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Aldermen reverse vote on grant for theater

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Supporters lobbied City Council members 'to do what's right for Quincy.' By Doug Wilson Herald-Whig Senior Writer One Quincy alderman changed his vote and another was present to reverse last week's rejection of a 3,000 federal grant for the Washington Theater. Alderman Ben Bumbry, D-1, had voted against the grant last week but made the motion to reconsider the issue after hearing assurances from members of the Washington Theater Commission that they do not want local tax money for the project. Alderman Steve Duesterhaus, D-2, voted to accept the grant because the repairs it finances may save the city from being forced to demolish the building. "I've heard it could cost 0,000 to 0,000 to demolish that building and there will be no grants to pay for that," said Duesterhaus, who was absent last week. The final vote tally was 7-6 in favor of the grant, prompting a round of applause from theater supporters. One week earlier the vote was 7-6 not to accept the grant. Others lobbied for reconsideration of the grant. Dan Griffin, the owner of several downtown developments, asked aldermen to "put aside all your political differences and do what's right for Quincy." Griffin said the heart of any city is the downtown area and letting the Washington Theater deteriorate would hurt nearby properties that have been rehabilitated by private owners. Alderman Eugene "Smoky" Mueller, D-2, voted against the grant last week and on Monday night. Mueller said he would support the theater project again if he has assurances that Quincy University or some other third party will take control of the building and not come back for a bailout from the City Council. Peter A. "Tony" Oakley, chairman of the Theater Commission, was pleased with the final outcome, although he is concerned that the margin of victory was so narrow. During his comments before the council vote, Oakley said the commission needs more time to review options and reminded aldermen that they created the commission on July 7. "We have no desire to ask the city to oversee the theater or pay its bills," he said. Greg Luekenhoff of Adam Florist

said a rehabilitated theater would attract people downtown. That would help the property owners who already have done work on nearby buildings. Alderman Roger Schoenekase, D-3, said the theater could still come back to haunt city taxpayers. "The granting process is not going to do anything but incur more expense" that may entice city officials to spend local tax dollars on the project, Schoenekase said. Theater Commission members are considering whether to seek non-profit status. They said it could take up to a year to complete that process if it is approved by the 14-member board. Those voting against accepting the grant were Aldermen Virgil Goehl, D-1, Mueller, Paul Havermale, R-3, Schoenekase, Mike Farha, R-4, and Mike Rein, R-5. Alderman Rick Smith, R-4, was absent. In other action the council heard a first reading of rate hikes for water and sewer service. Director of Utilities David Kent outlined the rate proposal for the Finance Committee before the council meeting. Kent said sewer expenses are higher than revenue and a Chicago engineering firm did a rate study/system inventory on both water and sewer facilities. Kent said the average residential sewer customer who now spends .07 per month would be charged .40 per month under the proposed rate change. The average water customer now spends .72 per month and that would climb to .05. Kent showed aldermen comparative rates for water and sewer service in other communities and said even with the .66 total rate increase, rates are higher elsewhere. Contact Senior Writer Doug Wilson at dwilson@whig.com or (217) 221-3372