

CITY OF HAMILTON

- RECOMMENDATION -

DATE: June 29, 2001
File: PD01116 Author: A. H. Gillespie (Ext. 3934)

REPORT TO: Mayor and Members
Committee of the Whole

FROM: Lee Ann Coveyduck
General Manager
Planning and Development Department

SUBJECT: Recommendation to Designate Under the Ontario Heritage Act, Part IV, the Property at 12 Mary Street in the Former City of Hamilton, Known as the Century Theatre (PD01116) - (Affects Ward 2)

RECOMMENDATION:

- (a) That City Council approve the Intent to Designate the former Century Theatre at 12 Mary Street as a property of historical and architectural value, pursuant to the provisions of Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act, 1997, as described in the Reasons for Designation (Appendix A).
- (b) That the Director of Legal Services and Corporate Counsel be authorized and directed to take appropriate action to have this property designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, 1997.

Lee Ann Coveyduck
General Manager
Planning and Development Department

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS:

Not applicable.

BACKGROUND:

The former Century Theatre was built in 1913 for the Keith Vaudeville Circuit as a vaudeville theatre and movie palace, named the Lyric Theatre. The original four-storey brick masonry façade, designed in a Renaissance Revival style, featured six pilasters with stone or cast stone capitals supporting an elaborate cornice, which surmounted a round-arched sign panel. The cornice has since been removed, but the original painted "Lyric Theatre" sign was left intact. In 1922, the building was extensively remodelled with "an elaborate new entrance", "a modern balcony" and "a beautiful mezzanine floor". It was completely modernized again in 1940 when acquired by 20th Century Theatres and renamed the Century. The fifth storey was probably added at this time. Of the seven largest and grandest theatres built in Hamilton during the early 20th century, the most resplendent being the Capitol and the Palace, only the Century and the Tivoli are still standing (as complete buildings with auditoriums).

The former Century Theatre has stood vacant since being closed a number of years ago. It was recently purchased by Zoran Cocov and Dimitar Gorgiev for conversion to 62 residential units. They have applied to the CORE Heritage 2000 Program for façade improvements and to the Downtown Convert/Renovate to Residential Loan Program. If designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, the building would be eligible for the Tax Incentive Program, an additional \$5,000 CORE grant, and an interest-free loan from the Community Heritage Fund. The new owners have therefore requested that the building be designated.

ANALYSIS:

The former Century Theatre is listed on the *Inventory of Buildings of Architectural and/or Historical Interest* (for the former City of Hamilton). It is also eligible for designation under the Ontario Heritage Act, as determined by the former City of Hamilton Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (LACAC).

Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act provides for the conservation of individual buildings of historical or architectural value by a municipal Council. Designation is not only a recognition of the significance of a property, but it also provides a measure of protection from demolition and unsympathetic alteration. Where the council has appointed a LACAC, it shall consult with this committee before giving notice of its intent to designate a property. Council must give reasons for its action, in the form of a summary of the architectural and historical significance of the property, identified as the "reasons for designation" which accompanies the Designation By-law.

The designation of the former Century Theatre will contribute to an important objective of the *New Land Use Plan for Downtown Hamilton*: to "retain and enhance the historic fabric of Downtown Hamilton".

The adaptive re-use of the Century Theatre is made possible by a number of municipal incentives in place at the present time, aimed at revitalizing the downtown core. The designation of this property will provide additional financial incentives (identified in the Background), which will assist with the conservation and restoration of the architectural facades of the Century Theatre and any significant heritage features.

LOCAL ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (LACAC):

Pursuant to Subsection 29 (2) of the Ontario Heritage Act Council is required to consult with LACAC respecting its intention to designate a property under Subsection (1). At its meeting of May 24, 2001 the City of Hamilton LACAC endorsed the staff recommendation to approve the Intent to Designate the former Century Theatre at 12 Mary Street, Hamilton.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

(Vision 2020, adopted by Regional Council as its vision for the future of Hamilton-Wentworth and endorsed by the Transition Board as the basis of a vision for the "New" City of Hamilton, embodies the concept of a sustainable community which is an equal balance of the economy, the environment, and social/health factors in all municipal decision-making.)

The designation of the former Century Theatre will help to protect and enhance a valuable heritage resource and will, therefore, contribute to the Vision 2020 goal of preserving our built heritage. The conversion of this large building to residential use would provide 62 new rental housing units. This supports one of the goals of Vision 2020 for the downtown core, which envisions residential growth in this area as an important step towards the revitalization of downtown Hamilton.

The adaptive re-use of existing buildings, in general, supports a number of the basic principles of sustainable development: waste reduction (resulting from the repair and re-use of building materials compared to the waste generated by demolition); efficient use of existing infrastructure; and the conservation of energy and non-renewable resources (compared to new construction). The intensification of downtown housing also contributes to improved air quality and the development of a sustainable transportation system, as residents are less reliant on the automobile for their daily trips to work, shops, etc.

Map and photograph attached (Appendix B).

:AG

Attachs. (2)

Century Theatre
12 Mary Street, Hamilton

DRAFT
REASONS FOR DESIGNATION

Context

The former Century Theatre at 12 Mary Street is located directly behind the landmark 1881 Copp Block which spans the entire block from Mary to Walnut Street. The theatre building originally stood in the midst of a thriving retail and entertainment district in the downtown core, just steps away from the busy King Street East commercial thoroughfare. Tucked away on a narrow street, the top of its impressive four-storey façade with a crowning cornice arching over the semi-circular sign bearing its original "Lyric Theatre" name could still be easily seen from the west above the rooflines of the three-storey commercial blocks on King Street East. Today the building is much more visible from the north than when originally built as many commercial/ industrial buildings and houses along Mary Street and King William Street have since been demolished and the vacant land turned into parking lots. Though vacant and in disrepair, the imposing five-storey brick and cast stone façade of the former Century/ Lyric Theatre still maintains a notable presence. Its new owners intend to convert the building into residential units on the upper floors with commercial space on the ground floor.

