



Gateway Milbridge

Revitalizing Downtown Milbridge

MilbridgeTheatre.org

The Milbridge Theatre and Community Arts Center- Project Fact Sheet A Regional Community Development Effort by Gateway Milbridge

What is Gateway Milbridge?

Gateway Milbridge is a non-profit 501c3 designated organization formed to assist with a downtown revitalization effort for Milbridge through a variety of community focused projects including an emphasis on rebuilding and reopening the Milbridge Theatre as a full service Theatre and Community Arts Center.

What is the "Bring Back the Milbridge Theatre" project?

As one of our projects, Gateway Milbridge is organizing an effort to rebuild and reopen the Milbridge Theatre as a modern **full service theatre and community arts center** serving Milbridge and the surrounding communities. The new, combined theatre and community arts center will provide us with a flexible venue and community gathering space for film and expanded options/events including educational programming, live music, lectures, and stage performances.

Why is the Milbridge Theatre so important to Milbridge?

The theatre has been a community icon since it was built in 1937. Area residents relied on the theatre for entertainment and gathering because such opportunities here are few and often a great distance away. It was one of the few facilities Milbridge had for creating a strong sense of community and belonging for our residents of all ages. Generations of our region's youth spent countless weekends of their lives at this theatre engaging in much-needed social and cultural experiences. The theatre's closure left an economic void in the center of our downtown.

Small towns and regions like ours face many difficult headwinds these days, and redevelopment projects, such as bringing back the Milbridge Theatre, are critical to the region's economy and our residents' quality of life. The new theatre and community arts center will not only provide our region with a venue for film, community gathering space, educational programming, and live performances, but it can create jobs, engage volunteers/students, attract visitors to the area, spur economic activity, and fill a critical commercial anchor in the center of our town.

Why was much of the theatre torn down – couldn't we restore the existing building?

Professional architects and engineers worked on options for renovation and reconstruction. The building had deteriorated significantly, and the most practical approach was to remove the structurally unsound sections and rebuild it. We are committed to restoring as many historic and sentimental items of the original theatre as possible, such as the candy counter, ticket counter, and other items. Proposed plans include a new building with a street-front appearance replicating the historic appearance of the existing building, while providing handicap accessibility, new bathrooms, a larger stage, year-round heating and possibly air conditioning.

Is there a plan for the new theatre's long term operation – how will it succeed?

Yes. We were awarded a grant from the Maine Community Foundation funding a feasibility study and long term business plan for the sustainability, design, programming, and operation of the theatre. Extensive interviews and financial reviews with other regional theatres show the project is viable and sustainable. The plan has been finalized by a Portland group which focuses on business plans for non-profit organizations.

How much will it cost to build a new theatre and how long will it take?

This is a large undertaking and trying to do it all at once would be very difficult. That's why we broke it down into more easily achievable phases while still keeping the overall project in mind. Each phase is designed to provide immediate, tangible benefits: acquiring the land and building, preserving historic items, removing the dilapidated building, creating a park-like green space for everyone to enjoy, and opening a new theatre and community arts center. Each of these is a positive step forward with a solid accomplishment we can be proud of, and each will be fully funded and completed before we move deeply into the next phase.

- Phases 1 and 2 (Jan-December 2016) - Raise the initial funds necessary to purchase the existing theatre building and land and cover the cost of insurance, taxes and legal work. Complete development of a professional long term business plan, initiate building design options and continue fundraising.
Estimated Cost- \$72,000 COMPLETED
- Phase 3 (January-December 2017) - Remove the structurally unsound portions of the building, retain the Marquee Shoppe portion of the structure, store historic items for preservation, stabilize the site by creating a simple, park-like green space, refurbish/reopen the Marquee Shoppe as a mini-museum of the theatre's history, and build an outdoor stage that can be used and enjoyed immediately by the community for outdoor movies and outdoor entertainment while we continue raising money for the new building.
Estimated Cost- \$29,000 COMPLETED
- Phases 4 – 7 (2018-2020) - Plan and construct a new facility that can be enhanced and expanded over time. Includes rebuilding and equipping the structure for use as a movie theatre and modern community arts center for a variety of live performances, film, arts, and educational programming.
Estimated Cost- \$579,000 IN PROCESS

How will this project be paid for– will it draw on local tax dollars?

Funding is coming from a variety of sources, including private donations, business donations, foundation grants, public grants for community development, and significant volunteer efforts. No funding is being sought or provided from the town government or local tax dollars. Although the theatre will likely be operated as a non-profit organization, it is planned for it to remain on the Town tax rolls.

Funding for phases 1 through 3 (approximately \$95,000) was sought primarily through local donations from individuals and businesses in the immediate region along with small grants from within the state. By receiving the funding for these three phases from a broad base of local donors, it allowed us to demonstrate local and regional project support which positions us to receive the larger corporate donations and larger matching grants necessary to fully fund phases 4 - 7, the construction and equipping of the new building.

How can I help?

Your support is critical to this project. Please help us by spreading the word about our efforts. Sign up on our website for updates, and "like" us on our Facebook page. Contact us with your ideas, comments, and questions at any time. Attend a fundraising event. Join us as a volunteer. Donate online or in person.

How can people or businesses make a donation?

Gateway Milbridge is a 501c3 designated nonprofit organization. Donations are tax-deductible and receipts are given for donations. You can make a tax-deductible donation [on our website](#) by credit card or you may donate by check. Check donations may be made payable and sent to:

Gateway Milbridge, PO Box 62, Milbridge, ME 04658

What has been accomplished so far?

