

School board approves initial improvements to Crescent Elk Auditorium

April 17, 2020



Crescent Elk Auditorium has hosted performances, from plays to music recitals for both educational and community groups since 1929. Del Norte Unified School District officials know, unfortunately, the auditorium shows its age as much of the interior and equipment have outlived its life cycle expectancy.

DNUSD trustees authorized April 9 to spend \$50,000 to combine with a match from the Nick and Lisa Rail Foundation to partially restore the facility.

The Rails, who recently donated more than \$70,000 in instruments to the school district, pledged another \$50,000 for new stage lighting. The district's contribution will come from its Measure A Go Bond Funding to install fiber-reinforced laminate (FRL) panels for the deteriorating lower walls.

In a report to trustees, Steve Morgan, district director of facilities and construction, began with the fact the entirety of the renovation needed to restore the auditorium would easily top \$1 million.

“To do what we all want to do, walk in there and make it look like we want it to, it would take at least \$1 million to have the acoustic tiles changed, the upper wall, the curtains, the ceiling, the flooring, painting of the stage face,” Morgan said. “With new lights, nice FRL on the lower walls, it will look much better than what’s there now, but it’s not going to be new auditorium by any stretch of the imagination.”

The project proposal kicked off in January when Nick Rail proposed to Superintendent Jeff Harris donating up to \$50,000 for new stage lighting if the district would paint or install wainscoting on the lower walls and fill in missing seating in the front rows.

A design team was assembled, including Nick and Lisa Rail, teachers, parents and leaders from community arts groups Del Norte Association for Cultural Awareness (DNACA) and Wild Rivers Community Foundation. Matt Fearing from Northridge Electric and Gary Gery from PBK Architects filled out the team.

Morgan said at their March 9 meeting Fearing pledged to donate \$20,000 of his time and expertise to the project, taking care of the entire electrical installation of the new stage lighting and other additional electrical repairs.

Morgan clarified the recommendation to install FRL wainscoting versus fiberglass reinforced plastic (FRP).

“The FRP is what you would see in home kitchens and bathrooms. The FRL is used in museums. It’s a long-lasting surface material that can be purchased to look like stone, wood or solid patterns,” Morgan explained. “As we move forward, we’d work with the architect and the working group to develop color pallets and other improvements, that will keep the historical flare, but using contemporary materials that will last over time.”

Morgan added the working group would meet periodically to address additional designs as money becomes available over the upcoming years.

Harris stressed the continuity of the working group.

“An important piece for me is maintaining the architect so we don’t piecemeal this out. We want a vision for the long run,” he said.

Morgan promised to look further into whether the missing seats in the auditorium’s front rows would really need to be replaced after questions arose that the area had been used for ADA access and the location for a director’s table during productions.

With the funding approved, Morgan hopes to have styles chosen by the workgroup and ordered by summer so Richerich Construction can make installations over the break.