



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

MEMO

April 6, 2016

Mr. Antonio Aguilar
National Park Service
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Re: *New Mission Theater, 2550 Mission Street, OHP Ref. # 537.9-38-0239*

1650 Mission St.
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San Francisco,
CA 94103-2479

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Dear Mr. Aguilar,

In 2012 the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) reviewed the project at the New Mission Theater, which is locally designated as City Landmark No. 245. As part of the approval process, the project required a Certificate of Appropriateness from the HPC for exterior and interior alterations, and Conditional Use Authorization from the Planning Commission. In addition, the project required environmental review per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which analyzed both exterior and interior alterations to the Landmark property. In all regards, the proposed project was determined to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards (SIS). The HPC offers its support to the Project Team in its effort to qualify for the 20% Rehabilitation Tax Credit.

Our understanding is the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) determined two areas of the project to be in conflict with the SIS.

1. Treatment of the Women's Lounge with the expansion of the kitchen into the Patron's Lounge; and,
2. Treatment of the lower balcony by creating three separate theaters, including the extension of the scalloped balcony edge one bay forward, approximately 15-feet.

We request that the National Park Service consider the HPC's findings in its deliberations on whether or not the project should qualify for use of the 20% Rehabilitation Tax Credit. The HPC determined the project required minimal change to the Landmark's distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships to accommodate the contemporary use. The HPC determined the historic character of the Landmark was retained and preserved. While some character-defining features and spaces were altered, the alterations were undertaken in a sensitive manner that preserved the majority of the features and spatial relationships of the historic resource. The building retains its status as a local Landmark and a National Register-listed property.

The proposed project maintained the subject property's historic use as a theater. While the project increased the number of screens from one to five, which introduced new elements into the auditorium, it was done in a manner that respected the building's distinctive materials, features, and spaces. The lower balcony is character-defining and its relationship to the main auditorium is maintained in the project. All

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character-defining features in the lower balcony area are extant and were not removed as part of the project. The three theaters located in the lower balcony were constructed in a reversible manner should the building's program change in the future. The historic scalloped wall materials were significantly damaged by vandalism and water infiltration and required full reconstruction. The scalloped edge of the balcony in its new location preserves all distinctive character-defining features and its relationship to the main auditorium. A scalloped shaped "scar" on the underside of the balcony is visible within the main auditorium and marks the edge of the historic location of the balcony. In addition, the balcony extension is pulled away from the side walls (east and west) to avoid the removal of character-defining decorative plasterwork.

The project reduced the size of the publically-accessible area of the Patron's Lounge, which was subdivided into an area for patrons and a commercial kitchen. The Women's Lounge was converted and reconfigured into space for the kitchen and a new wall was constructed between the lobby and the kitchen (to the west of the projection booth). Portions of the salvaged promenade lobby murals are on display on the new wall between the lobby and the kitchen. With the exception of the oval shape of the Women's Lounge area, character-defining features, such as plasterwork and trim, was retained and repaired. The kitchen is separated from the publically-accessible area of the Patron's Lounge by a half-height solid wall. The remainder of the wall, including the area adjacent to the mirrored stair, is glazed to maintain the overall sense of volume of the Patron's Lounge area and maintain public visibility of character-defining features of the space.

The staircase leading up to the mezzanine level was retained and preserved, though a portion of the staircase is only accessible from the kitchen area. This stair leads to an intermediate landing that is accessible to patrons by using the other side of the stair. The portion of the stair only used by kitchen staff is open and visible at the intermediate landing and all character-defining features are preserved. Restricting access to this portion of the stair slightly interrupts the historic circulation of the mirrored stair leading to the lower balcony; however, it is important to note that it is a reversible condition should the kitchen be modified in the future and all other character-defining features, including spatial relationships are preserved.

Since 2006 the New Mission Theater has been largely vacant and has suffered from theft, vandalism, and severe deferred maintenance issues. The preservation community is well-aware of the unique challenges involving the adaptation of single-screen movie theaters, churches, and other single-purpose historic properties. The HPC commends the project team in taking on the substantial expense associated with the seismic upgrade to the Timothy Pfleuger Promenade Lobby portion of the building, and the preservation efforts of the project. The project was found to be a sensitive and creative approach in the reuse of a challenging property type, which allows it to largely function as it did historically and preserves its character-defining features. The HPC hopes that you will concur with its determination.

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If you have any questions, please contact Tim Frye, Historic Preservation Officer, directly at (415) 575-6822, or by email at tim.frye@sfgov.org.

Sincerely,

Andrew Wolfram

President

San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission

cc: Rodney Fong, San Francisco Planning Commission
John Rahaim, San Francisco Planning Department
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