

Santa Maria Sun / News

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Guadalupe focuses on tourism, theater makeover with \$10M in state, federal funds

BY TAYLOR O'CONNOR

For the last decade, the Royal Theater has sat unused in the middle of Guadalupe, but city officials are hoping to bring it back to life after receiving \$4.9 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds.

"It's an eyesore [now], but it has history. We're not going to compete with your home theater or televisions, but we'll open it to other cultures. What is there other than staying home and watching Netflix? There's live performances," Guadalupe Mayor Ariston Julian said.

The state historical landmark will be renovated to have a 230-seat theater, a larger concession area, an amphitheater, and parking. Additionally, state Sen. Monique Limón (D-Santa Barbara) helped secure \$5 million to go toward a three-story building that will be used as a performing arts preparation center to create visual arts and films. She will be in Guadalupe on Oct. 6 to present a check to the city and kick off the project, Julian said.

"The theater is a large element of what we can do once the building is renovated to get life into the downtown area," he said. "The spinoff will be individuals coming to town and looking at Guadalupe in a different lens—it's not a sleepy town."

Along with renovation plans, Guadalupe has new housing developments coming in alongside a wine grotto, restaurants, a new exercise facility, and two cannabis dispensaries. The city received the rescue plan grant in the first place because of its promise to create jobs and boost tourism in the community, Julian said.

"What we have around is the ecotourism, having the *Ten Commandments* [set] down the street, the Dunes Center, ... and then tourists will spin off into looking to what we have in the downtown area, the restaurants, and the theater," he said. "The culture of the community bringing in the arts is a big thing."

City officials met with the U.S. Department of Commerce via Zoom on Sept. 30 to begin the process. Funds will be allocated over time as the project goes on, and the city has until May 31, 2027, to use it all, Julian said. In total, the city is expected to create 507 jobs, retain 176, and generate \$11.4 million in private investments, U.S. Economic Development Administration's Seattle Regional Office Director Sheba Person-Whitley told the *Sun* via email.

The grant applicants were reviewed by a committee that looked at each application to see if it aligned with the Economic Development Administration's (EDA) priorities and whether the project would help attract private investment and create more jobs, she added.

"The travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation sector is a critical economic driver for many communities, and EDA prioritizes supporting community-led development strategies to help rebuild this important industry," Person-Whitley said.

Typically, the EDA will award about \$300 million to \$400 million annually in grants to state, local, and tribal governments as well as nonprofits to support economic development, but under the American Rescue Plan, it allocated \$3 billion and granted 780 grants nationwide, she said.

U.S. Rep. Salud Carbajal (D-Santa Barbara) said that these funds have been "vital" to economic recovery for Central Coast communities like Guadalupe.

"I am pleased to see the city of Guadalupe continue to benefit from our landmark bill. With this new grant, Guadalupe will build on our region's ongoing recovery: preserving jobs and creating new opportunities," he said in a statement.



NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Along with renovating the Royal Theater, Guadalupe plans to add a three-story visual arts creation building for people can make visuals and films.

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