



Baker Orpheum Theatre
Architectural Designer's Model
A Community Project of EORT
1823 Main Street Baker City



Eastern Oregon Regional Theatre
501(c)3 Federal Tax (ID-47-092731
2101 Main St. Suite 113
Baker City OR 97814

February 16, 2025

To: State of Oregon House Committee on Economic Development, Small Business, and Trade

Subject: HB 3191 Written Testimony, Cultural Resources Economic Fund 2025

Greetings to Chair Representative Nguyen, Vice-Chairs Representatives Diehl and Isadore, and Committee Members Representatives Dobson, Lively, Osborne, Skarlatos, Watanabe and Yunker

My name is Aletha Bonebrake. I am Chair of the Baker Orpheum Theatre Building Committee, sponsored by Eastern Oregon Regional Theatre Inc, (EORT) in Baker City. I am writing today to ask for your support and recommendation to the Legislature for funding the Cultural Advocacy Coalition's recommended CREF slate [HB 3191](#). We are deeply appreciative being selected as one of the 14 shovel-ready cultural capital projects to effect an economic impact, and expanded access to the arts, building an enduring future for their presence in diverse communities in Oregon,

Our project when complete will be a 325-seat theater capturing the unique arte moderne theater architecture of mid-20th century in the heart of downtown Baker City to provide an acoustically excellent and professionally equipped venue for local performing arts groups, traveling performing artists and community gatherings, and support of school district performing arts education. The historic renovation will contribute to the economic tourism that has replaced our timber and mining economic base and now thrives with development of Historic Main Street boutiques, artists' studios, distilleries and restaurants and second story living quarters.

We are in the critical structural upgrade phase of the renovation to meet code and seismic protection for the 1889 building comprising not only the center 50-ft wide theater space, but adjacent businesses, the whole building being 3/4th of the city block and all sharing single brick masonry walls. Since 2017 EORT has raised \$2.2 million, and completed hazardous materials abatement, interior demolition, architectural & engineering design, construction documents and permitting, with the first step of the structural phase 5 being \$274,000 just spent for completed brick masonry repair of all 40-foot high surrounding four walls for seismic structural integrity.

This capital project will benefit our very rural county seat of 9,900 people in a county of 16,800 and a few very small towns. Baker City is 125 miles from the urban population center of Boise. There are only four viable towns along the I-84 corridor from the Washington State line to the Idaho border, with about 45-60 miles between. Their populations range from 10,000-16,000 and they are the centers of administration and commerce for their counties. Three of the four, Pendleton, LaGrande and Ontario, have State-funded institutions of higher education which provide each community wonderful facilities to support the performing arts and attract traveling performers. Only Baker City has no such State investment or any suitable local facility. Working with all partners in the community we are creating a space that can be used by all and impact what they bring to our common life. Our role in the community will be as a unique partner with our arts and civic colleagues, managing and providing all operating costs.

We came to the State CREF Funding to help this project over the huge and unexpected engineering and construction costs that derive from the necessity to create a foundation of micropiles reaching 72 feet through earth to bedrock. It was discovered after the deconstruction was completed that there had never been a concrete basement foundation due to sloped theater seating construction and concrete utilities vaults from original theater, unlike the neighboring spaces that poured concrete slabs on earth over the years. This was unknown because original plans for the building had been sent to archive at the University of Washington and never found. EORT hired specialized contractors for extensive testing of the base earth for foundation design and seismic stability of the masonry walls, from which the final engineering study was completed. Micropiles reaching 72 feet to bedrock have been designed for seismic structural integrity, supporting a poured slab and concrete footings for the staircase, balcony and flyloft structures.

The current request for Phase 5 Part 2 of \$600,000 is for the essential concrete micropile installation work. It is the extraordinary cost of this work that has presented the greatest challenge to the project's success. There are no more structural unknowns in engineering requirements and the project has the balance of funding secured for the completion of the concrete work. The structural steel part of Phase 5 that follows is already in design and fundraising is currently in process.

