

Theater expansion plan 'fluid'

PUBLISHED ON: NOVEMBER 7, 2007

PAGE:

SECTION: MAIN/HOME FRONT

By LEAH BETH WARD YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

Plans for a \$15 million expansion of the **Capitol Theatre** "are still in a very fluid state," Steve Caffery, chief executive officer of the complex, told the Yakima City Council on Tuesday.

Caffery briefly outlined the three-phase project at a study session for the 2008 city budget, which includes a requested \$500,000 for initial design expenses. The council will act on the budget in early December.

The Capitol's plans call for building a second theater, demolishing the Wilson Building for a pavilion and closing Third Street to create a pedestrian plaza. Motorists would have to find an alternative to using Third Street between Yakima and Chestnut avenues.

Closing Third Street concerns council members Bill Lover and Ron Bonlender, who say access for police and fire vehicles shouldn't be compromised. From Yakima Avenue, "Third Street is a straight shot to YPD," said Lover, referring to Yakima Police Department headquarters at Third and Chestnut.

"Please don't leave the Fire Department out of the loop on this," he added.

Caffery said the plans will be fully vetted with police, fire and federal officials, but he indicated that the designs have anticipated such questions: "These are design logistical issues we think we can address."

Caffery said there will be more discussions next year on the pedestrian plaza idea, but he said the concept is to create a playful and welcoming community space.

Council members didn't voice strong opposition to demolition of the Wilson Building, which Caffery described as unsalvageable. He said the plan is to peel off the 1950s-era siding to see if there is anything worth preserving on the second level. The bottom half of the building has no historical significance, he said.

In place of the 105-year-old building, the **Capitol Theatre** would construct a \$4.3 million complex to house a box office, cafe or wine bar, administrative offices and a 99-seat jazz club.

Mayor Dave Edler and council member Neil McClure praised Caffery's vision.

"I love personally all these concepts and look forward to seeing them come to fruition," Edler said.