

Preparing: The Civic Theatre will change hands Sept. 1. Then renovations will be under way, including new seats, rebuilt, expanded stage in the lower theater for live entertainment and a larger concession stand.

Curtains open on Civic's facelift

BY HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

Farmington City Council Monday took another step toward giving the nearly 60-year-old Civic Theatre a facelift and approved hiring a construction manager to oversee more than \$300,000 worth of renovations.

Council voted unanimously to hire M.K.A. Inc. of Wixom for the project, which will include installing new seats, new screens, new concession stands and first-floor bathrooms, among other things. Councilwoman JoAnne McShane was absent. M.K.A., which has overseen many theater renovations, will handle the day-to-day operations of the theater.

The estimated price tag is \$342,563 including a 5 percent manager's fee. That fee comes out to \$16,322.50. It will be paid out of the city's capital improvements fund, but the city will reimburse itself through the sale of revenue bonds.

At its July 6 meeting, the city council approved purchasing the theater and is expected to close on the property Sept. 1. The contract with M.K.A. Inc. also begins Sept. 1.

But with holiday movies expected to hit theaters in mid-November, this puts M.K.A. under a fairly aggressive schedule.

City Manager Frank Lauhoff said the goal was to complete the first phase of renovations by Nov. 15. No more than one screen at a time will be closed during the renovations.

Phase two, expected to be finished by 2001, will involve the upper level of the theater.

The theater, which opened in

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1940, was owned by Edward J. Hohler until 1973, when he passed the business on to his son, Greg, who will run the theater until Aug. 31. After struggling to keep the business afloat, he approached the city last year to let them know he was about to sell the theater. The city's accounting firm, Plante & Moran, inspected the theater's books covering the past five years.

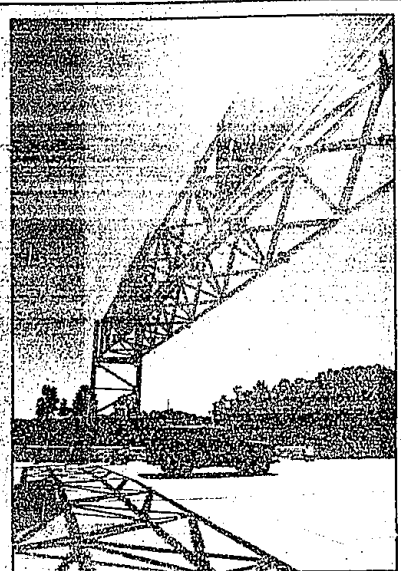
Slated improvements include:

- New seats
- Rebuilt, expanded stage in lower theater for live entertainment
- Larger concession stand, relocated to the west end
- Larger lobby area to accommodate more people waiting in line
- Lower level restrooms to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act
- Relocated box office

City Councilman James Mitchell said he wanted to review the list of renovations.

"A project this important needs city council review before we move on," Mitchell said. Lauhoff said the tight timeline might make it tough.

"We're going to have to be talking quickly," Lauhoff said.



Open: The M-5 connector opened for business on Monday. The road is expected to reduce congestion in Farmington Hills.

Yeah! M-5 is open

The hope is that newly opened M-5 will relieve congestion on Farmington Hills arterials, used by motorists headed elsewhere.

The well-known Haggerty Connector between 12 Mile and 14 Mile roads opened Monday for traffic.

The six-lane boulevard, also known as M-5, links western Oakland County to I-66, I-696 and I-275. The new road runs parallel to — and just west of — Haggerty Road.

"I'm sure it will be an investment that pays off," said Farmington Hills City Manager Steve Brock. "It will take traffic off our roads especially the afternoon rush when people cut through our city. Hopefully they will use the connector."

Some 63,000 cars are expected to use the road daily, according to Michigan

Department of Transportation estimates.

"That relieves a lot of pressure off the local roads," said MDOT spokeswoman Robin Pannecouk.

The new road connects with the highway portion of M-5, which runs south from 12 Mile to the intersection of I-696, I-275 and Grand River Avenue.

The new two-mile stretch cost about \$23 million to build, not including land acquisition and design fees, Pannecouk said. The project was paid for by state and federal funds.

Pannecouk said construction will begin next spring on the final stretch of M-5, which will run from 14 Mile Road to Pontiac Trail. That road is expected to be finished in 2002, she said.

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