers to those questions must guide how money is raised and spent, how space is allocated and outfitted, and who must become central to your restoration and operating efforts.



## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

### **F0. FINANCING YOUR HISTORIC THEATRE PROJECT: A CONFUSING RANGE OF CHOICES**

There are as many ways to finance the rescue and rehabilitation of your historic theatre as there are theatres. The most successful financing packages tend to be the most complicated as well. The articles in this section generally define the range of financing vehicles. LHAT recommends that you engage professionals versed in historic theatre financing as part of the feasibility and business planning process, and that you do so as early as possible in the process.

Commonly used funding vehicles include:

- Page 30 (F1) Start-up Funds
- Page 31 (F2) Bank Loans
- Page 32 (F3) Gifts from Individuals
- Page 32 (F4) Corporate/Business Support
- Page 32 (F4) In Kind Donations
- Page 33 (F5) Special Event Fund Raising
- Page 35 (F6) Federal Grants
  - NEA
  - USDA Community Facilities Program
  - HUD Community Development Block Grants
  - DEP Brown Fields Redevelopment and Cleanup Grants
  - DOT Transportation Enhancement grants
  - Line Item appropriations
  - Save America's Treasures grants
- Page 36 (F7) State, Regional, County and City
- Page 38 (F8) National Support
- Page 39 (F9) Foundation Support
- Page 40 (FA) City-based Tax-based Financing Vehicles
  - Tax Increment Financing
  - Transfer of Development Rights
  - TDR Banks
- Page 41 (FB) Federal and State Tax Credit-based Equity Investment



## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

### **F1. FINANCING YOUR HISTORIC THEATRE PROJECT: START-UP FUNDS**

When you begin the process of assessing viability, envisioning, and planning your project, funds will be difficult to obtain. That's the time you may wish to organize as a 501-c-3 educational organization so that you may seek grants. (See "Structure.")

If you would like to apply for grants, but don't yet have your 501(c)(3) exemption yet, you can ask another local nonprofit arts or community organization (or the city) to act as a "fiscal agent," accept the funds on your behalf, and disburse those funds to your group through their own accounts. However, it takes only a few months and a few dollars to obtain your own tax-exempt status, so it may be appropriate to begin that process as soon as your quest seems viable.

At first you should expect donations to come mostly from individuals and small businesses who share your vision. An effective fund raising campaign depends on people being informed of the good work done by your organization. Tell them what you've accomplished thus far, what the plans are for the immediate future, and what will happen when there's enough money.

The local chamber of commerce membership list may be a source of potential donors. Also, find out who sits on the boards of local nonprofit organizations, as these are people who are committed to their communities.

Donors like to see evidence of broad support, so a community-wide membership drive not only brings in money and involves people, but also gives your group more fundraising clout with foundations and high-level donors.

Whether your nonprofit plans to hire an experienced director yourselves or contract with a management company, clearly state that your intention is for the theatre to be run by professionals with ample experience. This might help dispel any concerns that the theatre will be under-utilized and poorly managed. Operating a theatre is not a part-time job and should not be handled solely by volunteers.

If your organization plans to use the theatre primarily for artistic purposes, your state arts agency and the National Endowment for the Arts are resources for both planning-focused technical assistance and grants to pay for those consultants. Visit <http://www.nea.gov/> and [http://www.nea.gov/partner/state/SAA\\_RAO\\_list.html](http://www.nea.gov/partner/state/SAA_RAO_list.html)





## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

### **F2. FINANCING YOUR HISTORIC THEATRE PROJECT: BANK LOANS**

A possible option is to take out a bank loan allowing you to control the building for a time and to pay some consultants. This might be done with one or more lenders, possibly with executives who can provide vision for the community. There are several ways this can be set up:

1. You can ask board members to personally co-sign the loan.
2. You can ask to use the building as collateral.
3. You can guarantee the loan against future funding pledges, in addition to the building.

The Community Reinvestment Act requires banks to help meet the credit needs of the communities in which they operate by making a certain portion of their capital available to community-oriented projects. Often a historic theatre meets those CRA requirements because it's in an economically depressed neighborhood and creates jobs in the community. The law does not require these institutions to make high-risk loans that may jeopardize their safety. To the contrary, the law clearly states that the institution's CRA activities should be undertaken in a safe and sound manner. Therefore, be very professional in asking for a loan, and have your financial plan in hand when you make your request.

