

Department of Community Planning and Economic Development - Planning Division
Certificate of Appropriateness
BZH-27345

Date: June 19, 2012

Applicant: MacDonald & Mac Architects

Address of Property: 2900 Hennepin Avenue

Project Name: Uptown Theater storefront repair and alterations

Contact Person and Phone: Amy Meller, 612-341-4051

Planning Staff and Phone: Chris Vrchota, 612-673-5467

Date Application Deemed Complete: May 25, 2012

Publication Date: June 12, 2012

Public Hearing: June 19, 2012

Appeal Period Expiration: June 29, 2012

Ward: 10

Neighborhood Organization: East Isles Residents Association

Concurrent Review: N/A

Attachments:

- Materials Submitted by CPED – A1- A-13
- Materials Submitted by Applicant – B1-B-40
- Materials Submitted by Others- C-1

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CLASSIFICATION:	
Individual Landmark	Uptown Theater
Period of Significance	1910-1945
Criteria of significance	Architecture, Social History
Date of local designation	1990
Date of National Register of Historic Places Listing	N/A
Applicable Design Guidelines	Neighborhood Movie Theater Thematic District Guidelines for Rehabilitation, Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation

PROPERTY INFORMATION	
Current name	Uptown Theater
Historic Name	Uptown theater
Current Address	2900 Hennepin Avenue
Historic Address	2900 Hennepin Avenue
Original Construction Date	1916, substantial remodeling in 1939
Original Contractor	Fleischer Rose Construction Co.
Original Architect	Liebenberg & Kaplan (Architect for 1939 remodeling that gave the theater its current appearance)
Historic Use	Movie Theater, Retail
Current Use	Movie Theater, Retail
Proposed Use	Movie Theater, Retail

BACKGROUND:

The Uptown Theater, located at the intersection of Hennepin Avenue and Lagoon Avenue, was originally constructed in 1916. The theater was given a substantial facelift in 1939, when the prominent architectural firm of Liebenberg & Kaplan designed the Streamline Moderne façade that is seen today. The character defining tower sign and marquee were also installed during this renovation.

The Uptown Theater is one of five movie theaters designated in 1990 as examples of the architecture and social history related to the development of movie houses in Minneapolis in the early 20th century. (The others are the Loring Theater, Granada Theater, Hollywood Theater and Avalon Theater.)

SUMMARY OF APPLICANT'S PROPOSAL:

The Applicant is proposing to make alterations to the exterior of the building, including replacing non-original entry doors along Hennepin and Lagoon Avenues, replacing the storefront glazing systems in the retail tenant spaces, removing an egress door on the south side of the east façade that is no longer needed for egress, and replacing metal transom panels above the storefronts with red-tinted glazing.

Two Certificates of No Change have been issued for the property over the past 7 months. One was issued in December for substantial interior renovations to accommodate the expansion of the retail spaces and installation of a new concession stand (the interior is not designated). A second was issued in March for exterior masonry repair and cleaning.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

The owner of a neighboring property submitted a letter of support for the project (see Appendix C-1).

Findings as required by the Minneapolis Preservation Code:

The Planning Division of the Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department has analyzed the application based on the findings required by the Minneapolis Preservation Ordinance. Before approving a certificate of appropriateness, and based upon the evidence presented in each application submitted, the commission shall make findings based upon, but not limited to, the following:

- (1) *The alteration is compatible with and continues to support the criteria of significance and period of significance for which the landmark or historic district was designated.***

As long as the subject site remains in use as a movie theater it will retain its historical significance related to social history. Changes to the design of the theater would impact the significance related to architecture. The majority of the changes proposed by the Applicant would meet this finding. However, the proposal to replace the metal transom system with glazing would detract from the integrity of the architecture of the building, thus impacting this criteria of significance.

- (2) *The alteration is compatible with and supports the interior and/or exterior designation in which the property was designated.***

The Uptown Theater is significant for its representation of Streamline Moderne architecture, especially as it relates to the design of movie theaters, and as an example of a movie theater built during the “golden age” of movies. The current façade was designed by Liebenberg & Kaplan, who are well known for their work on movie theaters during this era. Changes intended to improve the viability of the theater are compatible with the designation of the property.

