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<b>FROM</b>	NAME & TITLE	THOMAS J. STOSUR, DIRECTOR
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING 417 E. FAYETTE STREET, 8 <sup>th</sup> FLOOR
	SUBJECT	CITY COUNCIL BILL #10-0587-BALTIMORE CITY LANDMARK LIST: PUBLIC INTERIORS – THE SENATOR THEATRE

CITY of  
BALTIMORE  
**MEMO**



**TO** The Honorable President and  
Members of the City Council  
City Hall, Room 400  
100 N. Holliday Street

DATE: September 24, 2010

At its regular meeting of September 2, 2010 the Planning Commission considered City Council Bill #10-0587 for the purpose designating the Senator Theatre, 5904 York Road, as a historical landmark: public interior.

In its consideration of this Bill, the Planning Commission reviewed the attached agenda, summary, and previous staff report which recommended approval of City Council Bill #10-0587 and adopted the following resolution, nine members being present (nine in favor).

RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission concurs with the recommendation of its departmental staff, and recommends that City Council Bill #10-0587 be passed by the City Council.

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Eric Tiso in the Land Use and Urban Design Division at 410-396-8358.

TJS/ewt

Attachment

- cc: Ms. Kaliopé Parthemos, Deputy Mayor
- Ms. Sophie Dagenais, Chief of Staff
- Ms. Angela Gibson, Mayor's Office
- The Honorable Bill Henry, City Council Commission Representative
- Ms. Nikol Nabors-Jackson, DHCD
- Ms. Deepa Bhattacharyya, Law Department
- Ms. Karen Randle, City Council Services
- Ms. Kathleen Kotarba, Chief, CHAP



Sheila Dixon  
Mayor

## PLANNING COMMISSION

*Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman*

### STAFF REPORT



*Thomas J. Stosur*  
Director

December 17, 2009

**REQUEST:** Baltimore City Interior Landmark Designation / Senator Theatre – 5904 York Road

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approval, with the recommendation that upon the passage of Baltimore City Interior Landmark Designation legislation by the Mayor and City Council, the Special List designation on the subject property be removed by the Commission for Historic and Architectural Preservation.

**STAFF:** Melvin Hicks

**PETITIONER(s):** Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP)

**OWNER:** BDC on behalf of the Mayor & City Council of Baltimore

#### **SITE/GENERAL AREA**

**Site Conditions:** The site is improved with an existing theatre. The Senator Theatre occupies almost the entire lot size and it is zoned B-2-2.

**General Area:** The Senator Theatre is located in North Baltimore. It is a 1939 Art Deco Movie Theatre with a circular stucco and glass block lobby fronting York Road. It is located on the northwest corner of Rosebank Avenue and York Road.

#### **HISTORY**

- The Senator Theatre has been operating as a privately run movie theatre for 67 years. The theatre was proposed for landmark designation in 1987 and was approved by CHAP and the Planning Commission, however the Baltimore City Council did not approve landmark designation for the Senator Theatre and nine other buildings proposed at that time.
- On March 5, 2007, CHAP recommended approval of the Baltimore City Exterior Landmark Designation for the Senator Theatre.
- On May 17, 2007, the Planning Commission recommended approval of the Baltimore City Exterior Landmark Designation for the Senator Theatre.
- On May 12, 2009, CHAP recommended approval of the Baltimore City Interior Landmark Designation for the Senator Theatre.

## **CONFORMITY TO PLANS**

This action is consistent with the City of Baltimore's Comprehensive Master Plan, with respect to protecting and enhancing the preservation of Baltimore's historic buildings and neighborhoods.

## **ANALYSIS**

This is the second public hearing in the Baltimore City Interior Landmark Designation process. The structure was reviewed and approved by the CHAP Commission on May 12, 2009. After the Planning Commission renders an affirmative decision on the designation, it will then go to the City Council for introduction by the administration.

### History

The Senator Theatre, located in North Baltimore, is a 1939 Art Deco movie Theatre with a circular stucco and glass block lobby fronting York Road. The Senator Theatre is the last surviving single screen movie house in Baltimore City. Dating from 1939, it represents an era when motion pictures were the major form of affordable entertainment available to the general public prior to the widespread use of television and home video. The size of the theatre, neighborhood location and exuberant design are indicative of the role that motion pictures played in the life of Baltimore in the early to mid-twentieth century. The Senator Theatre is associated with important individuals related to motion pictures. Frank Durkee (1888-1955) was a pioneer in the local motion picture business, and the Durkee family has remained associated with the theatre today. The theatre is also associated with many motion picture personalities that have appeared at special events at the Senator Theatre including: Mickey Rooney and Ginger Rogers, John Travolta and Johnny Depp; and host of actors, writers and decorators that have ties to Baltimore and Maryland, such as, Kathleen Turner, Charles Dutton, Edward Norton, Devine, Barry Levinson and John Waters. The Senator Theatre has been the site of civic events and celebrations that have raised funds for a variety of local charities ranging from the Maryland Food Bank to the Pennsylvania Avenue Committee's effort to build a monument to the Royal Theatre. The unveiling of artistic sidewalk blocks has created a permanent physical reminder of these events. The Senator Theatre also contributes to the heritage and history of Baltimore City since it has played an important role in Baltimore as the site of motion picture filming since the 1980s. The theatre can be seen in motion pictures such as Avalon and Cecil B. Demented, as well as in various television shows. Its use as a venue for the premier of major motion pictures filmed in Baltimore has elevated the status of Baltimore as a viable location for motion picture filming.

### Architectural Description

The interior of the lobby contains mural paintings, geometric decorative trim and panels, and a terrazzo floor. The eye is immediately drawn up toward the ceiling chandelier, which replaced the original streamlined model, and the upper walls which are covered with murals by local artist Paul Roche depicting various fictional figures of the entertainment world, clowns, actors, animals, and settings in dramatic poses. The main auditorium is a large, open space without a balcony. The auditorium retains its original size and configuration except for the concession stand alteration. The theatre had seating for about 1,100, and it was one of the few pre-World

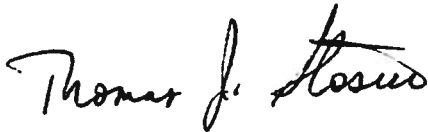
War II periods still existing in Baltimore. Upon entering, your attention is drawn to the ceiling above the screen, where a semi-circular line of light prisms in red and green is illuminated. A further row of light boxes edges the central ceiling area. The theatre is architecturally significant as the finest Art Deco Movie Theatre still standing in Baltimore City and the most intact example of this type of building. Designed by a noted local movie theatre architect, John J. Zink, the theatre retains many significant details including pigmented structural glass, glass block, neon signage, and geometric aluminum panels on the exterior. The theatre's interior is accented by a back lit sun-burst at the apex of the screen, and rainbow prisms in the recessed ceiling. A massive gold curtain still opens to dramatically reveal the screen before each performance.

The interior of the Senator Theatre is considered public interior and meets the following criteria from Chapter 5, Section 5.1 of the CHAP Baltimore City Landmark Designation Guidelines:

2. *That are associated with the lives of person significant in Baltimore's past; or*
3. *That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represented the work of a master, or that posses high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;*

Based on these findings, staff recommends that interior landmark status be granted.

Staff notified Senator Limited Partnership, Baltimore Development Corporation, Hofmiester & Levers, LLC, Mayor's Office, 4th Council District, Belvedere Improvement Association, Evesham Park Neighborhood Association, Govans Ecumenical Development Corporation-(GEDCO), Govanstowne Business Association, Greater Homewood Community Corporation, