

SF Railyard theater plan given green light

Kiera Hay / Journal North Reporter

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'Innovative' multiplex cinema, restaurant conform to master plan

SANTA FE – The Santa Fe Planning Commission has given a green light to a development plan by Violet Crown Cinemas to build a movie theater in the city-owned Santa Fe Railyard.

Violet Crown sought permission for a 25,800-square-foot theater and 4,447-square-foot restaurant. The building encompasses two floors and a mezzanine and stretches to 34 feet at its highest point.

“When we began the process, it was very important to us to create our design to not only conform 100 percent with the Railyard master plan but also to look beyond the plan to understand more about the history of the Railyard and make sure that our design’s intention represents the original intent of those in this community who created the concept for the Railyard master plan,” Violet Crown owner Bill Banowsky said.

The theater will have 10 screening rooms with 50 seats each and one 120-seat theater.

With the Planning Commission approval in place, Violet Crown can move forward with construction plans. The cinema could be complete by late 2014 or early 2015.

Banowsky has said the theater will offer an expansive selection of films that includes big-budget Hollywood movies, independent, art-house and foreign-language films and locally made productions.

Violet Crown “is an innovative cinema concept designed to substantially elevate the cinema experience through distinctive programming and enhanced amenities,” Banowsky said in a June letter from Banowsky to the Planning Commission.

The Planning Commission stipulated that Violet Crown must work with city staff to ensure the building’s water-harvesting system is hooked up to the Railyard’s water-harvesting system.



This rendering shows the design for the Violet Crown movie theater planned for Santa Fe’s city-owned Railyard complex.

(Courtesy of Violet Crown Cinemas)

The cinema site is sandwiched between Flying Star in the Market Station commercial complex and Santa Fe Clay. It’s long sat empty, with plans for a theater run by Maya Cinema derailed years ago because of funding problems. A huge hole in the ground marks where work on the Maya project started, briefly.

When the Santa Fe Railyard Community Corp., the nonprofit that runs the Railyard, selected Violet Crown earlier this year to run the theater, the nonprofit turned down another bid by Maya. The decision ruffled a few feathers as Maya had garnered some community support for its plan to work with the financially precarious El Museo Cultural, located near the cinema site.

A report compiled by city land-use staff recommended approval of the development plan.

“The proposed theater complex helps fulfill several Master Plan objectives including developing a mixed-use area to attract pedestrian activity; and creating a ‘diverse, people-oriented, community place,’” the report said.

“The theater-restaurant complex will create full- and part-time jobs; generate additional revenue; purchase local produce, goods and services; as well as provide a customer base for other businesses in the Railyard,” the report continued.

The Santa Fe City Council has already approved a parking plan that will provide moviegoers with four free hours of parking in the Santa Fe Railyard parking garage. The SFRCC will pay the estimated cost of \$100,000 to \$150,000 a year.