



DOWNTOWN SOMERSET
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

NATIONALLY RENOWNED ARCHITECTURE FIRM TO LEAD VIRGINIA RENEWAL

SOMERSET, Ky. (August 25, 2014) — Downtown Somerset Development Corporation’s (DSDC) 12-year effort to restore the city’s beloved historic theatre has been revived.

DSDC recently selected nationally renowned architecture firm Westlake Reed Leskosky (WRL) to create a concept plan for transforming The Virginia. This 14-week phase is a necessary step before DSDC can raise public and private funds needed for construction and renovation.

WRL, with offices in Cleveland, Ohio, and four other U.S. cities, has been in continuous practice for 109 years and has experience with more than 100 historic theatre projects of national caliber — including the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., and the Tennessee Theatre in Knoxville. WRL currently has more than 10 dark theatres in design that are relevant to The Virginia project.

“We work on projects that enhance the quality of life of our communities,” said Paul Siemborski, principal architect for the project and board member of the League of Historic American Theatres. “No two communities are the same, and therefore, no two projects are the same. We seek out the unique characteristics and qualities of a community, and those attributes inform the design and make each project unique.”

DSDC Director Gib Gosser said WRL’s extensive experience in historic theatre projects and its support of the performing arts made the firm a natural choice for this project.

“We were inspired by the work Westlake Reed Leskosky has performed for other theatres and, for the first time, saw real possibility in transforming The Virginia into a modern entertainment venue, while respecting its historical significance,” Gosser said. “We believe we can make this happen.”

The Virginia opened in 1922 and for seven decades served as both a cinema and live theatre venue. When it went dark in 1994, it was operating as a second-run dollar movie cinema, having succumbed to the pressure from an increasing number of entertainment options in the community. That year, a devastating ice storm damaged an already weak roof, which left the interior of the building vulnerable to further weather damage during the years that followed.

In 2002, with the help of \$54,000 raised in the community and a sizeable donation from the theatre’s then-owner, D.E. Coates, DSDC purchased The Virginia in hopes of renovating it. DSDC immediately secured Renaissance Kentucky Program grant funds to repair the roof and façade windows and renovate the terra cotta trim, but no further public funding has been available to continue restoration.

During the concept phase, WRL and its partners will establish a vision for the theatre, seeking input from community stakeholders on what kind of flexible entertainment venue will be most successful, evaluating its potential impact on tourism, and analyzing the building’s structure and costs associated with renovation. Once a clear direction is developed, the end result will include plan diagrams, project phasing and cost estimation.

WRL will partner with two local firms — KSD Kinetic | Strategic | Design, a design, communications and marketing firm in Somerset; and CCS Engineers, an engineering, consulting and construction design company in Burnside — to help develop the vision and brand for the revitalized Virginia.

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With a concept in hand, DSDC will then begin the fundraising process which will include applying for block grants and seeking financial support within the community.

“A first round of community stakeholder brainstorming sessions in July was productive and introduced the creative thinking WRL and its partners bring to the table,” said Adam Richardson, DSDC board member. “It’s really exciting, the concepts we can explore. (Paul) has a lot of talent dragging ideas out of people, exploring options we may never have thought of ourselves.”

For more information about The Virginia revitalization project, call DSDC at (606) 679-8376. For information about Westlake Reed Leskosky, visit www.wrldesign.com.

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