

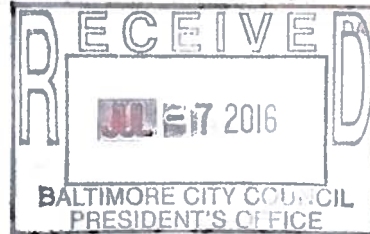


FROM	NAME & TITLE	Eric Holcomb, Executive Director CHAP 	CITY of BALTIMORE MEMO	
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation 417 EAST FAYETTE STREET, 8 TH FLOOR		
	SUBJECT	Council Bill 16-0658 Baltimore City Landmark List: Exteriors – Ambassador Theatre		

TO

The Honorable President and
Members of the City Council
City Hall, Room 400
100 North Holliday Street

June 15, 2016



At its regular meeting of June 14, 2016, the Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation considered City Council Bill 16-0658 concerning Baltimore City Landmark List: Exteriors – Ambassador Theatre. In its consideration of this Bill, the Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation reviewed the attached staff report and recommended approval (9 members being present, 9 in favor):

Ambassador Theatre meets CHAP landmark criteria:

1. is associated with events that have made significant contributions to the broad patterns of Baltimore history; and
3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represents the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Eric Holcomb, Executive Director, at 410-396-4866.

Attachment

cc: Mr. Colin Tarbert, Deputy Chief for Economic and Neighborhood Development
Ms. Angela Gibson, Mayor's Office
Ms. Elena DiPietro, Law Dept.
Ms. Natawna B. Austin, Council Services
Ms. Casey Brent, Special Assistant Mayor's Office
Mr. Thomas J. Stosur, Director Baltimore City Department of Planning
Ms. Sheila Wyche, Mayor's Office
The Honorable William Henry, Council Rep. to CHAP

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Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Mayor

**COMMISSION FOR
HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL
PRESERVATION**

Tom Liebel, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Thomas J. Stosur
Director

June 14, 2016

REQUEST: Designate as a Baltimore City Landmark

ADDRESS: 4604 Liberty Heights Ave, Ambassador Theatre

RECOMMENDATION: Approval

STAFF: Lauren Schiszik

PETITIONER: Hon. Rochelle “Rikki” Spector, City Council District 5

SITE/HISTORIC DISTRICT

General Area: The Ambassador Theatre is located on Liberty Heights Avenue in the northwestern neighborhood of Howard Park, near the intersection with Gwynn Oak Ave. This neighborhood was developed in the early 20th century as a streetcar suburb. Liberty Heights Avenue is the main commercial street in the neighborhood. The south side of the 4600 block of Liberty Heights Avenue was historically comprised of one and two story commercial structures, but today it is the site of the new Shop-Rite grocery store. On the north side of the block, the theatre is located mid-block, adjacent to two single family homes converted to commercial businesses on one side, and a gas station on the other side.

Site Conditions/Architectural Description: The Ambassador Theatre is a free-standing two-story brick movie theater. The façade of the building is constructed with buff brick with bands of black brick, Vitriolite, and ornamental stone. The building is three bays wide, with an entrance in the center bay. This entrance does not appear to retain any historic integrity, having been altered over the years and recently suffering from a fire. The entrance is currently boarded up with plywood. Above the center bay is a remains of a large horizontal marquee that projects over the sidewalk by more than ten feet, which is not original to the building, but seems to cover the original Vitriolite marquee, partially visible underneath. The two outer bays feature three poster frames, horizontal brick banding, octagonal stone details, and are missing horizontal bands of Vitriolite. Although two stories in height overall, the façade of the building is one story tall at the sidewalk, and steps up and back in a series of recesses above the entrance. These steps have been covered with metal. The vertical AMBASSADOR marquee is located to left of the entrance, rising higher than the building itself. The two outer bays of the building feature two semi-circular projections on the second story, which are crumbling, as well as decorative horizontal banding. The rest of the building is constructed with a red brick. The structure has been vacant since at least 2009, and suffered a fire in 2012 that gutted the interior. Based on an exterior visual survey, the building still retains physical integrity, but is at

risk of further decay. The roof structure is still intact, but has some holes and is missing some roofing.

BACKGROUND

- This property was ordered into receivership in Housing Court in October 2013. Receivership requires that the owner fixes up the property, and Mr. Gaston (the owner) and the court entered into an agreement and schedule for renovation by the owner. This renovation did not occur.
- CHAP placed this property on the Special List on December 10, 2013, at the request of Councilwoman Spector.
- On June 30, 2015, Mr. Bass, who claimed to be the owner of the property, removed the circa 1950s aluminum marquee without CHAP approval. Because the property was in receivership, he had no legal right to take this action. A Stop Work Order was placed on the property by an inspector for the Department of Housing Code Enforcement Division.
- On April 7, 2016, CHAP staff was informed that the property was scheduled to be sold at auction on June 9, 2016 through the court-appointed receiver, One House At A Time.
- On April 8, 2016, the Howard Park Civic Association requested that Councilwoman Spector introduce the landmark designation bill for the Ambassador Theatre; this bill was introduced on April 18, 2016.
- On April 15, 2016, CHAP staff was informed by DHCD that the receivership process was dismissed by a judge on the grounds of ineffective assistance of counsel for the defendant, and that full control of the property was given to the owner.
- DHCD is currently pursuing a new receivership action against the owner, and it is scheduled for Housing Court in July 2016.

PROPOSAL & APPLICATION OF GUIDELINES

The proposal is to designate the Ambassador Theatre as a Baltimore City Landmark. This designation was requested by Councilwoman Spector, who introduced City Council Bill #16-0658 to designate this property as a Baltimore City Landmark.

Conformity to Guidelines: The proposed designation meets Guideline 5.1 *Criteria for Designating Districts and Landmarks* as the structure meets Criteria 1 for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Baltimore history; and Criteria 3 for its embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

- Located in the northwestern neighborhood of Howard Park, the Art Deco- style Ambassador Theatre was one of the most modern theaters in the city when it opened in 1935. The theater was designed by prominent Baltimore architect John J. Zink for Durkee Enterprises, which was the largest neighborhood movie theater company in the city. The Ambassador is considered to be one of Zink's most exuberant designs.

When it opened, Frank Durkee called the Ambassador “the realization of an ideal, a crowning achievement.” It was modern, luxurious, and technologically advanced. The theater is significant for its role in the development of Northwest Baltimore and theater design, and serves as an excellent example of Art Deco architecture.

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMENTS

The Howard Park Civic Association requested this designation.

ANALYSIS

CHAP staff finds that this landmark designation meets CHAP designation requirements.

CHAP staff recommends approval.



**Eric Holcomb
Director**

Locator Map



Aerial Photos



View from south



View from east



View from north



View from west