

Westmont theater proposal finds new life

By DAVID HEITZ
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WESTMONT — A plan to bring a new performing arts theater to Westmont may be back on the table, this time with a new location.

Westmont residents and developers Keith Erickson and Eldon Olmstead presented a new proposal for a theater at a vacant building at 11 W. Quincy St. in downtown Westmont at the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting Dec. 12.

The commission approved the recommendation for the proposal to go for before the Westmont Village Board, which could occur in January, officials said.

Erickson and Olmstead are now seeking a new location after plans to rehab the old Westmont theater building at 25 S. Cass Ave. fell through earlier this fall. A fundraising effort to raise \$400,000 to renovate that building fell far short of that amount.

The new proposal calls for a 5,000-square-foot entertainment venue at 11 W. Quincy St. with a maximum capacity of 300 people to host live music, plays, comedy acts and private parties. Erickson said the goal is to build a facility that would be an anchor location in downtown Westmont to bring in more people to the area.

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The theater would operate on the first floor of the building with office space on the second floor, according to the proposal. The developers would lease the space, and not own the building.

As far as funding, Erickson declined to reveal how much it will cost to rehab the building. He said the new location is smaller and needs less work than the former proposed site, as building owners were preparing to house a restaurant there before a deal fell through.

"Funding this time would be secured through our sources, and funds from the building landlord," Erickson said. "No fundraising would be necessary this time."

The facility also was pitched as being available to schools for programs.

But some challenges remain. One is due to the proximity to Holy Trinity Catholic School. A special zoning variance would be required to permit a liquor selling establishment within 1,000 feet of a school. Liquor sales would be needed in order to keep the venue competitive with other

theaters, Erickson said.

Erickson said the theater would not be open during school hours.

"The intent of the venue is not to be a bar, but an entertainment venue that serves alcohol," Erickson said. "The majority of our revenues would be from ticket sales."

As far as parking, the plan would be to use the existing Metra commuter lots along Quincy Avenue, and due to the hours of operation of the theater, which would be mainly from 7 p.m. to midnight, parking would not interfere with rush hour traffic or train commuter parking.

But some residents have concerns. Kevin Field, who lives at 13 S. Lincoln Ave. across the alley from the property. He said some of his concerns are about having alcohol at a live venue so close to residential area, and noise concerns as well. He is also concerned about the impact of property values of nearby homes.

"Being so close to the location, I'm concerned that noise from this would impact my children going to sleep at night," Field said.

Erickson said he is willing to work with the neighbors, and the village, to make this development work.

"This is something that is missing in Westmont that would be a good thing for the town," he said.

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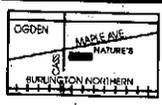


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