

# Watsonville's Fox Theatre still months from opening

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WATSONVILLE — The earthquake-damaged Fox Theatre is still at least three months away from reopening, despite what the marquee has said for months.

The marquee outside the downtown theatre — the largest theater in the county at 1,050 seats — has proclaimed, "Watch for our grand reopening." But despite some \$70,000 in repairs already, more work is needed, including a proposed redesign of the lobby, said Bob Corbett, architect for theater owner Hank Garcia.

Corbett estimated a reopening would be at least three months away. Garcia was unavailable for comment.

The lobby redesign would involve, among other things, moving the theater entrance to Maple Street rather than the existing Main Street, Corbett said. Such a change would eliminate a long, narrow hallway, and allow more room for concessions.

However, the proposed redesign

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is already a cause for concern from members of the Watsonville Development Committee, which is working on downtown recovery. Committee members said Tuesday that a Main Street entrance would be beneficial to attract people downtown. The Fox is seen as a critical element to downtown's recovery.

At the same time, committee members discussed re-establishing a sub-committee to meet with Garcia about the possibility of renovating the Fox into a long-discussed performing arts theater. Such a suggestion failed to generate enthusiasm since members of the former Fox Town Center Committee

are now pursuing the possibility of a 1,000-seat theater to replace the earthquake ruined auditorium at Watsonville High School. (See story below).

Ann Soldo, former Watsonville mayor and a member of the Fox Town Center Committee, said later, however, that she "didn't want to end" any performing arts center discussion with Garcia.

Meanwhile, Garcia has filed a lawsuit charging that his theater was needlessly damaged after the Watsonville Masonic Hall, which was located to the rear of the Fox, was torn down last January following the October 1989 earthquake.

The suit was filed against the Watsonville Masonic Hall Association, the city of Watsonville and Gilbertson Land Co., the contractor for the demolition.

The demolition caused a billboard-sized hole in the theatre's rear wall. Garcia claims the temporary wall and security provided by the city was inadequate to prevent vandals from entering the theatre and further damaging it.