

**Community Planning & Economic Development**  
250 4<sup>th</sup> Street South, Room 300 PSC  
Minneapolis, MN 55415



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

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Heritage Preservation Commission  
FROM: Joe Bernard, Senior Planner, CPED Long Range Planning, (612) 673-2422  
REVIEWED BY: Jack Byers, Manager, CPED Long Range Planning, (612) 673-2634  
DATE: October 22, 2013  
RE: National Register of Historic Places Nomination – Plymouth Building

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**Background**

On September 16, 2013, the Minnesota Deputy State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) sent the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission a letter requesting comments on the nomination of the Plymouth Building, located at 12 6<sup>th</sup> Street South, to the National Register of Historic Places. As a Certified Local government, the Commission is required by federal law to participate in the National Register nomination process as follows:

- Afford the public a reasonable opportunity to comment on the nomination;
- Prepare a report as to whether or not the subject property is eligible for National Register listing; and
- Have a chief local elected official (the Mayor) submit this report and his/her recommendation to the Minnesota State Preservation Officer within sixty days of the notice from SHPO<sup>1</sup>

The Owner has retained Hess, Roise and Company and Preservation Design Works, LLC to nominate the subject property to the National Register of Historic Places as a step in seeking financial aid for a substantial rehabilitation of this property. Attachment A includes a copy of the nomination, prepared by the nominator, for your review and comment.

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<sup>1</sup> More than a simple comment letter, this report provides the City with significant decision making power in the matter. If both the Commission and chief local elected official recommend that the subject property should not be nominated to the a National Register, the SHPO shall take no further action, unless within thirty days of the receipt of such recommendation by the SHPO an appeal is filed with the State. If such an appeal is filed, the State shall follow the procedures for making nomination pursuant to established procedures. Even then, the City's report and recommendations are included with the nomination submitted the State to the Keeper of the National Register.

## Previous Reviews

The Plymouth Building has not previously been reviewed by the Heritage Preservation Commission. The property was not identified as a potential historic resource in any recently completed Section 106 reviews, Historic Resource Surveys, or in the City's database of potentially historic resources.

## Nomination Review

To be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, a property must be significant within a given context and retain its integrity, defined as its ability to communicate that significance. The nomination identifies the Plymouth Building as significant under National Register Criteria C; the property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction. As stated in the nomination, The Plymouth Building...

*"...is locally significant under Criterion C in the area of Engineering as a representation of the development and acceptance of reinforced-concrete skeleton frame construction by the American building industry. The building's period of significance begins at the completion of its construction in 1911 and ends in 1936."*

The nomination cites several elements of the Plymouth Building that contribute to meeting National Register Criterion C:

1. The building exemplifies the mature development of the reinforced-concrete "skeleton" frame construction method.
2. The aforementioned engineering allowed for the use of a decorative masonry curtain wall system and large window openings. The non-load bearing nature of the curtain wall allowed for its replacement no more than 25 years after the building's initial construction date.
3. This refined engineering approach occurred in an era that contributed to the cost-effectiveness of construction.

The period of significance established by the nomination identifies the years from construction (1911) to when decorative elements of the curtain wall were replaced (1936).

The architectural and engineering description in the nomination is thorough, highlighting the key stylistic features that remain intact from the original construction of the structure. The narrative also focuses heavily on the relationships and dynamics in international, national, and local reinforced concrete use.

In terms of meeting the significance criterion C, the nomination details the work of architects and engineers, and in particular their role in bringing innovation to reinforced concrete design and construction methods to Minneapolis. Several reports of considerable interest from the nomination include erroneous attribution of the design in the local paper to C.A.P. Turner and a trade magazine claim that the Plymouth Building was "the world's largest all-reinforced office building." The construction method also allowed for the possibility of future additions on top of the initial structure, at one point a planned addition would have topped out at 25 stories. Staff concurs with the nomination documents in that replacement of the curtain walls in 1936 makes this building an excellent working example of how

the intended engineering benefits can be utilized. Furthermore, as noted in the nomination, the relative scarcity of structures remaining on the east side of Hennepin Avenue from this era make the resource all the more important to preserve.

### **Staff Recommendation**

The Nominator has prepared a nomination that indicates their consideration of the subject property's contributions to the field of architecture and engineering patterns in Minneapolis. Staff recommends the Commission **adopt** this CPED report, **approve** the nomination, and **direct** staff to transmit the report and a letter summarizing the report to the State Historic Preservation Officer.

### **Attachments**

- A. Plymouth Building National Register of Historic Places Nomination prepared by Hess, Roise and Company and Preservation Design Works, LLC.
- B. Photographs