

**CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS  
CPED PLANNING DIVISION  
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

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FILE NAME: Hollywood Theater, 2815 Johnson Street Northeast

CATEGORY/DISTRICT: Individual Landmark

CLASSIFICATION: Certificate of Appropriateness to allow for staging and stabilization improvements.

APPLICANT: City of Minneapolis, Community Planning and Economic Development Department, Business Development, Miles Mercer (612) 673-5043

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STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Brian Schaffer (612) 673-2670

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**A. PROJECT 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.

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. 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 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 and a half 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 has 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. CPED and the neighborhood task force developed a concept plan for the activation and stabilization of the theater by pursuing non-theater commercial uses. The plan includes a historically sensitive and reversible subdivision of the auditorium to allow for a reactivation of the theater. The plan underscores the importance of near term stabilization of the theater to the health and vitality of the 29<sup>th</sup> and Johnson commercial node.

On September 9, 2008 CPED hosted a tour of the Hollywood Theater for the Heritage Preservation Commission to provide an introduction to the HPC Commissioners regarding the historical and physical context of the theater. The tour was followed up by an informational presentation and discussion with the HPC on October 14, 2008 regarding a flexible rehabilitation concept plan to activate the structure. At this meeting, the HPC provided guidance and endorsed the concept of sensitive and reversible modifications to the interior spaces, including the subdivision of the auditorium space and the maintenance and protection of some key interior character defining features. The HPC also endorsed the acquisition of 2819 Johnson Street NE to aid in the rehabilitation of the theatre. The HPC asked staff to prepare a catalog of the character defining features of the Hollywood.

Staff has presented a Framework for Treatment of Character Defining Features for the Reactivation of the Hollywood Theater. This framework provides supplemental guidance to the more general Neighborhood Movie Theater Thematic District Guidelines for Rehabilitation that were adopted for this and four other theaters in Minneapolis in 1991.

## **B. PROPOSED CHANGES & ANALYSIS**

### **Removal of the Auditorium Seats**

CPED is proposing the removal of the auditorium seats as part of staging improvements to aid in marketing the theater to potential developers and tenants. CPED is proposing to remove the seats on the main floor of the auditorium as necessary for the staging of the structure. The concept reactivation plan that was presented to and generally accepted by the HPC on October 14, 2008 allows for the removal of the seats to facilitate the reversible leveling of the auditorium floor to allow for a non-entertainment commercial reuse of the theater. The proposed framework for the treatment of character defining features provides more guidance on this issue.

CPED is proposing to salvage the decorative end panels of the seats and store those on site for potential reuse in the theater. It is likely that a new entertainment use will also require the reconfiguration and removal of many of the seats, let alone the complete repair and replacement of all the seats that remain. Evidence for the need to reconfigure the seats can be seen in the previous entertainment use proposals that proved to be not economically viable. The proposal from 1994 included a reduction of the seats to 400-450. The proposal from 1999 included all new seats and a new configuration of the seats that included booths and sofas. The most recent entertainment reuse proposal from 2004 included plans to reconfigure the seating and even a proposal to level the floor. The removal of the seats does not preclude an entertainment use of the theater and broadens the potential use of the theater to non-entertainment uses.

### *Existing Conditions*

There are approximately 750 seats in the Hollywood and they are original to the theater. Pictorial evidence suggests that the configuration of the seats has not changed from when the theater opened in 1935 to present day. Some seats in the balcony were removed prior to the designation when there was a wall constructed at the rear of the theater. Some other seats have also been removed- likely when mold, lead, and asbestos remediation occurred in the early part of 2000. The seats were removed, but their metal frames and hardware remain. These can be seen in attachment B-2. This gives us a better understanding of the configuration of the seats and their construction. To further understand the details of the seats CPED worked with Shea Architects to provide a dimensioned plan, section and elevation views of a typically seat (see attachment C).

The seats have survived over 20 years of vacancy. Prior to CPED acquisition, the theater experienced water intrusion and severe mold. Upon CPED acquisition the mold, asbestos and lead in the theater was abated and a new roof installed. The seats have been exposed to all of these events.

