

**Community Planning & Economic Development
Planning Division**

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City of Minneapolis
*Department of Community Planning
& Economic Development - CPED*

MEMORANDUM

TO: Heritage Preservation Commission
FROM: Brian Schaffer, Senior City Planner 612.673.2670
DATE: October 14, 2008
RE: Hollywood Theater Interim Use Concept – Informational Item

Historical Background

The Hollywood Theater opened at 2815 Johnson Avenue Northeast in 1935. Designed by architects Liebenberg and Kaplan, the movie theater is a noteworthy example of the Streamline Moderne style. The Hollywood Theater is a large house, by neighborhood movie standards, and its approximate budget of \$44,000 allowed for generous handling of decorative elements by its architects. Liebenberg and Kaplan's solutions to the acoustical problems in building a theater for sound established their reputation as movie theater experts. The generous budget and the architects expert industry and design experience are recognized in a Minneapolis Tribune article from October 20, 1935 describing the theater. "Instead of the usual center aisles, entrance is gained over carpeted ramps on both sides of the building. This arrangement prevents interference with the vision of those persons already seated." "The front-lobby scheme is carried out with metallic effects, indirect lighting being featured. Three tones of silver constitute the general color scheme, while the doors have blue trim... and the projection room has mechanisms which are virtually silent. Walls of the auditorium are treated so to eliminate echoes and reverberations."

The Hollywood operated as a movie theater from its opening in 1935 until it closed in 1987. The property has stood vacant since 1987. The same year it closed a designation study was commenced to protect the structure from demolition. A consultant's report issued in September 1989 on "The Development of the Neighborhood Movie Theaters in Minneapolis: 1910-1945" recommends that the Hollywood Theater, including its interior, be designated as a local historic landmark. And states that this would make it impossible for the developer to subdivide the interior into apartments.

In 1990 the Hollywood Theater was designated as a local landmark. The nomination cites the significance of the theater's architecture, the master architects who designed it, and its social history. Both the exterior and interior are designated, except for the marquee (which was replaced in 1948) and some of the non-public interior spaces. In 1991 the HPC adopted a document entitled "Neighborhood Movie Theater Thematic District Guidelines for Rehabilitation." The majority of the document is a copy of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. The final section provides guidelines specifically tailored to the Hollywood Theater.

Project Background

In 1993, the Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA), now CPED, purchased the Hollywood Theater and 2800 Johnson Street – a former gas station site across the street from the theater. During the 15 years of City ownership three separate Requests for Proposals processes and continuous informal marketing were carried

out. Past project proposals were all based on the entertainment reuse of the theater and failed because they were not economically viable.

Over the past year CPED has worked with a small neighborhood task force to develop a new strategy to achieve the goal of a stable long term use of the Hollywood. The pursuit of entertainment uses had not yielded results and it is not likely that conditions contributing to this lack of success will improve in the near future. The direction changed to consideration of more practical options for the theater building with more possibility for success. The plan underscores the importance of near term stabilization of the theater to the health and vitality of the 29th and Johnson commercial node.

The new strategy to achieve the goal of a stable long term use of the theater is divided into two phases. Phase I is to pursue general non-theater commercial uses such as a photography or art studio or architects offices for the building as an interim use. Phase II will be the renovation of the theater when it is economically viable. The focus of this informational item is Phase I, the interim use of the Hollywood. This interim use concept includes subdividing the Theater into tenant spaces, which could be easily removed and reversed if a viable entertainment re-use of the Theater is realized. The HPC will not be approving any work at this time. The intent of this informational item is to provide guidance and advice to CPED on overall interim use concept plan with intention that this guidance will be used a part of the formal marketing plan of the building. Individual elements of the interim use plan include:

- Leveling of the auditorium floor and removing the auditorium seats
- Subdividing the auditorium space into three tenant spaces
- Leveling of the outer lobby floor and accompanying changes to the lobby doors
- Retention and restoration of architectural features.