- (3) *The alteration is compatible with and will ensure continued integrity of the landmark or historic district for which the district was designated.***

Both the City of Minneapolis’ Heritage Preservation Regulations and the National Register of Historic Places identify integrity as the authenticity of historic properties and recognize seven aspects that define a property’s integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Based upon the evidence provided below, the proposed work would impact but not fully impair the integrity of the landmark.

Location: The Applicant is not proposing to change the location of the structure, thus the project will not impair the landmark’s integrity of location.

Design: The Applicant is proposing an in-kind replacement of the existing entries along Hennepin Avenue. The current entries differ from the original 1939 plans. The proposed replacement of the entry doors would not have a substantial impact on the integrity of design.

The proposal to replace the storefront glazing systems would have a positive impact on the integrity of design. The Applicant is proposing to match the fenestration pattern shown in the plans Liebenberg & Kaplan created for the 1939 remodeling of the theater. (See Appendix B-32- B-33 & B-37-B-39.) Restoring the original fenestration pattern will improve the integrity of design for the building.

The proposal to remove the egress at the south end of the Hennepin Avenue façade would have an impact on the integrity of design. As shown on Appendix B-32, this doorway was part of the original 1939 design. This door provided egress from the theater auditorium. Because of the expansion of the retail tenant space at the south end of the building, this door is no longer connected to the auditorium and is not needed for egress. The Applicant has proposed two design options for the removal of this door- to either extend the storefront glazing system, matching the rest of the storefront, or set the new glazing back 1 foot to maintain the fenestration pattern. Staff believes that the second option would lessen the impact on the integrity of design.

The proposal to replace the metal transom system with red-tinted glazing would also have an impact on the integrity of design. As shown in the 1939 plans, these panels were part of the original façade design. While the material has been replaced over time, the configuration still exists and original plans are available to guide restoration efforts. Metal banding is a widely used treatment in the Streamline Moderne style; color-tinted glazing is not.

Setting: The Applicant is not proposing any modifications that would have an impact on the integrity of setting.

Materials: None of the proposed alterations would result in the loss of any historic building materials- all storefront and glazing systems have been replaced over time. Replacement materials being proposed for use include metal and glass door and window systems, which are compatible with the period of significance and architecture of the building.

Workmanship: The proposed alterations would not require the removal or alteration of any distinct decorative or character defining elements on the building. However, replacing the metal transom panels with glass would remove an original design element, even if the material itself is not original. The proposed alterations would have an impact on the integrity of workmanship.

Feeling: The proposed replacement of the metal transom systems with glass could impact the integrity of feeling. It would change the appearance of the primary façade of the building. The proposal to use tinted glazing instead of metal would impact the integrity of feeling.

Association: The proposed alterations would not have a substantial impact on the integrity of association.

- (4) *The alteration will not materially impair the significance and integrity of the landmark, historic district or nominated property under interim protection as evidenced by the consistency of alterations with the applicable design guidelines adopted by the commission.***

The Heritage Preservation Commission adopted the *Neighborhood Movie Theater Thematic District Guidelines for Rehabilitation* in July of 1991. The guidelines apply to all 5 movie theaters that were designated together. (Note: These guidelines are not included in the Preservation Resource Binders. See Appendix A-2 – A-13 for a full copy of the guidelines.)

The guidelines for window replacement are primarily written to address replacement of historic windows. The existing windows are all replacement windows. The Applicant is proposing to return to the fenestration pattern used in the 1939 remodeling of the building. While not specifically addressed in the guidelines, this treatment is sensitive and appropriate for the building.

Section 4.c states: “Replacement windows will have a paint finish unless historical documentation suggests otherwise. (Anodized finish will not be permitted.) A condition has been added that an anodized finish will not be permitted for the window systems.

Section 4.e states: “Replacement glazing shall have clear glass unless historical documentation suggests otherwise.” The Applicant is proposing to use clear glass for the store front glazing system, which is in keeping with the guideline. The Applicant is proposing to use red-tinted glazing to replace the metal transom panels above the windows. While this is not replacing existing glazing, staff does believe that this proposal is not in keeping with this guideline.

