

Voters To Decide Hiawatha Theater Future

(KNZA)--Two plans for a movie theater in Hiawatha, but only one will be voted on.

That's the issue facing Hiawatha voters when they go to the polls Tuesday to decide whether or not a city run theater will be constructed in the future.

At the same time, the ACES community service organization is continuing to renovate the former Arrow Theater through the use of private donated funds.

Hiawatha resident Ian Schuetz, who serves as ACES president, says the two projects are not connected. "We as the ACES, doing the Arrow Twin renovation project, have absolutely nothing to do with what's on the ballot," he tells MSC News. "People need to realize that is actually the city theater initiative and not anything the ACES are involved with."

The special ballot question has nothing to do with renovation of the former downtown theater. Instead, it calls for a ten-year sales tax increase of three-eighths of a cent to fund construction of a brand new building with three digital-capable movie screens, modern surround sound, stadium seating, and an arcade and small party area.

Construction is estimated to cost \$1.8 million.

Voters in April turned down a similar, but differently worded special question, to fund a city owned theater. That measure included a half-cent sales tax increase, no sunset clause and would have also used the generated revenue to fund undefined "recreational and economic development" purposes.

Following the failure of the initiative, Hiawatha resident Matthew Haws went to work, circulating a petition to bring the issue back to the voters. "I grew up in Hiawatha and we always had a theater growing up," Haws tells MSC News. "I can remember walking there in middle school to watch *Batman Returns* and it was one of my great memories of being able to go to the theater. I want my three daughters to be able to do the same thing when they get that age. I think Hiawatha really needs a theater is what it simply comes down to."

Meanwhile, renovation of the former theater continues, but would, according to Schuetz, come to a halt if the city-owned initiative passes. "The city really only has room for one theater in town, and so there wouldn't be much point in continuing with the Arrow Twin renovation at that time. However, the ACES is really a multifaceted group. We're only concerned with quality of life issues in general in town, and so there's other projects that we have on the horizon. We intend on doing the summer lunch program again next year. We have some other larger projects that we hope to begin in the spring. We don't see the ACES going away, it would just be that one project."

Voters have the ultimate say, and will make their choice known Tuesday.

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