Project Timeline

Informational Item with the HPC on the Interim Use Concept – October 2008

Purpose of item is to have a thoughtful discussion on Interim Use Concept Plan. And to provide guidance and advice to CPED on elements of the plan with intention that this guidance will be used a part of the formal marketing plan of the building.

City Council Review of the Hollywood Redevelopment Plan. – October / November 2008

Consideration of 2819 Johnson Street acquisition funding, review Interim Use Concept Plan and Marketing Strategy.

Install Stabilization and Staging Improvements – Late 2008 / Early 2009

Likely stabilization improvements include the replacement of exit doors and the repair of the façade, marquee and canopy. Staging improvement may include the removal of auditorium seats and window openings in the north wall. All of the work will have the necessary preservation review. The removal of the auditorium seats and window openings will require a Certificate of Appropriateness and review and approval by the HPC.

Implement Marketing Plan – Early 2009

Seek proposals and potential tenants for the Hollywood Theater

HPC Review of Improvements for Interim Use – 2009 / 2010

Once a viable developer or viable tenants are found for the Theater their proposed improvements will require a Certificate of Appropriateness and review and approval by the HPC. The proposed improvements should follow the guidance offered by the HPC during the October 2008 informational item.

Proposed Changes

The interim use concept that is proposed is to retrofit the auditorium for one large tenant space (approximately 5,000 sq. feet) in main part of auditorium and two small studio tenant spaces (approx. 1,500 to 2,000 sq. feet) in the balcony area. It also proposes to convert the outer lobby to retail tenant space, install bathrooms on the first floor, and add new access and windows on the north façade to support new use. The plan will also combine the Theater with the adjacent property at 2819 Johnson Street NE, which CPED proposes to purchase and clear to provide improved service access and some parking for the Hollywood Theater.

Outer Lobby

Liebenberg and Kaplan were renowned for their attention to detail and design which is evident in the finishes throughout the Hollywood Theater. The outer lobby of the Theater had a multicolored terrazzo floor inlaid in grey, yellow, black and pink. In the entrance vestibule of the theater the terrazzo designed in a half circle pattern and in the main portion of the outer lobby the terrazzo had multicolored banding that terminates at the base of a fountain on the south wall of the lobby. The fountain had an engraved mirror and tulip decorations flanking either side. The mirror and fountain are gone, but the framing for the space remains as well as the tulip detail, which was apparently uncovered during lead paint remediation.

To use this space for a retail tenant it is believed the floor needs to be leveled. The concept plan proposes to level the floor in a manner that can be easily reversible and that can protect the original intact floors. The attached plans show a concept for which that floor leveling could be configured in that space. As a result of the leveling the front exit doors of the lobby would become nonfunctional and are proposed to be replaced with glass paneling that resemble the door configuration.

Inner Lobby

Under the proposed concept the inner lobby will not be altered, however treatment to the decorative spiral staircase to the bathrooms will need to be done to limit access and make sure building codes are met. The railing of this staircase is listed as part of the designation. The basement will not be used for bathrooms and will likely be used for storage. The inner lobby will be used to access the tenant spaces in the auditorium and one of the emergency exit doors will likely be used as a primary entrance to the auditorium tenant spaces.

Auditorium

The floor of the auditorium will need to be leveled to allow for the interim use. This will be done in a similar fashion to the outer lobby floor to ensure that the leveling will be easily reversible without damaging the integrity of the structure. This will require the removal of the seats, which are listed as part of the designation of the theater.

The auditorium will be subdivided and the main floor of the auditorium will become one tenant space. The division of space will occur at the start of the rake for the balcony. There will be two tenant spaces created in the balcony and a portion of the seats kept on the south end of the balcony. The partition walls that are proposed to divide the space are designed to be temporary and easily removed.

Four window openings will be cut into the north wall of the theater to provide better light into the space. The proposed window openings will be above and below the original porthole lights on the north wall. The north wall is a not a character defining wall and the removed brick will be stored on site.