Section 5 of the guidelines deals with entries and entrance doors. Section 5.d states: “If entries are to be abandoned they shall retain their character as an entry.” The Applicant is proposing to remove the doors at the south end of the façade, where they are no longer needed for egress from the theater auditorium. Staff believes that the design option that would continue the storefront glazing system while setting it back 1 foot would help to recall the location of this doorway. This would be in keeping with this guideline.

- (5) *The alteration will not materially impair the significance and integrity of the landmark, historic district or nominated property under interim protection as evidenced by the consistency of alterations with the recommendations contained in The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.***

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation below are most applicable to the proposed project.

Standard #1 states: A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.

The Uptown Theater is undergoing substantial internal renovations aimed at expanding the footprint of the two retail storefronts to help support the ongoing use of the site for a movie theater. These storefronts were part of the 1939 plans for the building. Removal of the now unnecessary egress door on the south side of the façade would be in keeping with this finding. However, the Applicant has not made a strong case for why the replacement of the metal transom panels above the storefronts with glass panels is needed for the ongoing use of these storefront spaces.

Standard #2 states: The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.

The metal transom panels are not on their own a primary character defining feature of the building. However, the use of vertical metal paneling as a design element is characteristic of the Streamline Moderne style of architecture. Color tinted glass is likely not a design feature that would be found in a building of this style and era. Replacement of the metal transom panels with glass would not be in keeping with this standard.

Standard #5 states: Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.

Again, replacement of the metal panels, a common feature in Streamline Moderne architecture, with glass panels, which are not, would not be in keeping with this standard.

Standard #6 states: Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.

The Applicant has provided photographs showing that the transom panels have deteriorated, been damaged and in some areas fully removed. Per the Applicant, none of these panels are original, but are replacement material. However, based on the existing material and the original plans from the 1939 remodeling, there is sufficient evidence that could be used for historically appropriate replacements to be made, rather than replacing them with glass panels. The Applicant has not provided any evidence as to why replacing the metal transom panels is not feasible.

- (6) *The certificate of appropriateness conforms to all applicable regulations of this preservation ordinance and is consistent with the applicable policies of the comprehensive plan and applicable preservation policies in small area plans adopted by the city council.***

As conditioned, the project would comply with policy 8.1.1 of The Minneapolis Plan, which states: "Protect historic resources from modifications that are not sensitive to their historic significance."

Before approving a certificate of appropriateness, and based upon the evidence presented in each application submitted, the commission shall make findings that alterations are proposed in a manner that demonstrates that the applicant has made adequate consideration of the following documents and regulations:

(7) Adequate consideration of the description and statement of significance in the original nomination upon which designation of the landmark or historic district was based.

The Applicant submitted statements outlining how they feel the proposed work meets the applicable findings (see Appendix B-7 – B-11).

(8) Where applicable, Adequate consideration of Title 20 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances, Zoning Code, Chapter 530, Site Plan Review.

The proposed alterations do not require site plan review.

(9) The typology of treatments delineated in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and the associated guidelines for preserving, rehabilitating, reconstructing, and restoring historic buildings.

The Applicant submitted a statement saying how they believed the proposal was in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for rehabilitation (see Appendix B-9 – B-10). As outlined in Finding #5 above, staff finds that most, but not all aspects of the proposed work are in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission adopt the above findings and **approve** the Certificate of Appropriateness for storefront repairs and alterations for the property located at 2900 Hennepin Avenue, with the following condition(s):

1. The proposed replacement of the metal transom systems with tinted glass is not approved. Existing metal transom system shall be repaired or replaced in-kind.
2. New window systems shall be painted- an anodized finish shall not be permitted.
3. Where the door is removed on the south side of the east façade, the new glazing and granite base shall be set back 1' from the existing façade.
4. CPED-Planning shall review and approve the final site plan, floor plans, elevations, finishes and materials.
5. All workmanship must be completed in conformance with the Secretary of Interior Standards, see: <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standguide/>

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6. The Applicant shall obtain all other necessary City approvals prior to the commencement of work.
7. The Certificate of Appropriateness approvals shall expire if not acted upon within one year of approval, unless extended by the Planning Director in writing prior to the one-year anniversary date of the approvals.

Attachment A: Submitted by CPED staff

Attachment B: Materials submitted by Applicant

Attachment C: Submitted by Others