CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS CPED PLANNING DIVISION HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

FILE NAME: Hollywood Theater, 2815 Johnson Street Northeast

CATEGORY/DISTRICT: Individual Landmark

CLASSIFICATION: Framework for Treatment of Character Defining Features for the

Reactivation of the Hollywood Theater

APPLICANT: City of Minneapolis, Community Planning and Economic Development

Department

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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 neighborhood taskforce 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 taskforce has recognized these past failures and has been in pursuit of more practical options for the reuse 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-entertainment 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 29th 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 on the plan and endorsed the concept of sensitive and reversible modifications to the interior spaces, including the removal of theater seats and 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 theater. The HPC asked staff to prepare a catalog of the character defining features of the Hollywood.

B. PROJECT UPDATE

Acquisition of 2819 Johnson Street NE

In October of 2009 the City Council approved funding to allow for the acquisition of the parcel to the north of the theater at 2819 Johnson Street. The parcel is expected to support the reactivation of the Hollywood Theater by providing parking, service access, or space for other related development. The demolition of the home at 2819 Johnson Street will occur in two phases. The first phase was the demolition of the home and occurred on February 23, 2009. The second phase is the removal of trees, walkways, and steps followed by the installation of grass seed to stabilize the site. The second phase will occur later in the spring when the ground has dried.

Stabilization Improvements

In December of 2008 Preservation & Design staff approved certificates of no change to allow for repairs to be made to the roof of the theater and the replacement of the rubber membrane roof of the canopy. In addition to these approvals staff approved the removal of the green tile from the Johnson Street façade with the condition that the tile must be reinstalled. The fastening system that attached the tile to the structure was failing and tiles were occasionally falling from the structure. This posed a threat to the public safety as well a threat to the integrity of the structure. The tiles are stored on site until the feature can be repaired or replaced.

Staging Improvements

CPED is proposing some improvements to aid in the marketing of the theater. These improvements consist of the installation of projection booth windows on the front façade, the removal of the seats on the main floor of the auditorium, and general maintenance and repairs to the marquee, canopy and 'Hollywood' sign. The staging improvements including the installation of the projection booth windows and the removal of the seats require a certificate of appropriateness and will be the subject of a public hearing by the HPC on March 10, 2009. If approved, these improvements will occur during the spring of 2009.

HPC Review of Improvements for Reuse

Once a viable developer or viable tenants are found for the Hollywood their proposed improvements will require a Certificate of Appropriateness and review and approval by the HPC. The proposed improvements should follow the guidance offered in this report.

C. CATALOG OF CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES

On October 14, 2008 the HPC asked for a catalog of the interior character defining features of the Hollywood Theater. The purpose of the catalog is to understand what features remain in the theater and the condition of those features. The catalog also provides guidance for the treatment of thee features. This guidance is divided into the following categories, which are slightly based on the typology of treatments used by the Secretary of the Interior.

- **Reconstruct** Feature is integral to defining the character of the theater and is either missing or in a severely deteriorated condition. The feature needs to be reconstructed to original design.
- **Rehabilitate** Feature is integral to defining character of the theater and is need of general repair and maintenance.
- **Maintain** Feature is important to defining character of the theater, but its rehabilitation or reconstruction is not a priority in reactivating the theater. The feature requires maintenance, but does not to be restored to its original state. However, the feature shall not be enclosed or removed.
- **Removal Allowed with Mitigation** This addresses two scenarios. First, the feature may be important to defining the character of the theater; however, the removal of the feature is integral to the reactivation of the Hollywood. Second, the feature is not integral to the character of the theater and the condition of the feature is poor.

Exterior

Materials



Condition

The front façade is wrapped in Kasota limestone with a granite base. The sides and rear are common brick with brick details in toward the front of the sides of the structure. The stone around the chimney is reinforced with steel banding, which is not original.

