

Air of change at Downtown Conroe's Crighton Theatre with \$75,000 renovation

By Catherine Dominguez | Posted: Sunday, August 31, 2014 10:32 pm

The Crighton Theater Foundation got another boost in preserving the Crighton Theater after members of the Conroe City Council agreed to give the foundation \$75,000 from its hotel occupancy tax reserves.

The council approved the action unanimously Thursday during its regular council meeting.

The money, according to information from Crighton Theater Foundation Executive Director James Bingham, will be used to replace the heating and cooling systems in the theater that was built in 1934.

The HVAC system, Bingham said in a letter to Harold Hutcheson with the Conroe Convention & Visitors Bureau, is critical to the preservation of the historic building.

“HVAC is the first line of defense in helping to arrest decay of the beautiful artwork and frescoes in the Crighton,” he said. “The humidity as it is Texas would destroy the plaster surfaces in no time if left unattended.

“The HVAC systems serves to not only cool the facility for the comfort of thousands of patrons, it is the backbone of the facility for removal of humidity.”

The current HVAC system was installed in the theater, located at 234 North Main St., in 1978. Bingham outlined the average life of such a system is about 20 years adding it is no longer as efficient as it was.

“Where we used to add Freon every couple of years, we are adding Freon every four to six month now,” he said. “This is the old Freon that is harmful to the atmosphere.”

As for the heating of the building, it is also just as inefficient with the theaters bills for December, January and February all exceeding \$2,000.

Bingham said he is currently in the process of working on bids with contractors.



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Downtown Conroe’s Crighton Theatre, seen in this photo captured through a fisheye lens, will undergo a \$75,000 renovation. Part of the renovations include an elevator and additional restrooms.

The move follows a motion in March when the council unanimously agreed to give the Foundation \$35,000 for repairs, including replacing rigging and rope systems, replacing the stage floor and handrails and giving the interior a new coat of paint.

During that meeting before Councilman Duke Coon was elected to the council, he spoke about the need to preserve the theater that he said was “showing her age.” Coon recused himself from the discussions about the recent motion since he is a member of the Foundation’s board of directors.

Councilwoman Marsha Porter said in a previous meeting the funding is important.

“I think the Crighton Theatre is the crown jewel of downtown and it is in disrepair,” said Porter, adding that the city may need to grant additional funds in the future to ensure all renovations are complete.

The city is allowed to use the HOT funding for renovations. According to information from the city of Conroe, a city may use a portion of its hotel occupancy tax revenues to enhance historical restoration and preservation projects.

The Crighton Theatre is the home base for performances offered by Stage Right Productions, The Montgomery County Performing Arts Society, Sounds of Texas Music Series and Christian Youth Theatre. In addition, the theater is rented for other events.

Productions at the Crighton are funded in part by a grant from the Conroe Commission on Arts & Culture.