### *Designation & Guidelines*

The designation of the theater states the following about the configuration of the auditorium:

“The auditorium is entered on either side, in between the main floor and the terrace seating. The Hollywood was designed in the stadium style, with rows of seats rising sharply in the rear. The main floor was 29 seats across, divided by two aisles covered in the geometric carpeting.”

The seats are not specifically mentioned in the local designation of Hollywood, which includes the interior of the theater. However, in the Neighborhood Movie Theater Thematic District Guidelines for Rehabilitation, which was adopted in 1991, it states that the extent of the interior designation includes the outer lobby, inner lobby, stairway to the lower level, the main auditorium and the balcony. This document includes a note in parentheses which states “Note that the auditorium seating is original and the handrails are significant.”

The Neighborhood Movie Theater Thematic District Guidelines for Rehabilitation that were adopted in 1991 provide the following guidance on seating:

- A. Historically significant auditorium seating shall be retained.
- B. Refurbishment of this seating is acceptable, however new finishes shall match original finishes.

These general guidelines were adopted for five theaters in 1991. They do not take into account the specific conditions at the Hollywood Theater and since they were done in 1991 they do not recognize the recent past of finding a viable reuse of the Hollywood. The Secretary of the Interior Standards allow for the removal historic fabric with the proper mitigation measures. CPED is proposing to use the historical photographs, the drawings of a typical seat and the salvage of the decorative end panels of the theater to mitigate the proposed seat removal.

### **New Projection Booth Windows**

CPED is proposing to install three new projection booth windows to replace the missing projection booth windows on the Johnson Street façade of the Hollywood. The proposed windows are a three-light fixed aluminum window with a painted finish. The original plans for the Hollywood Theater indicate that the windows were to be a three-light window with casements at the outside edge and an affixed unit in the middle. CPED worked with Shea Architects to develop a plan for appropriate replacement windows. According to field investigation by Shea it appears that the original frames were two inches deep. Shea is not proposing replacement casement windows as their profile would be wider and not in keeping with profile of the original windows.

### *Guidelines and Standards*

The general guidelines adopted in 1991 for window replacement are directed to the replacement of existing, original windows. The proposed windows appear to match the profile of the original windows and will have a painted finish similar to the original windows. The proposed windows are designed to be compatible with the Hollywood based on evidence of the profile and light pattern of the original windows. The proposed windows comply with Secretary of the Interior Standards which state the following for designing for missing features “Designing and installing new windows when the historic windows (frames, sash and glazing) are completely missing. The replacement windows may be an accurate restoration using historical, pictorial, and physical documentation; or be a new design that is compatible with the window openings and the historic character of the building.”

### **C. FINDINGS**

1. The Hollywood Theater is a locally designated landmark; the exterior and portions of the interior are part of the designation. The seats are not specifically mentioned in the designation.
2. The seats are the original seats and their condition is poor.
3. The seats have been compromised by 20 years of vacancy. Prior to CPED acquisition, the theater experienced water intrusion and severe mold. Upon CPED acquisition the mold, asbestos and lead in the theater was abated and new roof installed. The seats have been exposed to all of these events.
4. The three previous rehabilitation proposals all included the removal and reconfiguration of the seating.
5. The removal of the seats does not preclude an entertainment use of the theater and broadens the potential use of the theater to non-entertainment uses.
6. The proposed mitigation measures meet the Secretary of the Interior Standards.
7. The proposed projection booth windows comply with the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation and the Neighborhood Movie Theater Thematic District Guidelines for Rehabilitation.
8. These changes are necessary for the successful staging of the property. The occupation of the Hollywood will stabilize the landmark structure and the vitality of the 29<sup>th</sup> and Johnson commercial node.

### **D. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission **adopt** staff findings and **approve** the certificate of appropriateness to allow for the removal of auditorium seats and the installation of new projection booth windows as part of staging and stabilization improvements.

### **E. ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Historic Photographs
- B. Current Photographs
- C. Drawing of Typical Seat
- D. Drawing of Proposed Windows
- E. Framework for Treatment of Character Defining Features for the Reactivation of the Hollywood Theater.