Guidance Rehabilitate

The materials shall be rehabilitated and repaired as needed. New or enlarged openings in the front façade shall be prohibited.

Ticket Booth



Condition

The original materials for the ticket booth appear to be missing. It is currently plywood and other structural materials. This is the original configuration of the booth.

Guidance Reconstruct

The ticket booth shall be reconstructed.

Poster Cases



Condition

Frames of poster cases intact; the glass is missing. All but one of the cases is covered by plywood boards.

Guidance Rehabilitate

Poster cases shall be cleaned and refurbished, with new glass installed.

Green Tile



Condition

Many tile missing due to failing fastening system. The tiles facing Johnson Street were removed and stored in structure.

Guidance Rehabilitate/Reconstruct

Green tile may not be original, but it is historically significant and warrants preservation. Green tile system shall be reinstalled with rehabilitated tile or replacement tile.

Canopy, Sign, & Marquee



Condition

The roof of the canopy has been repaired. The canopy is need of cleaning and general repairs and maintenance. Some of the glass in the marquee is missing. The Hollywood Sign is weathered and the 'Y' has fallen back onto the roof.

Guidance Rehabilitate

May not be original, but these are historically significant features and warrant preservation.

Interior - Outer Lobby

Volume of Space



Condition

The entrance vestibule and main lobby both contain significant amount of volume which is created by the height of the ceiling and the scale of the features contained in these spaces.

Guidance Maintain

This volume of space is important to convey in future reuse of the structure. The volume of space should be maintained and drop ceilings shall be avoided.

Terrazzo Floor



Condition

The multicolored terrazzo floor inlaid in grey, yellow, black and pink is covered in dust and dirt.

Guidance Rehabilitate

All efforts shall be made to rehabilitate the floor. It may be covered up if proven necessary and that it won't damage the floor. See Guidelines for specific guidance.

Tulip Detail



Condition

Paint is in various conditions. Pictorial evidence suggests that these are not the original painted tulip stenciling.

Guidance Removal Allowed

The tulip details can be painted or removed.

Alcove Features



Condition

South wall alcove is missing mirror and fountain. Plaster fluting appears to be intact along with the architectural details of the features.

Guidance Maintain

The features do not have to be rehabilitated to original levels including the mirror and fountain details. Features shall be maintained and repaired as necessary.

Circular Ceiling Light in Entrance Vestibule



Condition

The concaved plaster ceiling is missing and deteriorated. Circular indirect light fixture appears to be intact as well as center direct light fixture.

Guidance Rehabilitate

All efforts shall be made to rehabilitated fixture and plaster

Crown Molding in Entrance Vestibule



Condition

The molding is missing in some locations and deteriorated in others.

Guidance Removal allowed with Mitigation

The molding can remain its current state or be removed. If it is removed profile and pattern drawings shall be made to mitigate loss.

Crown Molding in Main Lobby



Condition

The moldings appear intact.

Guidance Rehabilitate Moldings shall be rehabilitated.

Interior - Inner Lobby Volume of Space



Condition

The volume of space is intact. The feeling created by the lower vaulted ceilings in the inner lobby is more intimate than other areas of the theater which contain larger volumes of space.

Guidance Maintain

The volume of space should be maintained and dropped ceilings shall be avoided.

Railing



Condition

The railing is one of the most prominent features of the inner lobby. The railing appears intact, but is need of cleaning and maintenance

Guidance Rehabilitate

The railing shall not be enclosed or obscured; it shall be maintained and rehabilitated as necessary

Poster Cases



Condition

The poster cases appear to be intact, but in need of cleaning and maintenance.

Guidance Rehabilitate

Features shall be incorporated into the reuse of the space

Linear Light Features



Condition

The metal on the top and bottom of the feature needs repair and cleaning. The glass may not be original- the original plans from 1935 called for glass rods.

Guidance Rehabilitate

Features shall be incorporated into the reuse of the space

Crown Moldings



Condition

Molding is missing at south and north ends of the inner lobby where plaster has failed.

