

Plans under way to close Tobago MovieTowne

■ Elizabeth Williams

PLANS are in place to close Tobago's only cinema by January 1, 2026.

MovieTowne founder Derek Chin said he intends to hold discussions with the landlords to determine the way forward for the multiplex, located at Gulf City Mall in Lowlands.

The cinema, which opened on November 1, 2008, features four screens with a total of 800 seats.

'We haven't made a full decision yet. We are still in the process of determining how best to approach it, whether there are possible options, like other people who might want to take it over, or whether in fact something could be worked out with the landlord.

It has always been a challenge. It has never been a very profitable location for whatever reason, and we did try. So the process is that it does not make sense, really, to say go back into it, because the cost of upgrades is very expensive and the return would not be there.'

Chin said the Lowlands cineplex, the second MovieTowne location to open, had never been a profitable investment.

'We have always been struggling. I don't know what the problem is in terms of Tobagonians and the cinema, but we never really had a bumper time, say, one month or year, to say that it really paid its way,' Chin said.

'We kept going, thinking that would change, but actually it has gotten worse,' he said.

Chin said the best the Tobago cinema had done was break even during some months of its operation.

He said that at this time there are about ten permanent employees at the location.

'A lot of the equipment is faltering-the air-conditioning; the place has some leaking issues; seats have been damaged-so it would mean that you would have to reinvest in the plant, and that is where the numbers and the decision were made. It just doesn't make economic sense to make that investment, given the history,' he said.

Chin said the entertainment industry continues to reel from the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic.

'To be honest, not only in Tobago...we haven't been able to recover even in Trinidad and around the Caribbean. So it has been an effect that I think we will never be really able to recover from,' Chin said.

Chin said they have seen cinema attendance drop by about 30% as people have changed how they entertain themselves, and this has directly impacted revenue.

MovieTowne closed its Chaguanas branch in November 2020.

Chin said Tobagonians will be informed of the decision once it is made.