When the planning is done and the project is nearing the time to mobilize, loans may be part of using tax credit equity investment. You'll read more about this in article FB on page 41

### **F3. FINANCING YOUR HISTORIC THEATRE PROJECT: GIFTS FROM INDIVIDUALS**

Your group should hold a confidential meeting to determine who in town can give, at what level, and who should approach them for a donation. Meet first with the most influential people, and win them over (or determine what their concerns are, and work to alleviate them.) If they absolutely won't donate money at first, find another way to involve them and you'll eventually win them over.

It's preferable to send two people to meet with each prospect. This process should be undertaken for both private individuals and local business leaders. Tell each major donor that they will be recognized as founders.

The key to personal solicitation is to establish common ground between you and prospect, work to build their interest in your goals, describe specific gift ranges and explain what impact each gift level will have. Ask the donor for a specific amount.

All donors should receive a personalized letter from the leader of your organization thanking them for their support. This should be sent the day the gift is received. Later follow-up letters, reporting what was done with the donor's gift, gives them "ownership" in the results.

If your organization is raising funds to purchase the building and are considering offering to name the theatre after the largest donor, you may prefer to offer naming rights to the auditorium, lobby spaces, and other areas of the building, so that you can retain the theatre's original name.

In addition to identifying those most likely to offer financial support, contact people locally who are politically or socially active, and sell them on your vision.



## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

### **F4. FINANCING YOUR HISTORIC THEATRE PROJECT: CORPORATE / BUSINESS SUPPORT**

Think about how a company's products or image can be linked creatively to your project. Would they like the opportunity to entertain clients, promote a product (giving out samples at your event,) or receive tickets for their employees? Corporation's marketing and advertising budgets are much larger than the pool of money set aside for charitable contributions, so work to create sponsorship opportunities, particularly through tie-ins.

Because your organization is likely not yet well-established, it may be considered presumptuous to tell local businesses that their sponsorship is a public relations opportunity for them. Rather, ask them to help you improve the quality of life for their employees, and the community as a whole.

Find out where your volunteers work, and ask their employers for donations. Because a connection already exists, this increases their interest level. Also, research which national corporations have a local giving interest, whether because they are headquartered or have a branch in your town, or have some family connection to the area.

Ask area businesses and corporations if they will agree to match employee donations to your organization dollar for dollar. Many already have such programs in place. Ask them also to provide challenge grants, asking other businesses to "up the ante."

### **IN-KIND DONATIONS**

Keep accurate record of volunteer hours. Have a sheet that notes the date, name, task handled, time-in, time-out, number of hours, hourly rate (minimum wage), and total. Ask all volunteers to sign in for all functions.

Keep records of Board and Advisory Board meetings, as these can also be counted as contributions. Remember to record attendance and length of meeting.

For legal fees, public accounting and audit fees, and consulting fees, one-third of the value of their donated service can be used as in-kind matching. Often accountants suggest an exchange of checks, when professional services are donated. You have them invoice you for their service, you pay them the fee, and they donate it back.



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### **F5. FINANCING YOUR HISTORIC THEATRE PROJECT: SPECIAL EVENT FUNDRAISING**

Often, successful fund raising is tied to a specific goal: buying the theatre, funding a study, repairing the marquee, etc. Consider placing the focus on each aspect of the process as you move forward, so you can keep people interested and show them continued progress as you accomplish tasks, one by one.

Most of the events mentioned here will raise only modest sums. The biggest benefits may be increasing the visibility of the theatre, involving new people, and creating the aura of excitement and fun around the project. Try to get as much donated as possible, but do everything with style and creativity!

Organize a “Taste of Downtown” event and ask area restaurants to donate samples from their menu, as a way of showcasing their food. Sell tickets and, if possible, hold it on the theatre stage.

A wine-tasting can be held in a similar fashion, with the vineyards acting as hosts. Music can be provided by high school or college musicians: cello, string quartet, or harp.

Offsite, you can organize a "Night on the Town" where downtown restaurants commit a portion of one night's proceeds to a "Restore the Theatre" effort. Put theatre volunteers at each of the participating restaurants to answer questions and take donations and memberships.

When a new restaurant opens downtown, ask the owner for permission to hold a preview cocktail reception for your supporters, sell tickets, and donate the proceeds to the theatre.

