

## Walsenburg, CO

# The Fox Theater Restoration and Reimagining

*A transformation of an underutilized theater into an entertainment and event venue.*

### Background:

Walsenburg is a town in southern Colorado. An historic mining town situated adjacent to the intersection of Interstate 25 and Colorado State Highway 160, highway traffic through the city exceeds 6 million cars a year. The climate is typical of the southwest, with warm summer days and evenings, and a prevailing, robust wind out of the west. The Fox Theater is the only theater within a 50 mile radius and as such, offers a unique opportunity to become an entertainment destination for residents of Walsenburg and the entire outlying area. Though the theater runs a weekly rotation of first run movies, the general attendance numbers total under 200 movie goers a week--a number that will not sustain the facility. The ability to accompany live performance, host special events and update the entire infrastructure of the building will help the viability of the theater for many years. The theater is well suited for such an expansion of activities, but lacks some modern amenities (sound, light, concessions, dressing rooms, etc.) that will make such a transformation possible. Our intent is to assess the building thoroughly, then provide an array of possible solutions to our stakeholders and eventually the general public (end users, and possible sources of financial support).

The building is well located, near the center of the business district, and there is the possibility of expansion into a neighboring building if need be. Parking is a concern, though but clearly no worse than it is with the current use as a movie house.



The current Fox Theater in Walsenburg.



COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING

Colorado Center for Community Development

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The University Technical Assistance (UTA) Program at CCCD, through a generous grant from the Department of Local Affairs (under the Supervision of Regional Manager Crestina Martinez) has been contacted to provide design and planning services to Huerfano County via Mike Peters (Fox Theater) and Carl Young on behalf of the county. A group from the CCCD (Chris Koziol, James Hogden, Eric Schankerman and Taylor Carlisle) met on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018 with Mr. Peters and Mr. Young, along with Crestina Martinez (DOLA) at the theater where we toured and discussed the building, the inadequacies and ultimately the possibilities for the facility, in preparation for this scope of work.

### **The Project:**

The Fox Theater, a movie house dating from the 1910's and then ultimately refurbished in the 1940's has been struggling to remain viable in a climate of DVDs and on-demand movie content available in most homes. In order to create more robust attendance, the stakeholders would like to create a venue for musical/comedic/live performances by local and national acts that might also host other types of events (weddings, lectures, meetings, conferences and trade shows, to name a few). The facilities, though, are outdated and somewhat incomplete. Better sound, lighting, stage, dressing area/backstage, control center, as well as improved acoustics, and cosmetic repairs to the lobby and with greater consideration of concessions (Bar, food service, etc.) will enhance usability. It is hoped that the venue might become an entertainment destination landmark for the entire region.

From this meeting(s), and in conjunction with other findings, a series of design concepts will be developed, from which we will develop a plan for updating the facility, as well as cost projections, and a priority list (plan of attack). In some instances, these improvements could move forward even as the facility is opened up for additional use.

Upon initial inspection, the following issues came to light (not a comprehensive list):

- [] Sloping floor is badly damaged and additional "flat area" may be beneficial for tables, dancing, and trade show use.
- [] Stage is generous, but could be expanded to accommodate more "flat area" uses.
- [] Sound system is outdated (as well as one might assume the microphones and amps)
- [] Stage lighting is limited and somewhat outdated.
- [] House lighting could be improved, and should be done in conjunction with cosmetic repair to ceiling (and ceiling repair should take into account acoustic improvements.) Electrical considerations are problematic throughout the facility and extensive re-wiring and upgrade to service panels will no doubt be required.
- [] Back stage facilities are non-existent but could be located in underutilized basement, but water/dampness issues will need to be addressed, as would ADA compliance (elevator and/or ramps)
- [] Performer restrooms are non-existent.
- [] A better box office and concession area could be developed in the lobby area to provide bar, dining and such (kitchen facilities/ café area, etc).
- [] Emergency exiting should be analyzed and confirmed to meet code.



- [] In addition to musical performances, and array of uses could be considered, and other amenities should be examined to accommodate these uses.
- [] Existing restrooms are small and would benefit from some expansion and renovation.
- [] There is a need for better storage throughout the building.
- [] The energy envelope and systems all need updating and insulation needs to be added throughout to improve energy costs and comfort of patrons.

