

## Capitol should anchor revitalized downtown

When thinking of a revitalized downtown Yakima, it's not difficult to envision the **Capitol Theatre** as a primary anchor, especially with ambitious, long-range upgrades and expansion being planned for that community treasure. But as much as we like the Capitol and what it can do for the community, let's make sure all the bases have been covered before signing off as a community on such an ambitious project.

The Yakima City Council will get an up-close look at the \$15.2 million expansion plans during its regular meeting today at 6 p.m. in City Hall. **Capitol Theatre** officials earlier in the year successfully pitched the state Legislature for earmarked money to help pay for the project.

Lawmakers expanded the authority of a local Public Facilities District (Yakima, Selah, Union Gap) to earmark 0.033 percent of the state sales tax collected in the district to pay off bonds. That rate translates to 33 cents on a \$1,000 purchase.

The sales tax authority is for a credit against the state tax and is not a tax increase. The facilities district would retain the money for the local projects rather than have it move on to the state as general state revenue.

The components of the project:

- \* A two-story production facility at the rear of the theater to include four truck bays and two bus ramps, dressing rooms and a 200- to 400-seat black box venue for smaller, more intimate events when larger shows aren't being staged.
- \* A two-story pavilion at the corner of Yakima Avenue and South Third Street in what is known as the Wilson Building where a gown and tuxedo shop and Kimmel Athletic Supply are now located. The first floor would include a theater lobby annex, food and beverage service and 99-seat jazz club. Administrative offices are proposed for the second floor.
- \* A pedestrian plaza extending along South Third Street from Yakima Avenue to the front of the theater and a pedestrian pathway through what is now the alley between the Wilson Building and the theater.

The latter two components of the plan are drawing the most attention.

While the pavilion concept seems a good one, a potential point of controversy is the 105-year-old Wilson Building now owned by the theater. While some preservationists might balk at its demolition, the boxlike structure with bland metal siding that was later added is not in the same historical class as, say, the A.E. Larson Building a block away.

Still, the Capitol should make a commitment to get a clearer understanding of any architectural or structural significances of the current building before ordering in the wrecking ball. We are all for preserving Yakima's heritage, but there are instances when buildings shouldn't be preserved simply because they are old. Sometimes a new building is a more viable part of the city's future. Let's find out which is in the case with the Wilson Building.

The pedestrian plaza is an intriguing idea, but one that would require closing off Third Street. Before that is seriously considered, let's see some hard numbers on what impact that would have on traffic and parking in the downtown core, though it does seem to be a good possibility for greatly enhancing downtown pedestrian traffic as a trade-off. More private financing of this component would also seem in order.

The **Capitol Theatre** is a community jewel and has history and community commitment on its side for such a sweeping, long-haul improvement. Opened in 1920, it was destroyed by fire on Aug. 19, 1975. An outpouring of community support followed, and the facility was rebuilt in 733 days.

The three-part project would make it even more of a downtown draw and thus a key player in downtown revitalization. But if we're going to do it, let's make sure we're doing it right.

\* Members of the Yakima Herald-Republic editorial board are Michael Shepard, Sarah Jenkins and Bill Lee.