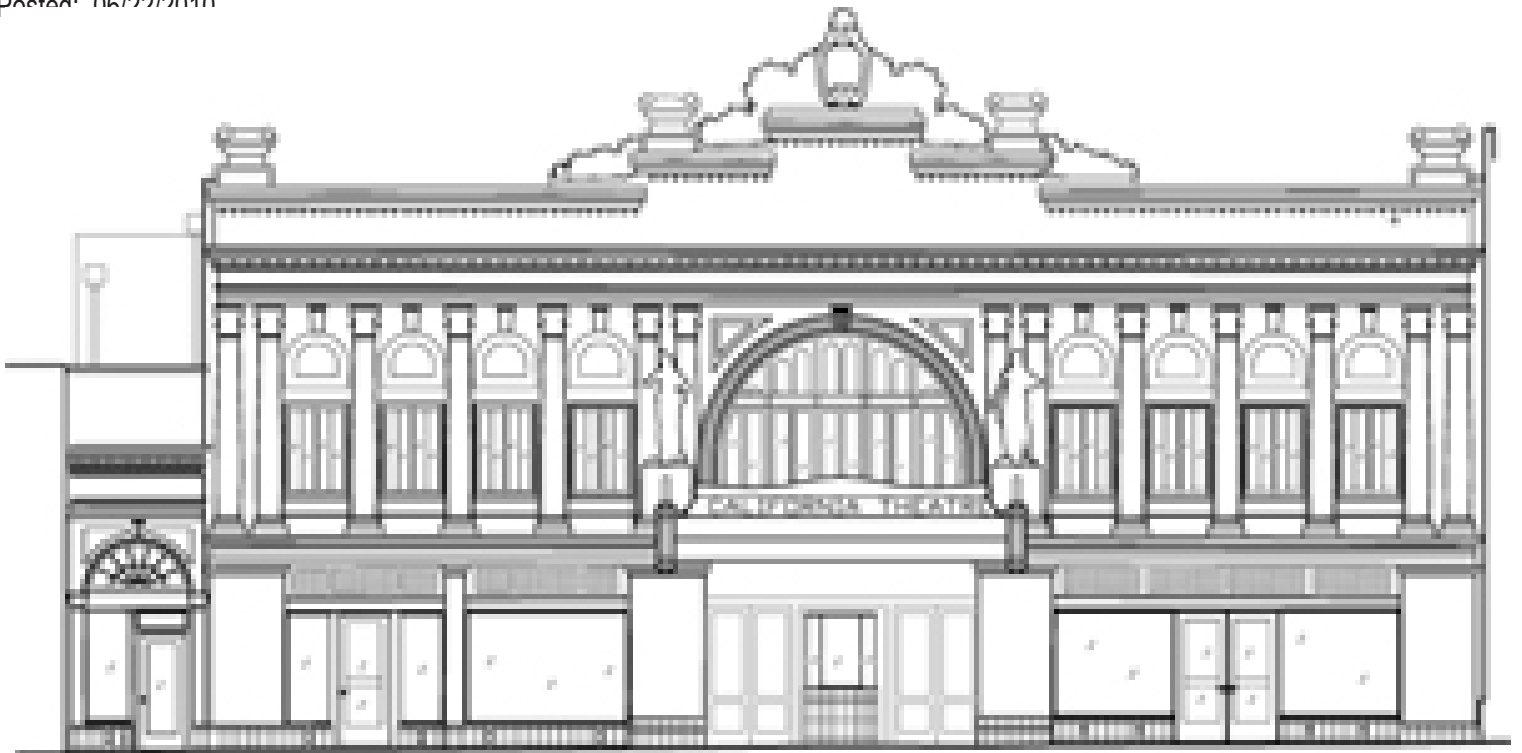


Pittsburg approves contract to renovate landmark theater

By Paul Bugarino
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PITTSBURG — The curtain is rising on plans to renovate a landmark downtown theater.

Pittsburg leaders approved a \$2.8 million construction contract this week to begin refurbishing the California Theater.

The first phase of the renovation will include seismic strengthening, the restoration of the theater's marquee and exterior, and the addition of an elevator and bathrooms that meet disability standards, City Manager Marc Grisham said.

Other plans include the remodeling of commercial and office spaces and the first- and second-floor lobbies, he said.

Work could start on the project shortly after the July Fourth holiday. Completion is anticipated in fall 2011, said Grisham, who hopes revenue generated from other downtown projects can help fund the interior renovation.

The City Council unanimously approved the contract with Vallejo-based AJH/BHM Construction, including authorizing nearly \$429,000 for unforeseen construction problems. Pittsburg has found structural problems in several older downtown buildings it is trying to renovate.

For years, Pittsburg leaders, local historians and interested residents have sought to transform the long-vacant theater on Railroad Avenue into a community performing arts center.

"Ultimately, the hope is it will add to the many reasons for people to come to Old Town Pittsburg," Grisham said.

The California Theater opened in 1920 and was a popular regional attraction for years before closing in 1954. Pittsburg purchased the property in 1970. The theater has been shuttered since 1991 when a leaky roof was discovered.

In 2006, the city spent \$422,000 for architectural designs for the project, along with close to \$630,000 to remove lead, mold, asbestos and bat contamination from the empty theater.

"It's been a long, long, long road," Councilman Ben Johnson said.

Added Vice Mayor Michael Kee: "I think the last movie that played in there was 'My Friend Flicka' (1943). It's good to finally see some progress and get it moving in the right direction."