
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District: **The Strand Theatre** (x) Consent calendar
Address: **5129-5131 Nannie Helen Burroughs
Avenue, NE**

Meeting Date: **October 25, 2012** (x) Alterations
Case Number: **12-614** (x) Addition

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** (x) Concept

The applicant, Ronnie McGhee (of R. McGhee and Associates), agent and architect for owner the Washington Metropolitan Community Development Corporation, requests the Board's approval of a previously approved concept.

In 2009, the Board approved by consent a conceptual application for a proposal to combine the landmark theater lot with two smaller lots to the west; to demolish all but the façade of the undesignated building immediately to the west of the theater; to construct a new, two-story structure on the vacant lot farthest west; to combine all of the structures internally, demolishing much of the theater's west wall to do so; to perform some nonstructural demolition within the theater; and to make other alterations to the theater, including largely restoring the exterior. (See the original staff report, attached, for more detail.)

The Board supported the concept with the condition that the storefront openings on either side of the corner entrance be restored with appropriate projecting bays, and that further review be delegated to staff.

As three years have passed, and the project has not proceeded because of economic conditions, the conceptual approval has expired, and the applicant returns to request another approval. The applicant has submitted somewhat revised copies of the original drawings, to begin to meet the Board's original condition. There will be additional refinements, as well as changes to the interior plans and perhaps some reduction of demolition. The owner intends to seek federal rehabilitation tax credits, so the review will be more rigorous than what is required under the preservation law.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Board again approve the proposal in concept as compatible with the character of the landmark, with the condition that the storefront openings on either side of the corner entrance be restored with appropriate projecting bays, and with further review delegated to the staff.

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Landmark/District:	The Strand Theater	() Agenda
		(x) Consent
Address:	5129-5131 Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue, NE	(x) Alterations
Meeting Date:	October 22, 2009	(x) Subdivision
Case Number:	09-431	(x) Addition
		(x) New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Concept

The applicant, Ronnie McGhee (of R. McGhee and Associates), agent and architect for owner the Washington Metropolitan Community Development Corporation, requests the Board's conceptual review of a proposal to combine the landmark theater lot with two smaller lots to the west; to demolish all but the façade of the undesignated building immediately to the west of the theater; to construct a new, two-story structure on the vacant lot farthest west; to combine all of the structures internally, demolishing much of the theater's west wall to do so; to perform some nonstructural demolition within the theater; and to make other alterations to the theater, including largely restoring the exterior.

The 1928 Strand Theater was designated in June 2008, principally for being the first purpose-built theater in Washington located east of the Anacostia River, and the first there to serve African Americans. A fairly stripped-down version of Renaissance Revival, it has been further stripped by the ravages of time, losing its entrance canopy, fluted pilasters, original windows and doors, and nearly all of the interior features and finishes. It does, however, retain the large rooftop sign.

The theater exterior

The intention of the exterior work is to bring the outside of the building more or less back to its appearance *circa* 1949, from which time we have some photographic evidence. The entrances would be restored (with a canopy somewhat shallower than the original), and the window and storefront openings and sign boxes largely brought back to what they were. Large openings at ground level in the east wall—now blocked up with concrete masonry units—would be reopened. Most of these are not original openings, but date to the 1960s/1970s. Replacing them with storefront windows would be an improvement, as long as these are well detailed. A couple of additional windows at the second story in the east wall would take the place of former air conditioning vent openings, so although they are not original, they are sufficiently compatible considering the building's current state, and they are justifiable alterations to render the upper story suitable to tenants.

The roof sign would be retained and refurbished, but it is not clear yet whether its lighting would again be made operational.

The one area in which the exterior project could be improved—indeed, should be improved—is rebuilding projecting show windows in the openings flanking the shop entrance at the northeast corner of the theater according to the historic photographic evidence.¹ The primary façade would look odd with large storefront windows in the plane of the walls, and restoring a bay on the east side would be an appropriate distinction from the storefront-type windows to be placed in the presently blocked openings.

Demolition

There is to be significant demolition of partitions and stairs within the theater, but as these are nonstructural, the work falls outside the purview of the law. Similarly, the demolition of most of the building next door is not an issue, because the building, although a contemporary of the theater, is not designated. That building's façade, however, will be largely restored with a new storefront and windows.

The most important demolition issue is that of much of the west side wall of the theater, intended to connect the theater space to the building next door. The brick piers would be retained, of course, to continue to support the theater, but the brick walls between would be removed. In light of the commercial program of the complex; the fact that the interior of the theater has very little integrity of finishes; and the fact that the other three walls and the roof and floor framing would remain, as would the line and piers of the west wall, the proposal seems sufficiently compatible and reasonable to revitalize the building and area.

Subdivision and new construction

The little, two-story brick entrance piece to be added to the west end of the complex does not even touch the theater, but its compatibility is required because that property will be joined to the theater lot. Its design will undergo further development, of course, but it harmoniously combines the modest brick front and parapet of the older, adjacent structures with a lightly framed projection at the second story, a modern move but evocative, too, of commercial show windows.

The only significant physical consequence of the subdivision to consolidate all of the lots is the demolition of much of the theater's west wall to connect the buildings. As this consolidation of properties may be necessary to make the rehabilitation successful, it should be supported.

The staff recommends that the Board approve the proposal in concept, with the condition that the storefront openings on either side of the corner entrance be restored with appropriate projecting bays, and that further review be delegated to staff.

¹ The applicant has indicated an interest in seeking federal rehabilitation tax credits, so the better the exterior restoration, the more likely that such credits could be forthcoming.