***Our proposed work will entail the following steps:***

**Step One:**

Site Reconnaissance and inventory/brainstorming of project opportunities.

**Step Two:**

Develop (2-4) concepts addressing our initial findings, including determining pros and cons of various approaches, with an eye toward costs, funding sources and establish the level of urgency or importance, as well as phasing opportunities.

**Step Three:**

We will develop 1 or 2 more fully developed concepts that will address the concerns and thoughts generated out of our first meeting with stakeholders. This will include a more comprehensive Opinion of Cost as well as interior and exterior renderings as we deem necessary to clearly explain the concepts and give the stakeholders their first glimpse into the new theater. The end product of this stage will be leading up to a presentation to the community and interested public who may emerge as fundraising sources.

**Step Four:**

Community Meeting/Presentation (1 Meeting): Offer a detailed analysis of the project in order to facilitate meaningful dialogue to determine community support. This will be a multimedia presentation (PowerPoint, printed exhibits and even handouts made available to attendees) given by the student-employees of the CCCD.

**Step Five:**

Final Refinement based on stakeholder's wishes, costs, and any relevant input from the community. At the conclusion of this we will provide final drawings and a summary of the process and steps taken to arrive at the selected scheme, in the form of a document that can be distributed to grantors and funding resources. The final document would be assembled and printed for final publication and **presented to the county** and stakeholders in various formats (hard copy, digitally, etc.).

**Process/Services to be provided:**

- Documentation of all amenities and spaces suitable for development.
- Prepare schematic diagrams indicating locations, photographs, drawings, adjacencies, and other exhibits intended to describe the project and the possible alternative solutions.
- Prepare presentations to stakeholders and eventually to general public for review and comment to generate comment, additional ideas and garner/gauge support for project.



- Cost Estimation (ongoing)
- Design Development Drawings (for use for cost estimation and fabricators)
- Produce summary of our findings (drawings and estimates), for grant support and to assist the stakeholders and county in deciding how best to proceed.

**Note we will also need use of whatever meeting space is deemed appropriate (assume that would be the theater) for presentation to community. Though we are happy to assist with preparation of the notice for the meeting (if needed), we will rely on the county and stakeholders to take whatever steps are needed to actually notify the widest possible audience. We anticipate a total of 1 public presentation and one final presentation to county.**

Work is intended to be to schematic in nature. The CCD/UTA cannot stamp or sign or issue drawings for construction under their own title and would need others, if/as acceptable to take over responsibility for permit/construction drawing completion when deemed necessary at the sole discretion of the CCCD/UTA.

It is hoped that meetings can be coordinated to minimize redundancy, but managed in order to be productive (small size meetings are more conducive to more detailed discussions, whereas larger issues can easily be presented at larger gatherings). We anticipate two to three stakeholders meetings (included in this budget) in addition to the community wide presentations, but more may be required.

Work is supervised by Jeffrey Wood, UCDenver Community Development Coordinator/ University Technical Assistance Program (in conjunction with other professionals within the program), and prepared by undergraduate and graduate level Landscape Architecture, Planning and Architecture design interns from the College of Architecture and Planning in Denver.

**Timetable:**

It is estimated that work can begin with initial documentation upon acceptance of this scope of work and the execution of a suitable Memo of Understanding (note: our fees would be split in some fashion with DOLA [Department of Local Affairs] and would not be payable until our work is completed). Depending on the availability of various members of the town council and staff, and related stakeholders, as well as engineers, contractors and other interested parties, (including student availability and schedule) the CCCD/UTA portion of the work should take roughly 4-6 months, with a projected endpoint on or about September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019. (Note: subsequent phases would be addressed in additional MOU's as warranted or requested by stakeholders.)



**Budget:**

Work will be billed to the HUERFANO COUNTY at completion of the final work task. It is estimated that work on this project will require \$4,250 to cover the staff work, travel expenses, follow-up review and preparation/printing of the final documents. Work is divided by task and COUNTY-DOLA contribution as follows:

<b>Projected Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$4,250</b>
DOLA Match (40%)	\$1,700
HUERFANO COUNTY Share of Cost (60%)	\$2,550