Guidance Rehabilitate - Reconstruct

Missing features shall be reconstructed and existing moldings rehabilitated.

Interior - Auditorium

Volume of Space



Condition

The volume of the auditorium is intact. The plaster of the roof was removed during remediation and roof replacement- this slightly changes the feeling of the volume of the space.

Guidance Maintain- Convey feeling of volume with sensitive subdivision

The subdivision of the space can be done, however, the sense of space associated with the volume of the space and theater activity shall be conveyed in the subdivision.

Floor



Condition

The rake of the floor is intact.

Guidance Maintain- Allow for sensitive and reversible leveling The floor may be leveled in a reversible manner that is sensitive to and retains the character defining features of the structure.

Porthole Lights



Condition

The metal frames of the porthole lights are intact. The condition of some of the metal is deteriorated due to moisture exposure. The finish materials are missing

Guidance Maintain

The existing features shall be stabilized to prevent further deterioration and the frames repaired. The features do not have to be reconstructed to their original finish.

Stage



Condition

The original proscenium appears to be intact, but in serious disrepair. A plywood addition has been made to the stage and the pillars surrounding the stage appear to be intact.

Guidance Maintain - Removal Allowed with Mitigation
The removal of the proscenium may be allowed with proper
mitigation and documentation. The addition to the stage can be
removed. The configuration of the stage shall be maintained.

Pillars



Condition

The condition varies. All of the pillars have been painted. In some places the material of the pillars has been cut away at the bottom. This was likely done during remediation.

Guidance Maintain

The pillars shall be maintained and not enclosed or covered up. The leveling of the floor shall be done in a way that is sensitive to the pillars.

Rear-wall Cornice Feature



Condition

Two wall cornices flank either side either side of the balcony wall. As is evident in the historical photographs these cornices had horizontally banded metal mounted below which was used for decorative lighting. What remain of these features are the plaster cornices.

Guidance Maintain

The plaster remnants of this feature shall be maintained.

Balcony Railing



Condition

The balcony railing is intact. The top rail appears to be bent in some locations.

Guidance Rehabilitate

The balcony railing shall be rehabilitated as needed. The railing shall be incorporated in any design that subdivides the auditorium space.

Balcony Light Fixtures



Condition

The fixtures are hanging from conduit. Their finish is not intact.

Guidance Removal Allowed

The fixtures are deteriorated and their original location and configuration is not known.

Seats



Condition

The seats appear to be original and have survived the water intrusion and years of deferred maintenance. The metal end panels appear to be intact and in good condition. Some seats have been removed leaving metal framing.

Guidance Removal Allowed with Mitigation

The removal of the seats is allowed with mitigation measures that include drawings of a typical seat, photographs of configuration, and the salvage and storage of the decorative metal end panels.

D. FRAMEWORK FOR TREATMENT OF CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES FOR THE REACTIVATION OF THE HOLLYWOOD THEATER

Based on the catalog of features and the guidance provided by the HPC during its review of the interim use concept plan on October 14, 2008 staff has developed a framework for the treatment of the structure for the reactivation of the Hollywood. This framework provides a narrative on the significance and history of the features of the structure. This is intended to be a stand alone document that will supplement the existing the general neighborhood theater guidelines by adding more precise direction. The framework recognizes that the theater has sat vacant for over 20 years and that during the 15 years of City ownership three separate requests for proposals processes and continuous informal marketing were carried out to reactivate the theater. Past project proposals were all based on the entertainment reuse of the theater and failed because they were not economically viable.