We thank you and truly appreciate the time you give to reading about and considering this one-time funding package for these various capital projects presented by the Cultural Advocacy Coalition in HB 3191 that make possible the efforts of our local communities to bring arts and culture to Oregonians everywhere.

Sincerely, 

Aletha G. Bonebrake, EORT Vice President

Attachments: Letters of support selected from 10: Betty Palmer; Kerry Savage; Les Penning; Brian Vegter



July 30, 2024

ATTN: Sue Hildick

Cultural Advocacy Coalition Cultural Resource Economic Fund Grant

This is a letter of support for the Orpheum Theatre Request for Phase 5 Structural Upgrades Part II Foundation.

Baker School District schools serve 1650 K-12 Baker County students. Our schools include four elementary buildings, an Early Learning Center, middle school, alternative school and high school.

Our elementary buildings were built prior to 1960. These facilities have lost capacity to host their own theatrical and musical venues, due to repurposing of the stage area for additional instructional space.

Elementary schools host annual programs by grade level. Current practice is to bus children to Baker High School for program practice and presentations. This auditorium was built to hold an audience of 600+. Parents and grandparents attend the performance in an impersonal space amidst rows and rows of empty seating.

Baker School District was excited to hear about the Orpheum project. The Orpheum Theatre is conveniently located in the historic downtown district, less than one-half mile from each of our largest elementary schools. Children could walk to the theater for practice sessions. The venue would seat families attending their child's grade level performance. The ability to see and hear would be vastly improved.

We also envision this space as a location for summer theater and music camps that will involve elementary and high school students. The Orpheum's dedication to recreating a period-style atmosphere will inspire students and the community to a greater level of support for performing arts.

We add our whole-hearted support to the Orpheum project in their pursuit of Phase 5 Structural Upgrades Part II Foundation from the Cultural Resource Economic Fund Grant.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Betty Palmer", is written over the typed name.

Betty Palmer, Administrative Mentor

betty.palmer@bakersed.org

541.524.2260



Kerry Savage
Baker County Assessor
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08/13/2020

Cultural Advocacy Coalition

Dear CAC Review Team,

As a new member of the Oregon Heritage Commission and the Baker County Assessor I would like to offer my support for funding for the restoration/remodel of the Baker Orpheum Theatre by Eastern Oregon Regional Theatre in Baker City.

Just a few short years ago, no one knew that under the modernized façade both interior and exterior of the old Marilyn's Music shop of the the shell of the original Baker Orpheum Theatre. Only a few people had heard the story of this two floored performance and movie theatre which was still functioning through the 1930's. Local business owner David Burris, had heard his father's stories about the Orpheum Theatre and wanted to see if it could become the home of Eastern Oregon Regional Theatre. Mr. Burris purchased the theatre and gave it to EORT and helped fund the dismantling of the interior façade to uncover two original Orpheus Murals, the original train trestle beam which held up the balcony, and the original orchestra pits. Thus began EORT journey to raise the funds and to figure out how to rebuild the Orpheum into its new home while staying within the National Main Street Baker City Downtown which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Once completed this modern theatre will sit inside of a period perfect shell and facades allowing for the beauty of a bygone era but with comfortable seats, accessibility, high quality sound and lights. This will cement Baker City as the "Queen City" of Eastern Oregon. With the vibrant visual arts community this 200-300 seat theatre will provide live performances, theatre, orchestra and community events all in the heart of downtown Baker City.

This project is a labor of love and will provide significant economic stimulus to our community. Currently EORT has a 45 seat house with a tiny stage and little to no storage. Once completed, with high quality restaurants, award winning spirits maker and the top flight galleries and visual scene Baker City will continue to be the significant draw to the Treasure Valley of Idaho (Boise) which is the fourth fastest growing city in the country.

