

# Consultants for Civic facelift OK'd

## Cultural buffs lament facility's shortcomings

*Civic Auditorium*  
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SANTA CRUZ — Fine arts enthusiasts have advanced in their move to give the 45-year-old Civic Auditorium a shot of culture.

The auditorium has been home to high school basketball games, rock dances, surf movies, boxing matches, beauty pageants and Christmas dinners since being completed in 1940 by the Federal Works Agency and Public Works Administration during the term of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

But cultural buffs lament the acoustics, seating arrangement and other features are ill-suited for fine arts events, such as orchestra and chamber music, drama and dance.

The main problems are bad acoustics and a poor line of vision for the audience, said Beverly Grova, director of the county Cultural Council.

"You can't see the stage, and you can't hear. Other than that, it's fine," she commented. "It is good for fund-raisers, basketball games and rock concerts."

Grova hailed a vote of the City Council Tuesday to approve a \$30,000 study by an internationally noted team of innovative theater designers to figure how the auditorium can better serve as a fine arts hall, but still retain its use as a civic center.

The city and Cultural Council are paying \$15,000 apiece for the study by Theater Projects Consultants of New York and ELS Design Group architects of Berkeley.

The consultants were chosen by the Civic Auditorium Technical Advisory

Committee, a group of citizen experts who interviewed several companies who bid for the job.

The selected consultants "are really the best in the United States. The committee was really excited," said Grova.

Theater Projects and ELS Design worked cooperatively on the renovation of the Paramount Movie Theater in Portland, Ore. That facility, which reopened in September with a new name of the Arlene Schmitzer Concert Hall, was phase one of a larger performing arts center project.

ELS was established in 1967 as a renovator and designer of cultural spaces when the partners won national competition to design the Memorial Arena for sports events in Broome County, New York.

Other ELS projects include a hall in Saudi Arabia and five-block renovation in downtown Milwaukee called Plankinton Arcade.

Founding partner Donn Logan is a professor of architecture at UC Berkeley and has directed downtown planning studies for Concord, Glendale, Phoenix, and Portland.

Theater Projects had experience with 130 projects in 26 countries over a 10-year period.

Those projects include five national theaters, concert halls and university facilities.

The projects include the National Theater of Great Britain; St. Lawrence Center in Toronto and Derngate Centre in Northampton, England. The company also was consultant for the Vivian Beaumont Theater in New York.

Data from city records show Theater Projects staff charge hourly rates of

\$50-100; ELS Design staff, \$30-100, with figures current through December.

Working with the team will be Thomas C. Mitze, production director for the La Mirada Civic Theater.

Grova said the La Mirada facility is noted for the fact it makes money, unlike most performing arts halls.

She said the Civic Auditorium loses about \$100,000 annually.

Plans call for renovation of the Civic, not expansion.

Grova said the Santa Cruz County Symphony plans to try to use just a portion of the auditorium for a performance this spring, to see how it works out. "They're desperate to find a place (performing hall)," added Grova.

Mitze will handle the budget and program scheduling part of the study. Marketing consultant will be Bailey Consulting Associates of Petaluma.

Acoustic consultant work will be done by Bolt Beranek and Newman Inc. of Canoga Park, known for its work at La Mirada, Louise Davies Hall in San Francisco and Aquarius Theater in Los Angeles.

The study is set to be done in May.

After its completion, meetings will be held with users and potential users of the Civic, Grova said.

The consultants will consider seating sightlines, configurations and capacity; stage lighting, access and support areas (dressing rooms, wing space); acoustics, building code requirements, cost projections and revenues.

Grova said "more and more communities" are looking to multiple-use facilities to be used as fine arts halls.