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## Meadville Redevelopment Authority buys downtown cinema

By Mike Crowley Meadville Tribune  
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The former Park Avenue Cinema was sold for \$21,000 at the Crawford County Tax Claim Bureau's judicial sale.  
SHANNON ROAE/Meadville Tribune



A movie theater that has recently featured “horrific” interior conditions rather than Hollywood films is now the property of Meadville Redevelopment Authority, according to City Manager Maryann Menanno.

A roof in need of replacement at the former Park Avenue Cinema, 960 Park Ave., led to extensive water damage, fallen ceiling tiles and “mold everywhere,” Menanno said Friday. But those conditions didn’t stop the RDA from buying the property, nor did they stop squatters from taking up residence inside the theater at one point after it closed in August 2019.

In fact, the decaying conditions were a primary reason why Menanno, acting in her capacity as the city’s director of community development and representing the RDA, offered \$21,000 in a successful bid for the theater at the Crawford County Tax Claim Bureau’s judicial sale. Bidding on the property began at \$500.

Coming soon will be demolition, according to Menanno.

“We’d like to do it, ideally, this year,” Menanno said.

A “party” wall on the theater’s southern side that is shared with 964 Park Ave., the location of McClure’s Fish House and More, means that the city’s engineer will play a role in planning the demolition, according to Menanno.

Following the demolition, the area will likely be seeded with grass in the short term and would be available for use in conjunction with The Arc Community Greenspace located to the rear of the building, according to Menanno. The ultimate goal is redevelopment.

“We always strive to return things to the tax rolls in a meaningful way,” Menanno said.

“We’d like to sell it to somebody to develop into a useful space.

Asked if the space left by demolition was likely to become parking spaces, Menanno responded, “There are no active plans for a parking lot at this point.”

One person has inquired about developing the lot once demolition is complete, Menanno said, and others with similar interests should contact the Redevelopment Authority.

Repurposing the existing building was unlikely. Menanno said a pre-pandemic estimate for roof replacement alone was \$125,000, putting rehabilitation prohibitively expensive for the RDA. In addition to the extensive rehabilitation needed, the theater's construction made it unlikely to be useful as anything but a theater.

A digital projection system costing tens of thousands of dollars was installed in an effort to keep the theater in business, Jon Horning told the Tribune in 2018. Horning was president of Park Avenue Cinema LLC, the company that owned the theater.

Menanno said that there was still a projector in the building and that efforts would be made to salvage anything of value, but was pessimistic regarding the condition of the building's contents.

"I don't have a lot of high hopes," she said.

The funds used to purchase the theater came from RDA's revolving loan fund, Menanno said, which is typically used for business loans but is also available for use in combating blight.

Those funds will now go toward paying nearly \$52,000 in delinquent property taxes that have accumulated on the property since 2016, according to Crawford County Treasurer Christine Krzysiak. Properties obtained at judicial sale are sold free and clear of any delinquent taxes, mortgages or liens, with the exception of federal liens, according to Krzysiak.

The property had previously been offered in the Tax Claim Bureau's tax upset sale in 2020 at a cost of \$43,629.23 — the amount of delinquent taxes at the time, according to Krzysiak.

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