Along those lines, your local arts council may help you create a fundraising event with cultural overtones.

One theatre raised money by putting collection barrels in every bank and credit union in the county, and asked people to donate their spare change.

Coordinate fashion shows with local clothing stores, with a luncheon as part of the ticket fee.

If you have access to the building, consider making it available to local photographers for wedding shoots.

Adopt-a-Seat or Buy-a-Brick gives the donor a physical link to the building. If you “sell” BTUs for a new heating system, tiles in the lobby, or the stars in the theatre’s atmospheric sky, give them a decorative certificate naming them an “owner.”

Consider renting space on the marquee for birthday or anniversary messages. If you replace your marquee, consider selling the old letters.

If there is a college or university in your town, ask students to donate items they don’t want to take home with them at the end of the year (sports equipment, clothing, books, furniture, rugs, etc.) and have a large rummage sale. Ask student volunteers to solicit and collect these items, promoting the recycling angle. As a tie-in, you could hold the rummage sale on a Saturday morning at the local drive-in movie theatre.

*(continued, next page)*



## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

Create and sell a children's coloring book, consisting of line drawings of decorative elements in the theatre: stained glass, tile, murals, carpet patterns, etc. Trace the designs from enlarged photos of the item, or directly from the original, like a brass rubbing.

Silent and conventional auctions. start with area businesses: ask restaurants for certificates for free dinners, retail stores for gift baskets or gift certificates, florists for a free flower arrangement (better yet, ask them to donate a flower arrangement each month for a year.)

Organize a sale of locally created crafts, with all proceeds benefiting the theatre.

One tried and true method is to display some type of thermometer or gauge, showing how much money has been raised versus how much you need by a certain date.

At one of your events, ask your sponsors to match dollar-for-dollar whatever attendees donate on the spot.

Ask the Elks, Junior League, Jaycees, Kiwanis, Rotary, etc. if they will designate the theatre the recipient of proceeds from one of their regular fund raising events.

Ask businesses to "adopt" the theatre, with management all joining and then giving memberships to all the employees until they reach 100% participation.

You can offer tours of the theatre for a small sum, or suggested donation, and provide "sneak peek" tours regularly during restoration. Getting people into the theatre is the best way to generate excitement about the project, and keep the public interested.

Organize a trip to a distant theatre for a show and tour. Rent a mini-bus, so no one has to drive, and charge folks a little more than they would normally pay for the hotel and theatre tickets, plus a registration fee (nothing outrageous.) Because you receive a group discount on theatre tickets and (if you have enough people) a group discount at the hotel, you save even more. It's another way to get people excited about the potential for your theatre.

For any event involving invitations, pay attention to the design. In addition to your logo, consider using decorative elements from the theatre. If it's a hard hat event, decorate the border with saws and hammers, finish it off with paint splatters. Be creative, and address invitations by hand.



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### F6. FINANCING YOUR HISTORIC THEATRE PROJECT: FEDERAL GRANTS



NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE ARTS

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA.) Through its Design Arts Program, the NEA can provide support related to architectural studies, design competitions, charrettes (design workshops,) or feasibility plans for the renovation, restoration, or adaptive reuse of facilities or spaces for cultural activities. They also fund projects that address cultural tourism or the revitalization or improvement of cultural districts. This may include the unified promotion of community-wide arts events or cultural resources through the professional design and distribution of material such as calendars, web sites, brochures, programs, and signage. Note that funding is not available for actual renovation or construction costs. <http://www.nea.gov/>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has supported preservation projects in rural areas through its Community Facilities Program, which provides loans, loan guarantees, and in some instances, small grants to develop community facilities that are essential to the quality of life in rural areas and towns of up to 20,000 in population. Its rural development website is: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/>

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), through its Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), has funded numerous theatre restoration projects. CDBG grants are provided by HUD to the county or city government, which can carry out programs directly or contract with sub-recipients for programs and services. Check with your city or county office of planning or community development to find the block grant coordinator for your area. [www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov)

The US Environmental Protection Agency Brown Fields Cleanup and Redevelopment Program has funds for rehabilitating affected historic properties. <http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/index.html>

With the help of a state senator, one theatre received a \$1 million federal special purpose grant for economic development – a line item appropriation or “earmark.” This program was a joint effort of the Veterans Administration (VA), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

