

## FROM HOLLYWOOD TO WORCESTER: Reviving the Theater Experience

### A Business Plan for Worcester's Only Theater

Despite Cinema Worcester's operation as the city's only consistent arthouse venue, it faces the universal problem of declining theater attendance in the wake of at-home streaming. With most of its current screenings only showing to around ten to twelve people, Cinema Worcester's downturn similarly mirrors that of Hollywood's in the wake of the 2023 Writers Guild of America and SAG-AFTRA strikes, where large corporations are instead choosing the easiest and most cost-effective option instead of the most beneficial. Additionally, according to Jeremy Siegel's 2023 GBH article *Meet the person trying to bring movies back to Worcester*, the central Massachusetts location is "the largest city in America with no movie theater." All of these factors put Worcester in a unique position, where viewers need a reason to leave their homes to help save the entire entertainment industry, as well as a local theater. In a time where content is more accessible than ever, I believe that through targeted marketing, local college partnerships, and a programming strategy, Cinema Worcester will be able to raise attendance by over ten guests per show and grow in popularity for years to come.

Firstly, Cinema Worcester's plan should consist of marketing itself as an opportunity to have a theatrical experience that overpowers at-home streaming. As previously established, this theatrical situation parallels that which is currently taking place in Hollywood, where streaming is the focus of major studios in order to consistently turn a profit, the Wall Street Journal reports in the 2025 episode "Hollywood Jobs Are Disappearing" of their podcast *The Journal*. Marketing

for the theater should highlight the theater's atmosphere, the community that is created when watching a movie socially, and events built around its presented movies. Photos of crowds should be posted online, utilizing positive peer pressure. For casual moviegoers, this will help to entice participation and fuel recognition. For young cinephiles, screenings should be framed as curated events that fill the gap left by mainstream programming. In the case of older adults, documentaries and similar genres should be positioned as involved learning in a social context. Targeted marketing based on these three segments of Cinema Worcester's audience would not only validate the theater as a staple for the local community but also justify it as a space worth leaving home for.

As New England's second-largest city, Worcester is filled with college and university students ready to discover a community in which they belong. Cinema Worcester should position itself as the solution to this problem, partnering with all local institutions to bring the theater to its students. If the theater were to use other locations such as Clark University's Razzo Hall or WPI's Upper Perreault Hall, financially unstable college students would only have to walk across campus to watch the newest movie releases. Cinema Worcester can also market through the institutions' film clubs, theater programs, screen studies organizations, and media majors, as well as international clubs and language programs when showing foreign films. This model also creates a built-in intern pipeline to employ students for college credits to help market and run the operations of showings. These informed and timely uses of marketing can help to raise awareness and engagement with the theater by five to ten viewers per week, organically gaining views and engagement. The end product would then be a self-sustaining ecosystem where students discover a family of film lovers like themselves, Cinema Worcester gains free interns, and local campuses benefit from the recurring programming and student engagement.

Finally, a new programming strategy must be developed that reinforces the theatrical identity of Cinema Worcester and separates it from streaming platforms. As mentioned earlier, the three audience segments of casual moviegoers for general films, cinephile young adults for arthouse cinema, and adults for nonfiction should all be equally and individually catered to. A weekly series model could cater to all three, addressing each group's needs and wants. For example, horror and action nights could draw casual viewers to both campus events and at WCUW. Also, film festival entries and foreign films could be showcased at colleges for the moviegoers who want to avoid the mainstream. Lastly, documentary and historical showings could be shown at the WCUW Radio Station, acting as personal enrichment for Cinema Worcester's dedicated audience. Rotating between the locations of the multiple satellite college campuses of Worcester and WCUW would allow each audience segment to feel curated and cared for, filling the theatrical void that Hollywood studios have begun to ignore post-pandemic. Furthermore, special monthly events could push attendance even more, and loyalty discounts could reward repeat viewing for all audience members. This kind of change in programming could transform Cinema Worcester beyond a theater into a local cultural icon.

As initially stated, Cinema Worcester cannot compete with the convenience of streaming, but it can compete with the experiential value of watching movies collectively. The theater must rebrand itself as the pinnacle of cinematic engagement in Worcester, laying claim to a marketplace that is citywide barren. With Cinema Worcester's current setup at the WCUW Radio Station of a projector, screen, and sound system, the means of presenting a movie is transportable. This small-scale setup should not be pitied but capitalized upon. Bringing the theater to viewers is a strong way to cut down on the convenience of streaming while also offering the theater experience in larger venues than WCUW. With local, young, and professional

interns at these colleges and universities running the showings and social media marketing, attempts to go viral should be a priority. Documenting the work that Cinema Worcester is doing to keep the moviegoing experience alive in a communal sense will propel word of the theater forward in the public eye. All of these elements should come together to not just help Cinema Worcester survive, but thrive, relying on the cinematic ideals of theatrical experience, social community, and curated discovery.