

Holyoke Victory Theatre renovation proceeds with selection of architect and \$400,000 more in state tax credits

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HOLYOKE – The cost to revamp the long-closed Victory Theatre on Suffolk Street has risen to \$28 million, but there's good news, too.

An architect has been chosen, construction will begin June 1 and the state has come through with another \$400,000 in tax credits to help in funding the restoration, officials said Wednesday.

"The exciting moment is here with us," said Donald T. Sanders, executive artistic director of the Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts, the nonprofit organization that owns the theater.

Durkee Brown Viveiros Werenfels Architects, of Providence, R.I., was chosen from a competition with five other firms, Sanders said.

Durkee Brown got the nod because it has shown historic restoration abilities in other projects while also experienced in contemporary renovation, Sanders said.



Staff Photo by John Suchocki

A wall mural towers over the stage at the Victory Theater in Holyoke in this 2008 photo.

Sanders and Mayor **Elaine A. Pluta** made the announcements in front of the boarded-up theater at 81-89 Suffolk St., which opened in 1919 and closed in 1979.

Months ago, the renovation cost was \$27 million but it's a big job and rising expenses are unsurprising, Sanders said.

The interior of the water-damaged former vaudeville hall is a landscape of plaster chunks and debris among busted-up rows of seats. None of which, as **tours have shown**, can hide the old showhouse's beauty inherent in the marble floors, art deco trim, mahogany walls, murals and other touches.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission provided the latest round of tax credits Oct. 26. In return for providing money for projects in distressed, low-income-areas, investors get tax credits based on a percentage of their investment over a period of years.

Including a total of \$3.4 million in state tax credits, Sander said, \$22 million of the project cost has been raised so far. That consists of federal tax credits, grants and donations, he said.

Also, he said, as the scheduled reopening of Dec. 30, 2012 nears, patrons can donate \$500 to \$1,000 to have audience seats named after them.