

The Salt Lake Tribune

Arts district

SLC Mayor enlists Broadway-savvy brother to guide theater effort

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Surrounded by cameras in the otherwise dark bowels of the Utah Theater, Ralph Becker trumpeted the still-ornate venue as the "cornerstone" of a downtown arts district and the possible home of a Broadway-class playhouse.

The Salt Lake City mayor announced Thursday that the city has an option agreement to buy Main Street's shuttered Utah Theater, which appears to top a list of five downtown spots (the others were not revealed) for what Becker calls a "grand theater."

The move comes as Sandy makes its play for a similar 2,500-seat, \$50 million theater in that suburb, though industry insiders - and Sandy Mayor Tom Dolan - insist the Salt Lake Valley could support only one large venue.

"That's their prerogative," Becker said. "We'll move forward aggressively."

The capital's new mayor hopes to

have the upper hand. He pointed to a still-growing Downtown Theater Action Group - comprising arts and business leaders - that will handicap locations and build a budget. He also tapped his brother, Bill Becker - a Tony-award-winning producer and expert in theater development - to be the city's point person in creating an arts district designed to breathe more life into downtown.

Bill Becker, who has volunteered his services, spent 30 years as legal counsel at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Since 2001, his company TheatreDreams has co-produced four Broadway productions; acquired, restored and operated The Chicago Theatre; and managed the Kodak Theatre in Los Angeles.

"I have been effectively commissioned to make it happen and make it happen fast," said Bill Becker, who praised Salt Lake City for its "extraordinary advantages" as a cultural hub.

Dating back a dozen years, a series of studies reaches contradictory conclusions about the Utah Theater's potential as a megaplayhouse. And there is the daunting dilemma of funding. No one knows how much a major remodel would cost.

Becker says a Broadway theater ranks among his top priorities, though insiders agree the project will require a substantial public subsidy.

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* **Appointed by his brother, Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker** , Bill Becker will serve as the pro bono ambassador for a team of community leaders dedicated to building a Broadway-class theater downtown.

* **Bill Becker, a graduate of Harvard Law School** , spent 30 years as general counsel for the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., where he helped plan a \$400 million expansion.

* **A Tony-award winning producer** , Becker organized TheatreDreams and currently serves as chairman. Since 2001, the company has co-produced four Broadway productions. It also acquired, restored and operated The Chicago Theatre and managed the Kodak Theatre in Los Angeles.

* **Admitted to the bars of multiple Eastern states** , including the U.S. Supreme Court, Becker has negotiated thousands of arts-related contracts ranging from Les Miserables and the Bolshoi Ballet to CNN debates and Seinfeld.

* **Becker lives near Park City** with his wife Joan Alper. He can be found hiking, fly-fishing and backcountry skiing.