Save America’s Treasures is a federal grant program. To check on fund availability, go to:  
<http://www.nps.gov/preservation-grants/sat/>

Additional federal funding sources: <http://www.grants.gov>



## HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL

### F7. FINANCING YOUR HISTORIC THEATRE PROJECT: STATE, REGIONAL, COUNTY AND CITY PROGRAMS

Common state funding options include:

- Bond bills (usually for capital improvements)
- General appropriations (usually for operating expenses)
- Special appropriations (from outside the state budget, state capital improvement budgets)
- Governor's supplemental bills
- Tourism funds
- Lottery funds
- Special legislative initiatives, and
- State economic development funds.

**Regional Arts Organizations** – <http://www.usregionalarts.org/>

**State Arts Organizations** - <http://www.nasaa-arts.org/About/State-Arts-Agency-Directory.php>

These agencies generally do not fund capital projects, but there are exceptions, so be ready to make a compelling argument that your theatre will enhance the arts in your community. These funding programs may have names like Cultural Facility Funds or the Arts Capitol Funding Initiative. Ask about funding for your market study.

**State Historic Preservation Offices** – <http://www.ncshpo.org/shpodirectory.shtml>

**Statewide Preservation Organizations** – <http://www.preservenet.cornell.edu/links.php#statewidenonprofits>

Some states have historic preservation loan programs to help nonprofits, individuals, businesses, and local jurisdictions acquire, rehabilitate, or restore a property. Every state legislator has a piece of the budget pie to spend as they see fit, so show them how your theatre's rebirth will help revitalize downtown and your community. Show them you have wide support, both public and political, and involve them as early as possible.

**COUNTY** bond bills, general and special appropriations, federal general revenue sharing, or Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. Contact your county office of planning, Department of Economic or Community Development, Tourism Commission.

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**CITY** bonds, general and special appropriations, general revenue sharing, CDBG funding, hotel/motel tax, restaurant tax. Contact your city office of planning, economic development, community development, or parks and recreation. To secure funding, learn when proposals will be heard for the next year's budget planning. Talk with the head of the city department that would most likely fund your project.

One theatre received a no-interest loan from their city's Housing Authority, one city's Convention and Visitors Bureau helped fund a marquee restoration, and one received a \$250,000 interest-free loan from a private, non-profit organization formed by that city's business leaders to encourage economic revitalization.

**Local Main Street Programs** and **chambers of commerce** have provided funding and even purchased theatres themselves in some cases. <http://www.mainstreet.org>

In some communities, revolving funds exist to assist nonprofits with financing construction and upgrading of facilities. These Cultural Facilities Funds or Nonprofit Facilities Funds are community development financial institutions that make loans from a revolving fund to nonprofits that need to improve or replace their buildings. In addition to the loans, which typically are made to nonprofits that do not have the collateral to borrow from traditional lenders, the funds provide the groups with assistance, to ensure that the projects for which they borrow money get done smoothly; that the buildings will be taken care of once they're built; and that the organizations develop to the point that they can get bank loans. This ultimately will make it easier for the groups to obtain funding from foundations and other grant makers.



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### F8. FINANCING YOUR HISTORIC THEATRE PROJECT: NATIONAL SOURCES



**The National Endowment for the Arts** provides technical assistance and grants for the purposes of planning restorations that are expected to be primarily arts-focused businesses. It generally doesn't provide capital funds, but can help in many other ways. <http://www.nea.gov/>

**The Trust for Public Land (TPL)** is a national, nonprofit, land conservation organization that conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, community gardens, historic sites, rural lands, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. They can serve as an independent agent, buying land from willing landowners and then transferring it to public agencies, land trusts, or other groups for protection. In some instances, TPL will protect land through conservation easements, which restrict development but permit traditional uses such as farming and ranching. Although the majority of their work is with open space, TPL has been involved in protecting such historic structures as the Key West Custom House, homes for the Martin Luther King Jr, National Historic Site; the Topeka schoolhouse that in now the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site; and the historic Glen Alpin residence, Harding Township, NJ. <http://www.tpl.org>

**The National Trust for Historic Preservation** is a private, nonprofit organization and is the only national preservation organization chartered by Congress in 1949. They provide information, assist and provide professional advice to preservation groups, administer grant and loan programs, conduct seminars and conferences, and a variety of other services through their headquarters in Washington, DC, and regional offices, which should be your initial contact point. Regional office contact information can be found at: <http://www.preservationnation.org/contacts>

Information on Financial Assistance Programs: <http://www.preservationnation.org/resources/find-funding>





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### **FINANCING YOUR HISTORIC THEATRE PROJECT: FOUNDATION SUPPORT**

Before approaching national foundations, start fund raising locally, so that you have a track record of strong local support.

**COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS** – Endowments for this type of foundation are built from numerous donors, usually from the same city or region, and they usually restrict their giving to organizations that operate in that same area. The Council on Foundations website allows you to search for agencies in your state, region, or city: <http://www.cof.org/whoweserve/community/resources/index.cfm?navItemNumber=15626#locator>

**CORPORATE FOUNDATIONS** – Endowments for this type of foundation generally come from the profits derived from the corporation's business.

**FAMILY FOUNDATIONS** – Endowments for this type of foundation generally come from members of the same family.

Two helpful websites:

**The Foundation Center:** <http://fdncenter.org>

**Preservenet:** <http://www.preservenet.cornell.edu/>



## **HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL**

### **FA. FINANCING YOUR HISTORIC THEATRE PROJECT: CITY-BASED TAX FINANCING VEHICLES**

Special tax valuation is another means to encourage restoration and renovation. For a specific number of years, property taxes will not reflect substantial improvements made to the property.

Cities can encourage development through their taxing authority by using tax increment financing (TIF), which allows the city to create special districts and to make public improvements within those districts that will generate private-sector development. During the development period, the tax base is “frozen” at the predevelopment level, which is determined by the last tax roll. Property taxes continue to be paid, but taxes derived from increases in assessed values (the tax increment) resulting from new development either go into a special fund created to retire bonds issued to originate the development, or assist with future growth in the district. The TIF district is created when a redevelopment plan is adopted, and the period of time for the tax freeze is determined at that time. When this freeze period is over, the taxing jurisdictions enjoy increased property values resulting from the improvements. If your city designates the area around your theatre as a “redevelopment area,” it can implement a TIF program to help pay for theatre restoration.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR,) or “air rights,” is another tool cities can use to encourage preservation and discourage sprawl. In a TDR program, a community identifies an area within its boundaries which it would like to see protected from development (referred to as the sending zone) and another area where the community would like to see more development (the receiving zone.) Property owners in the sending zone are allocated a number of development credits which can be sold to developers, or the community itself. In return for selling their development credits, the property owners in the sending zone agree to place a permanent conservation easement on their property. Whoever purchases the development credits can apply them to develop at a higher density than otherwise allowed on property within the receiving zone. In essence, the development rights are removed from the sending district property, and attached to the receiving district property. Generally, the TDR credits are traded in a free market, but some cities have established TDR banks to make the trade easier.

In Seattle, which has a TDR bank, this program is used to discourage demolition. Projects that cause designated features of a landmark building to be destroyed, unless authorized by the Preservation Board, will not be allowed to gain zoning incentives, such as floor area bonuses or TDR. To encourage preservation, developers are allowed to purchase and transfer unused development rights from sites in most downtown zones that have a designated Landmark building. The TDR from a Landmark structure allows them gain density for their development that they would otherwise not be allowed to build. Use of Landmark TDR is further encouraged by a requirement that a certain percentage of the floor area added to a project through TDR bonus incentives must be from Landmark TDR if the “bank” has them available. The value of these development rights is negotiated by the owners of the sending and receiving lots. The TDR from the sending lot to the receiving lot lasts for the life of the property on the receiving lot.



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### **FB. FEDERAL AND STATE TAX CREDIT-BASED EQUITY INVESTMENT**

Please read this 2007 article by licensed CPA Darlene Smolik, President of Plymouth Soundings, LLC:

**Federal & State Tax Credits For Historic Theatres: Could They Be Right For Your Project?**

See: [http://www.lhat.org/pdf/archives/2A\\_Tax\\_Credit\\_Overview\\_Article\\_Summer\\_07.pdf](http://www.lhat.org/pdf/archives/2A_Tax_Credit_Overview_Article_Summer_07.pdf)



## HISTORIC THEATRE RESCUE, RESTORATION, REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE MANUAL

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