History

Built as a vaudeville theatre in 1913, the Lyric Theatre was hailed at the time to be the largest theatre in Hamilton with a seating capacity of over 2000. It was built for Dominion Theatres Limited to offer "top-class" Loews Vaudeville and moving pictures to the citizens of Hamilton. At a time when this form of entertainment was extremely popular, the Lyric Theatre was one of the seven largest and grandest theatres of its type to be built in Hamilton, three of which were located in the immediate vicinity: the Temple, the Capitol and the Palace. In 1914, the Lyric was sold to the Canadian United Theatre Company of London, Ontario, becoming the Keith Vaudeville Circuit's permanent home in Hamilton. The theatre underwent extensive renovations in 1922, making it "one of the most palatial amusement centres in the Dominion". Purchased in 1940 by 20th Century Theatres it was fully modernized to serve as a state-of-the-art movie house. In 1967, the Century underwent yet another complete refurbishing and continued to operate until closing in 1989 when the new multi-theatre complex opened in Jackson Square. Today, the Century and the Tivoli on James Street North are the only two of Hamilton's grand early 20th century theatres to survive with their auditoriums.

Architecture

The Lyric Theatre was originally built with a four storey wrap-around brick masonry façade designed in a Renaissance Revival style. It featured six pilasters with cast stone capitals supporting a cast stone moulding that was originally surmounted by an

elaborate crowning cornice (almost certainly fabricated of galvanized iron) with a central round arched section framing a semi-circular metal sign panel. The symmetrical front façade was divided by four brick pilasters into three window bays. The wood-framed sash windows originally provided natural light for the offices located on the three floors at the front of the building.

In 1922, the building was extensively remodeled with an "elaborate new entrance, modern balcony and beautiful mezzanine floor". In 1940, the building underwent more major changes, which most likely included the fifth floor addition at the front. The architects, Kaplan and Sprachman of Toronto, reputedly designed many outstanding pictures houses across Canada. Claimed to be the first theatre in Canada to have the modern convenience of year-round air conditioning, it was decorated with sensational new fluorescent carpet never before seen in Canadian theatres. Fluorescent paint was applied to the ceiling and wall panels in modernistic designs and illuminated with black lighting. The entrance was again altered to include a new marquee, stainless steel box office, vitrolite cladding and neon lighting. The Century underwent another complete remodelling in 1967, resulting in modern décor, lighting and new projection and sound equipment. The only decorative elements of the 1940 interior to survive were a series of identical abstract Art Deco panels painted on the side walls of the auditorium, which are now faded but still visible.

Today, the upper façade retains its original brick masonry facing and cast-stone trim, and its original window openings with some of the wood sash windows (now hidden behind metal cladding) and cast-stone lintels. Although the decorative cornice has been removed, the painted metal "Lyric Theatre" sign has survived, now badly faded but with the lettering still just discernible. The only surviving original feature of the street level façades is sections of the cast stone lower cornice which wraps around the sides of the building, where it is still visible and partially intact. Even in its neglected condition, the former Century continues to stand as a significant example of Hamilton's early 20th century theatre architecture.

Designated Features

Important to the preservation of the former Century Theatre is the west (front) façade and the 20-foot sections of the north and south walls which echo the architectural treatment on the front façade. Included are the six brick pilasters; the cast stone capitals, sills, upper string course and surviving sections of the lower cornice; the semi-circular metal sign panel; the original window openings and any surviving wood sash windows. Also included are the 1940 painted panels in the auditorium.

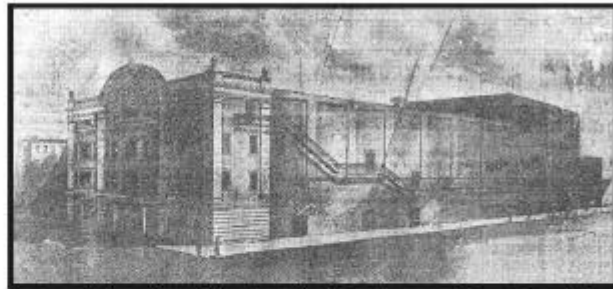
Century Theatre 12 Mary Street

"The New Vaudeville Theatre on Mary Street",
The Hamilton Spectator, April 26, 1913

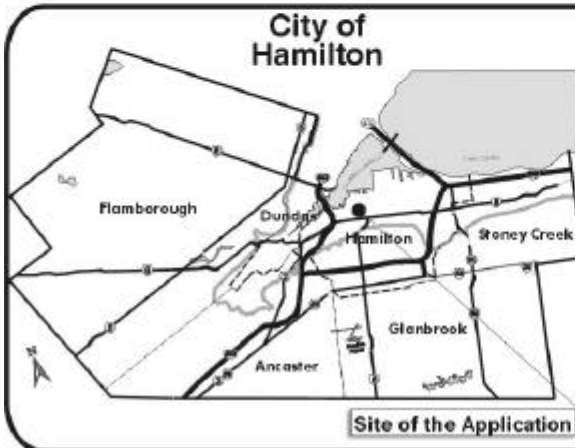


HERITAGE PLANNING
 Photograph, November 2000

Century Theatre
 12 Mary Street



"The New Vaudeville Theatre on Mary Street",
 The Hamilton Spectator, April 26, 1913



PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Location Map

LEGEND

 Subject Lands

Reference file:
PD01116

Scale
Not to Scale

Date
June, 2001

Technician:
B. B.

APPENDIX "A"

