



By Amy Sylvestri

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Bal Theatre owner Dan Dillman and the city have come to an agreement about live entrainment at his theater — at least for now.

In 2009, Dillman bought the theater at 14808 East 14th Street, which had sat unused and empty for years and made it into a computer-repair store by day and theater by night. In addition to documentaries and independent films, the Bal hosts singers, comedians, and other live events.

For more than three years, Dillman has been fighting with City Hall about his conditional use permit. He argued that he is “grandfathered in” to hold as many live events as he wants.

“Small vintage theaters can turn cities around and spur business,” said Dillman. “People can come to town for an event and spend money. This whole thing has been hard on me.”

In 2011, the Board of Zoning Adjustments granted him permission for only one live event per week. It was rare that Dillman would have more than one event scheduled per week, but he said he fought it on principle.

Dillman said that he hasn’t spent that much money on the zoning fight, but feels he has lost millions in potential events, as promoters don’t want to work with him in fear of being shut down by the city. He pointed to a comedy fundraiser for the Davis Street Family Resource Center that the Bal hosted last fall — they raised \$60,000 in one night and he says he thinks about all the other events he could have hosted over the years.

As it stands, Dillman has signed a new conditional use permit which allows live events four days a month (up to three shows on any of those four days) and movies to be screened any day of the week.

But Dillman isn't completely happy with the new permit. In fact he signed it "Under Protest with Reservation of Rights, Dan Dillman."

Later this year, Dillman is going to try to get another permit that would allow five live events per week. He says he signed the current one so he could hold a comedy show on New Year's Eve, but he's not done fighting City Hall.

Under the current permit, Dillman can hold live events after 5 p.m. on weekdays and 10 a.m. weekends. No dancing, no cabaret, no adult films, and no adult live entertainment will be allowed under the permit, though Dillman had no plans for those things.

Tom Liao, the city's planning manager, said that despite Dillman's signing of the permit "under

protest,” no one forced him to sign it and that the city and Dillman have a friendly relationship.

“It was his decision to sign and signing gave him an opportunity to have his New Year’s event,” said Liao. “We made it clear when he signed it that no one was forcing him and he could have walked away. But I want to say that overall we have a good relationship, it wasn’t acrimonious at all when he came in to sign it.”

Liao said that Dillman is a conscientious business owner and he looks forward to working with him on a future permit. Liao expects the matter to go back before the BZA in the early part of this year.

Mayor Stephen Cassidy released a written statement when Dillman signed the permit.

“The Bal Theatre is an asset for our community and we want it to be successful,” wrote Cassidy. “We are pleased the Dillmans signed the use permit. The conditions in the permit take into account legitimate concerns of neighboring homeowners on the frequency and types of programs and functions at the theater and seek to ensure the safety of patrons.”

Dillman said that his permit problems are unfortunate, but that he still loves his business and his city.

“I just want to move forward and share entertainment with the people of San Leandro, said Dillman.

CAPTION: Dan and Gina Dillman bought the empty Bal Theatre and turned it into an entertainment center.

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