E. CONSISTENCY OF PROPOSED FRAMEWORK WITH GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS

In 1991 the Heritage Preservation Commission adopted the Neighborhood Movie Theater Thematic District Guidelines for Rehabilitation. The document addresses five local theaters that were designated in a movie theater thematic district. The document is divided into three sections. The first section is the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The second section is called Neighborhood Theater Guidelines for Utilization. This section provides a description of each theater and discusses their significance. The third and last section is entitled Additional Guidelines for Rehabilitation of Buildings in the Neighborhood Thematic District. These guidelines provide general guidance on the treatment of typical features of theaters such as a marquee or window replacement. It is important to note that while these are called guidelines for rehabilitation they read as guidelines for restoration.

Exterior

The guidelines from 1991 discuss the "Exterior Restoration" of the masonry, marquee, lighting and signage, window replacement, entries and entrance doors, roofing, removal of historic fabric, and health safety code requirements. A review of the guidance offered under each one of these sections reveals that the proposed framework is in keeping with the guidelines and offers more specific guidance.

The proposed framework states that new openings may be allowed in the north wall or in the roof to allow for natural light. This in keeping with the 1991 guidelines which state that the removal of historic fabric or original building materials, such as brick, is allowed as part of an adaptive reuse of the building. The proposed replacement of the projection booth windows is in keeping with the general guidelines. The framework guidance regarding the marquee, canopy, sign and green tile is also in keeping with the guidelines from 1991.

Interior

The guidelines for the "Interior Restoration" are more specific than those for the exterior and discuss design intent, floor materials, color selection, interior lighting, wall treatments, seating, and handrails and hardware. These interior guidelines are focused on the interior restoration of the theater and not the adaptive reuse of the theater. The guidelines also assume that the much of the historical integrity of the theater is intact.

Auditorium Subdivision

The proposed framework allows for the auditorium to be subdivided in a reversible manner at a natural division point such as the location between the balcony and the main floor. The sense of space associated with the volume of the space and theater activity shall be conveyed in the subdivision. The proposed framework regarding the subdivision of the auditorium space may appear to be in opposition with the one of the guidelines which states that historically significant areas shall not be subdivided. However, staff believes that the guidance in the framework is supported by the 1991 guidelines as it stipulates that the spirit of design shall be retained in historically significant areas and that alteration to historically significant rooms to allow adaptive reuse may be permitted. This is interpreted as allowing for alterations and subdivisions that convey the spirit of design of the auditorium's volume as defined in the approach stated in the proposed framework. This is also supported by the Secretary of the Interior Standards which recommend the following for alternations for adaptive reuse "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."

Outer Lobby Floor

The general guidelines adopted in 1991 for the five theaters also offer specific guidance regarding floor materials such as terrazzo. The guidelines suggest that significant floor materials be retained and not

covered up. The proposed framework offers similar guidance with a provision to allow for the floor to be covered up if proven financially necessary to reactivate the theater and it is proven that that the covering of the floor is reversible and will not damage the original floor.

Auditorium Seats

The guidelines adopted in 1991 state that the historically significant auditorium seating shall be retained with refurbishment of the seating being an acceptable treatment. The seats appear to be original and have survived over 20 years of vacancy. Prior to CPED acquisition the theater experience 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; their condition is poor and the seats will likely need to be replaced. The proposed framework recognizes the significance of the seats and allows for their removal through mitigation and salvage efforts that will allow for the seats to be reconstructed in the future.

Other Interior Features

The guidelines adopted for the five theaters in 1991 also provide guidance on other interior features that include wall treatments, lighting fixtures and handrails. The proposed framework expounds on these guidelines with specific information regarding rehabilitation, maintenance and in select cases mitigation for features that are missing or have deteriorated beyond repair. The guidance from the proposed framework is consistent with the Secretary of the Interior Standards which call for the identification, retention, and preservation of interior features and finishes that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building.

F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission **adopt** staff findings and **approve** the Framework for Treatment of Character Defining Features for the Reactivation of the Hollywood Theater.

G. ATTACHMENTS

- A. Framework for Treatment of Character Defining Features for the Reactivation of the Hollywood Theater
- B. Neighborhood Movie Theater Thematic District Guidelines for Rehabilitation, adopted 1991