

Hiawatha To Possibly Fund New Movie Theater

(KNZA)-- Hiawatha voters could decide in April if the city should fund a new movie theater.

The topic was discussed at Monday's Hiawatha City Commission meeting, where commissioners heard from representatives of Acme Cinema, a theater consulting group from Parsons, along with Creal, Clark and Seifert, an architectural firm from St. Joseph.

Mayor Crosby Gernon it's not a question of if, but when, the current local movie theater will close due to the high cost of going digital. Soon all movie theaters will have to make the move to digital.

Gernon says in almost two years of discussions he hasn't been successful in finding private investors interested in building a new theater in Hiawatha. He says one option is to do nothing and let Hiawatha lose it's theater. However, he says another option is to have a consultant come in and tell the city what it will cost for Hiawatha to build it's own theater.

Pat Hailey with Acme Cinema said it's a problem being faced by small communities across the nation. He says the National Association of Theater Owners says 10,000 movie screens will close across the nation as a result of the cost of going digital. Hailey says in those communities the local government or foundations are looking at ways to come up with the money to support the theater.

Following discussion, the commission approved entering into an agreement with Acme Cinema to perform a feasibility study on a new movie theater for a cost of \$5,000. The commission also approved entering into an agreement with Creal, Clark and Seifert to prepare preliminary plans and a cost estimate for a new theater at a cost not to exceed \$5,500. The agreements were approved on a 2-1 vote, with Commissioner Irv Schwalm voting no. Commissioners Bill Collins and Toni Hull were not present at the meeting.

Gernon said he sees the action as the first step in providing voters with the information needed to make a decision.

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