The interim use concept plans include windows that stretch nearly the entire height of the south portion of the temporary partition wall between the main auditorium and the balcony spaces. This combined with the remaining balcony seats allows for the original volume of the auditorium space to be experienced.

Applicable Guidelines

In 1991 the HPC adopted the “Neighborhood Movie Theater Thematic District Guidelines for Rehabilitation” that offer guidelines for the interior restoration of the Hollywood Theater. The title of these guidelines state that they are for rehabilitation, but as they are written they appear to be guidelines for restoration. The guidelines reflect the danger of the structure was facing by incompatible uses. See Attachment E for the guidelines in their entirety.

The Hollywood Theater Guidelines state that “the restoration of historically significant areas shall retain original materials, architectural, detailing and spirit of the design.” The Hollywood Theater was renowned for its ornate details many of which have been lost due to updates and the mold, asbestos and lead abatement that have occurred. The original configuration of the auditorium space and the seats exist today, also the metal frames of the porthole light fixtures, and the five fins or columns on either side of the stage are extant.

The guidelines for the Theater go on to state that “historically significant areas shall not be subdivided into smaller rooms.” This would apply to the proposed division of the auditorium space. However, the guidelines also state that “alterations to historically significant rooms to allow adaptive reuse may be permitted subject to HPC approval.” The Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation recommend that in alterations for a new use that “installing permanent partitions in secondary spaces and removable partitions that do not destroy the sense of space should be installed when the new use requires the subdivision of character-defining interior spaces.” The proposed partition walls are temporary and the southern portion of the partition wall is primarily glass to maintain the sense of space.

The Theater guidelines also state that “architecturally significant floors of hard surface materials (i.e. terrazzo, linoleum) which are patterned; contributing to the overall design of the room shall be retained and not covered up with other materials.” This would apply to the proposed leveling of the outer lobby floor, which is covered in multicolored terrazzo. The auditorium floor was originally covered in carpet and is currently exposed concrete.

Considerations

The proposed interim use concept plan raises questions that need to be considered. Eighteen years ago when the Hollywood Theater was designated as a local landmark in Minneapolis it was facing demolition and redevelopment pressures that shaped the designation and the adopted guidelines for rehabilitation. The theater has sat vacant for 21 years and has been the subject of three Requests for Proposals to rehabilitate the theater that all proved to not be economically viable. The theater sat vacant and unheated for six years until CPED purchased the property. During that time the structure suffered considerable moisture problems that compromised some of the interior design features of the structure. CPED has abated the mold, lead paint and asbestos. A new roof, sump pumps and HVAC equipment have been installed to stabilize the building. The proposed interim use concept plan provides a plan to place stable non-theater commercial uses in the structure. It is important to note that the length of time the interim uses are in place is unknown and could likely be a long term situation.

The proposed improvements conflict with some of the adopted guidelines for the Hollywood Theater, but they can also be supported by the same adopted guidelines for the theater and by the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation - if the improvements are executed properly and impacts mitigated. The following are questions that need to be considered and addressed.

- Can the auditorium be subdivided using removable partition walls? If so, is the feeling and volume of space of the original theater important to convey? How can this be done? Do the renderings provided for this concept plan appropriately convey this?

- Is the leveling of the outer lobby floor appropriate since the terrazzo floors are one of the few remaining intact interior design features? If so, what measures should be done to mitigate impacts to the floor and the configuration of the outer lobby (i.e. lobby exit doors, the fountain).
- What is the expectation on retention and restoration of existing or lost architectural and design features for the interim use? Does the fountain and lobby features need to be restored? The porthole light fixtures? The decorative plaster work? The acoustical tile along the walls of the auditorium? Other features?

Attachments

- A. CPED Interim Use Concept Plan statement
- B. Proposed Plans for Interim Use Concept
- C. The Hollywood Theater: Preservation Considerations prepared by Hess, Roise and Company
- D. Neighborhood Movie Theater Thematic District Guidelines for Rehabilitation
- E. Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation- Interior Spaces