These are the type of Heritage and restoration/rennovation projects which make Oregon proud! It has my full support!

Thank You

Kerry Savage
Baker County Assessor

Les Penning
18057 Western Heights Ln
Baker City, OR 97814

July 31, 2024

Dear Selection Committee,

I am writing to you as a private citizen of Baker County to provide my support for the Orpheum Theater CREF renovation, phase 5 structural upgrade, part 2.

I would like to first express to the committee that there should be great confidence in the individuals, community and supporting partners involved in this project. They have been nothing short of exceptional in their unwavering commitment of volunteer time, talent, and resources to keep this amazing facility and vision on a path to success.

The \$1,714,517 in funding that they have raised since 2016, \$714,517 from local gifts and fundraisers, is evidence of that commitment! Now, 8 years into the project and tirelessly working through the struggles of the pandemic, they are seeking to secure the necessary funding to complete the extensive support structures for the foundation of the theater. In turn, this provides the safety and foundational stability for the primary theater building and overall adjacent ancillary structures on that city block. There is no question that this is a methodically planned and critical phase of the project.

As part of the thorough detailed investigation and engineering analysis, it was discovered that the structure was not setting on a legitimate foundation. This discovery brought to light that the building had maintained its structural integrity through constant support by neighboring walls, but never had the enduring strength of a firm foundation. I find this significant discovery and the team's arduous work to resolution, analogous to the significance of the theater as a solid foundation for the arts and culture in our community and surrounding area. This theater facility would be such a gift for this community and surrounding region and another building block for the future.

My spouse and I have two children, one of which had the tremendous opportunity to play a small part in the traveling Missoula Theater programs for youth. Those programs allowed her to break social limiting barriers, see the world through a new lens and to this day have lasting memories and appreciation for the arts. Not only will this project fuel the economic engine and preserve a piece of our historic downtown, but it will create so many opportunities for all who want to participate. Additionally, this will be especially valuable for those that may have economic or physical barriers to travel to a community that has such a facility. Most importantly, this project will provide a foundation of opportunity and joy for all and will anchor the arts culture in this community and region for decades to come.

Sincerely,



Les Penning

Baker City Downtown

Oregon Main Street Revitalization Grant 2022
Carol Phillips, Chair

c/o Jeana Phillips, President, Baker City Downtown
Betty's Books 1813 Main St. Baker City OR

Dear Members of the Grant Review Committee,

As co-owner of Churchill School in Baker City, my wife, the community and I are so excited to see the Baker Orpheum Theater restored and brought back to life here in Baker.

The restoration of the old theater space with its unique theater architecture from the heyday of the theater 1930's & 40's on Main Street here will be a fantastic addition to the arts and cultural offerings in Baker County. I can't wait to see the lobby, marquee and interior spaces brought back to life in arte moderne design style. Inspired by the original Orpheum murals, which were found untouched flanking the proscenium of the old theater above the false ceilings installed for commercial space in the 1960's. Recapturing the presence of the downtown theater will give the community an acoustically designed auditorium of 125 ground floor seats, with professional sound and lighting equipment, a fly-loft structure and restored balcony that will provide seating for an additional 200 audience members to accommodate attendance potential of 325 required by nationally known performing artists who tour towns throughout America. It will also provide an intimate venue for local non-profit performance arts of music, dance and theater.

My wife and I have for the last four years been bringing Churchill School back to life, as an arts incubator, after it sat unused for almost two decades. The importance to our community of the Orpheum can not be over stated. The arts and culture aspect of tourism in our region has been growing by leaps and bounds for the past 15 years and we look forward to having another high quality performing arts venue here in Baker.

We believe wholeheartedly that the Orpheum will enhance the downtown tourism industry, complement the existing arts and culture scene that thrives in other restored historic buildings and will contribute to economic vitality of Northeast Oregon.

Sincerely,

Brian Vegter

Co-owner Churchill School