

The Argus

By Susan Gordanier

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Behind the Town Theater's doors

Until metamorphosis of the Town into the Venetian Theater is complete, the best most people can do is wish Denzil Scheller well with his project.

Although Scheller will discuss his plans with almost anyone who asks, the changes can be difficult to visualize. An architect's renderings can seem too far removed from the physical building on Main Street. Best is to have Scheller lead a tour through the ruins of the Town, while pointing out the physical changes that may start - pending city approval and a coming-together of finances - as early as the fall.

The changes begin at the sidewalk.

The sloped entry leading to the glass doors and theater lobby conceals a hollow crawlspace. Beyond the lobby, within the main theater itself, the floor begins its descent toward the screen. At a point almost in line with the balcony railing above, a visitor actually stands at street level.

Current plans are to remove this flooring and return the entire expanse, up to that point in the theater, to street grade, Scheller said.

The east wall of the lobby area, and the stairway leading to the former second-floor men's room at the building's front, will come down, opening the space to the restaurant that will occupy the adjoining storefront. A new stairway on the west wall will provide access to converted office space above the front entry.

Also on the west wall, transitioning from lobby to theater, will be the new wine, beer and concessions counter.

The mezzanine will be narrowed. Scheller said he plans to add open arches along the new walkway, providing a view down into the lobby and of the chandelier that will hang over the center of the space.

Another dramatic change is planned for the second floor above the restaurant. It too will become a dining area, with a twist that could alter the personality of Main Street itself: the addition of a balcony extending over the sidewalk. Weather permitting, roll-up doors will open this space to the outdoors and provide an extended view for diners.

Back inside the massive theater space, an asbestos-laden, stucco-like surface covers the walls and ceiling, in places scarred and flaking. Scheller said this material will be permanently sealed behind a new surface application - a much safer solution than removal, which would raise clouds of hazardous dust.

Besides reviving the theater as a local venue for movies, Scheller said he would like to host several live performances each year. Toward that end, the stage may be widened. Below the stage, the renovation may transform

the warren of small rooms into dressing rooms for the future performers.

Before construction can begin, the City of Hillsboro must sell the property to Scheller. During the Tuesday, July 17, meeting of the Hillsboro City Council, residents can address the council during a public hearing and state their opinions about sale of the Town and the store at 257 E. Main St. The council session will begin at 7 p.m.