

**For Immediate Release
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WITH PHOTO OF CST INTERIOR

Caption: Court Square Theater, carved out of the former Rockingham Motor Company in 1998, and operated by Arts Council of the Valley since 2001, will close on Dec 31, 2025.

**Arts Council of the Valley Board Votes
to Close Court Square Theater Dec 31**

HARRISONBURG, VA – The Arts Council of the Valley (ACV) Board of Directors voted Dec 17 to cease operations of its Court Square Theater, effective Dec 31, 2025.

The loss of significant local government funding since the pandemic, coupled with decreasing audience turnout led to the Board's decision.

"Court Square Theater has played a significant role in the vibrancy of downtown Harrisonburg for more than 25 years," noted ACV Board President Austin Sachs. "We recognize this closure may be difficult for the many patrons who have attended films, concerts, and live theater productions in that historic space."

Created in 1998 inside the building that once housed Rockingham Motor Company, the theater was an important part of the City's downtown revitalization effort. It was originally managed by the City and Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority (HRHA), before ACV was created in 2000 to support all the arts. ACV agreed to take on operation of the theater, backed by strong City and Rockingham County support along with a public hungry for live arts experiences in a downtown that included few other options.

"That investment in the arts has really paid off," said ACV Executive Director Jenny Burden.

"One of the joys for people who have lived in the area a while has been to see performing arts venues, community theater groups, galleries, restaurants, hotels, and shops come to life.

"Over those years, though," she added, "the way the public experiences the performing arts has changed. This is a different world compared to 1998."

Funding from local governments has also changed, Sachs noted. "We appreciate the many current demands on financial resources from the City and County; we are grateful for the support they are still able to provide," he added.

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However, Sachs explained that “in the years since the pandemic, ACV (including allocations for CST) has experienced substantially diminished funding from local governments. Since the 2020 fiscal year, we have lost a combined total of \$371,450 from what had previously been level funding from the City and County.

“And, as is true of other small theaters, we’ve seen increasingly empty seats across all forms of programming,” Sachs said. While the theater’s 260-seat size makes CST an intimate venue, it also works against the financials, he explained. “It’s almost impossible to charge enough per ticket for the seats we are likely to sell to cover performer and production costs – not to mention overhead – for most types of performances.”

Sachs noted that audiences for film and live events are shrinking. “This is true nationwide, and we’ve seen the same trend at CST. Since FY23, the first ‘normal’ year after COVID-19, when 18,836 people attended its films and live events, CST audiences have shrunk by an average of 1,415 per year.” For example, while total FY25 attendance was 16,436; CST’s estimated attendance for the current fiscal year is 14,590.

It’s no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted theaters worldwide, Burden said. Thanks to a 2021 \$110,932.20 Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG) through the U.S. Small Business Administration, she added, ACV was able to reopen CST in fall 2021 after an 18-month pandemic pause.

“Once the SVOG funds were spent – and in spite of its many successful programs – CST’s revenue stream has just not been sufficient over time to cover its operating costs,” Sachs explained. “To make ends meet, ACV has turned to its reserve funds, which is an unsustainable business model.

“We finally reached the point where continuing to operate the theater would possibly endanger the core mission of ACV – to cultivate the arts, create experiences, and connect communities,” he added, “and that is what brought us to this extremely difficult decision.”

Closing the theater will stop the most expensive outlays of the nonprofit’s funds, Burden said; however, cost-cutting strategies are being implemented throughout ACV, most of them internal.

Burden said that, while austere, these actions are designed to help ACV quickly regain its financial equilibrium once the many expenses of operating a theater are removed from the budget. She noted that ACV’s other programming areas: Advancing the Arts Grants, First Fridays of the Valley, Public Art, and Smith House Galleries are expected to continue without interruption.

Arts Council of the Valley is located at 311 South Main Street in Downtown Harrisonburg, Virginia. Programs are supported in part by ACV 25th Anniversary Presenting Sponsor Kathy Moran Wealth Group, and 25th Anniversary Visionary Sponsor Riner Rentals.

A 501(c)3 nonprofit, ACV is dedicated to cultivating the arts, creating experiences, and connecting communities throughout the City of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. Since it was established in 2000, ACV has grown into a multi-faceted community organization that fosters innovative partnerships among area businesses, civic organizations, schools, and artists. Today, ACV manages Smith House Galleries, funds local art projects through its Advancing the Arts grant program (awarding more than \$524,800 since 2001), supports public art initiatives, and coordinates monthly First Fridays of the Valley community gatherings.

ACV is supported in part by the City of Harrisonburg, the Harrisonburg Redevelopment & Housing Authority, and the Virginia Commission for the Arts, which receives support from the Virginia General Assembly. To learn more, visit valleyarts.org.

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