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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **For Immediate Release**

#### **County Enters Agreement to Purchase Historic Movie Theater**

*Aztec, NM*—A film studio in San Juan County is now one step closer with the purchase of one property and the announcement of a partnership securing more space to make movies.

Wednesday, San Juan County Commissioners voted to approve the purchase of the Totah Theater in downtown Farmington to be part of Totah Studios, which will include extensive backlot properties to host film and television productions.

San Juan County will be paying for the Totah Theater and any backlot construction with a total of \$1 million in grant funding from the State of New Mexico. San Juan County received \$1 million in capital outlay funding from the 2019 Legislature for the construction of a film studio and has been allocated \$500,000 from the 2020 session for the same purpose. The additional dollars have been approved by the Governor. San Juan County wishes to thank the local delegation and Governor Michele Lujan Grisham for their continued support.

The Totah Theater was built in 1949 as a 500-seat movie theatre on Farmington's Main street in Downtown and still boasts a widely recognizable neon marquee and much of its original architecture and charm inside. The Totah Theatre will undergo renovation to make it compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, upgrade some systems and increase fire safety of the building.

The upgrades to the facility will make it the crown jewel of Farmington's downtown and the center of San Juan County's cultural scene, along with providing modern and sought-after space for visiting movie or television productions. The Totah Theater will include office space and amenities available to productions and the main theatre can serve for screenings or premieres. When the facility is not booked for a production, it will be used for training an able film industry workforce, and other cultural events. The Totah Theater will be used by local schools and will be available to San Juan College for the education of aspiring filmmakers.

San Juan County intends to partner with the City of Farmington to run this facility as an extension of the Farmington Civic Center. There are plans for live music, stage shows, and of course, movies in the venue. The County plans to deed the Totah Theater to the City of Farmington to operate and fulfill the intent of the venue.

Additionally, San Juan County is partnering with the City of Farmington to use city land to construct an outdoor movie set that mimics a middle eastern village. The 120-acre plot sits northwest of Farmington and will house a complex of movie-ready buildings and facades with a style that could portray Puebloan architecture, a Spanish-style village or the middle eastern style.

It is through the use of two consultants that the San Juan County Commission has settled on these facilities to be the hub of Totah Studios. The use of the 70-year-old Totah Theatre lends itself to the movie industry, and perhaps in a starring role. The bulk of filming is expected to be at the backlot where the middle eastern style village is a set in high-demand and expected to be for years to come. Currently, the Totah Backlot village is in the final stages of design.

Renovations of the Totah Theater are expected to be complete in late 2020, which would likely coincide with the completion of the Totah Backlot set.