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Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation: River Falls receives state grant to renovate historic theater

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River Falls receives state grant to renovate historic theater
Restoration project to play a key role in revitalizing city's downtown

MADISON, WI. Feb. 5, 2018 – The City of River Falls has received an $82,600 state grant to support the renovation and expansion of a 90-year-old movie theater, a project expected to provide a boost to downtown businesses.

The Community Development Investment Grant from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) will help fund plans to add a second screen and make other renovations at the Falls Theatre on Main Street, which first opened its doors in 1927. The project also calls for adding more bathrooms, improving furnishings and equipment, increasing theater space to allow for more opportunities to screen additional films, and making infrastructure improvements throughout downtown.

Work will begin this month on the $640,000 project, which should be completed this summer.

“A vibrant downtown is key to a community’s overall economic health, and this expansion is expected to bring more visitors to downtown River Falls, which will benefit other businesses along Main Street,” said Mark R. Hogan, secretary and CEO of WEDC, the state’s lead economic development organization. “This is the latest example of WEDC’s ongoing commitment to help communities throughout the state revitalize their downtown business districts.”

“We are thankful to WEDC for supporting our community through this grant. It will not only help the Falls Theatre, a valuable and historic community asset, with its expansion plans but will also help the city continue to provide infrastructure and amenities that enhance the quality of life in River Falls,” said Mayor Dan Toland. “In addition, an expanded Falls Theatre will help attract new visitors, which will increase revenue and enhance the vibrancy of our downtown.”

“The WEDC grant will provide the opportunity for the Falls Theatre to add a second auditorium to the original single-screen theater that has been in continuous operation for over 90 years,” added Michelle Maher, the theater’s owner. “The Falls Theatre will be able to maintain its principles of affordable entertainment for the community with the investment and support of the grant, ensuring many more years of success.”

Located within walking distance of bars, restaurants and retail stores, the Falls Theatre is positioned at the center of downtown River Falls. The theater is the only one located in the city and is a major asset to the community, as patrons of all ages can enjoy entertainment at an affordable price.

With the addition of a second screen, the theater will be able to play a wider array of films that can cater to a more diverse audience. This, in turn, is expected to increase foot and vehicle traffic downtown. The project also will create opportunities for further development of the city’s downtown corridor.

The project also includes city infrastructure improvements such as electric and light upgrades behind the theater, parking lot resurfacing at a nearby park, the installation of a permanent common dumpster enclosure for nearby businesses, and the demolition of a storage building to make room for the common dumpster enclosure.

WEDC's Community Development Investment Grant Program supports community development and redevelopment efforts, primarily in downtown areas. The matching grants are awarded based on applicants' ability to demonstrate the impact of the proposed project, including public and private partnership development, financial need and the use of sustainable downtown development practices.

Since the program's inception in 2013, WEDC has awarded nearly $16 million in Community Development Investment Grants for 82 projects expected to generate more than $137 million in capital investments statewide.