



## Mayor: building new theater before selling old auditorium isn't wise

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McALLEN — Mayor Richard Cortez warned Thursday that building a new theater before selling the city's existing auditorium wouldn't be responsible, and could imperil McAllen's finances.

Nearly 70 people heard Cortez speak during the McAllen Citizens League's meeting, where he discussed the Civic Center Auditorium's future with Brent Bishop, a local attorney and spokesman for roughly 780 people who signed a petition urging city leaders not to sell the auditorium before a replacement is ready.

"This would be like buying a big house and hoping we get a higher paying job later," Cortez said. "No responsible person would do that."

"We would rather go through a temporary interruption of service than a financial blunder," Cortez said.

Bishop said he appreciated the need for flexibility, but worried a temporary interruption — the time between when the current auditorium closes and a new theater opens for business — might stretch on for years or become the status quo.

"The fear in this process is that if you go a year, it's really easy to go two years, and if you go two years, you go four, and once you reach a certain point you've lost your momentum and what you had as a city with a performing arts facility, and it's very hard then to go back and justify spending the money in an unknown economy in five years on something you haven't had in a while," Bishop said.

Controversy over the auditorium's future began in October, after city leaders called a meeting with people from several performing arts groups and asked what they'd do without the auditorium. The intent, Cortez said, was to help plan a transition from the current auditorium to a new theater, slated to be built near the McAllen Convention Center on Ware Road. Money from the auditorium property's sale would help fund the new theater.

Located at the intersection of South 10th Street and Expressway 83, the auditorium property has been sought after by developers and investors for decades. Cortez said he would only consider a deal if the new owner would generate more than \$100 million in retail sales.

The prospect of not having a theater during the transition alarmed several people connected to the local performing arts scene, who warned the interruption would hurt their businesses and send Broadway shows elsewhere. In response, Bishop and others organized the petition, which was presented to the city commission on Nov. 22.

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