- May 2015- A 14 member Board was created with membership from across our community.
- August 2015- An initial fundraising effort was started with a GoFundMe page.
- September 2015- A strong and active Facebook public page was created for the project; Over 20 volunteers participated in a clean-up day to make the existing theatre grounds more attractive.
- December 2015- A comprehensive community survey about the theatre and its future was made available to area residents and resulted in a very strong response rate from the community.
- December 2015- Preliminary drawings were completed for ideas of how the new theatre and community arts center might look.
- January 2015- A comprehensive public website was created at MilbridgeTheatre.org to share information about the theater and other group projects.
- March 2016- Brochures and posters about the project were printed and distributed.
- April/May 2016- The initial funding effort through GoFundMe.com evolved into a larger fund raising effort through our dedicated website at MilbridgeTheatre.org
- May 2016- Members from Gateway Milbridge attended the Milbridge Selectmen's meeting to provide a detailed overview of the theatre project and planning.
- May 2016- Gateway Milbridge was awarded a \$10,000 grant by the Maine Community Foundation to fund the completion of a long term business plan for the theatre project to prepare us for sustainable and successful design and programming of the theatre that fits the needs and capacity of our region.
- June 2016- Gateway Milbridge purchased and installed 20 permanent flower planters along Main Street in Milbridge. The planters are updated seasonally and are extremely popular.
- July 2016- We had our first participation in Milbridge Days with a successful fundraising event in front of the theatre where we distributed information, answered questions, and sold tee-shirts.
- August 2016- We hosted another very large and successful fundraiser that included an auction of local artwork and a show with Maine humorist, Tim Sample, netting over \$12,000 toward the project.
- September 2016- Purchase plans of the theatre building and land are announced.
- October 2016- We began the removal of sentimental and historic items from the theatre to store for preservation and reuse in the new theatre and community arts center.
- November 2016- Year-end fundraising campaign was initiated and a matching grant of \$5,000 was offered (and achieved) by an anonymous donor through the Maine Community Foundation.
- December 2016- Gateway Milbridge and the Milbridge Theatre board members held the first annual Christmas on Main Street Celebration and Community Christmas tree lighting to build community spirit.
- February 2017- Plans were introduced and approved to remove the structurally unsound portions of the

existing building while preserving/restoring/reopening the "Marquee Shoppe" section of the building.

- March 2017- Our Facebook page surpassed 1,000 followers and Gateway Milbridge took a leading role in the planning of Milbridge Days 2017 including making arrangements to bring in one of New England's best exotic animal petting zoos via private donations earmarked for this purpose.
- April 2017- Volunteers completed the tasks of removing, preserving, and storing sentimental and historic items from the theatre for use in the new building.
- April 2017- Plans were announced and approved for the new outdoor stage and green space on the back section of the land.
- May 2017- Payment was completed for the theatre building and land.
- June 2017- Work was begun to renovate the Marquee Shoppe section of the theatre.
- June 2017- Removal was initiated and completed for the deteriorated and structurally unsound sections of the theatre building. The lot was cleared except for the Marquee Shoppe section of the building.
- July 2017- Work was begun and completed for the new outdoor stage to provide us with an interim location to begin immediately hosting live entertainment at the theatre lot.
- July 2017- Milbridge Days brought the opening of the theatre's new outdoor stage and record setting attendance for the town celebration. The exotic animal petting zoo was a phenomenal success and live music performances took place on the outdoor stage.
- August 2017- The Marquee Shoppe is reopened as a mini-museum of theatre history and memorabilia. An open house is hosted on August 22. An expansion of the Marquee Shoppe was initiated to include two public restrooms and additional facilities for live music and movie performances.
- August 2017- Gateway Milbridge began, "Live Music Friday Nights", a successful four part series of live music performances hosted on the new outdoor stage.
- September 2017- Through a single, targeted donation, professional outdoor/indoor movie equipment was purchased including a projection system, sound system, and a 12 foot screen allowing us to begin hosting outdoor films for the community.
- November 2017- The formal capital campaign effort was ramped up to provide the funding for the construction of the new theatre and community arts center.
- February 2018- A Maine Arts grant enabled a full series of summer performances to be planned on the new outdoor stage every Friday night from June through September 2018.
- January to May 2018- Thanks to match challenge grants from Machias Savings Bank and Wyman's of Maine, fundraising topped \$200,000.
- June 2018- The Friday Night Live Event Series kicked off with great success as over 320 attend a family friendly performance of "Everybody Loves Pirates" by the Frogtown Puppeteers.

- July 2018- Gateway Milbridge hosted another successful and sold-out Live Game Show Night fundraiser with 340 in attendance and \$14,000 in donated prizes given away to “contestants” through the night.
- July 2018- Gateway Milbridge again took a lead role in helping to organize a record-setting Milbridge Days Celebration. Targeted donations from private donors through Gateway helped bring live music to the celebration, toy for the kids on the parade route, a large petting zoo, bagpipe group, and fireworks as part of the weekend’s festivities.
- September 2018- The outdoor stage concludes its second season of operation with tremendous success
- December 2018- Gateway Milbridge took a leading role in helping to plan and host another successful Christmas on Main Street event for Milbridge
- January 2019- Planning and event announcements begin for the 2019 Friday Night Live performances at the outdoor stage
- February 2019- The theatre’s new building fund surpasses \$200,000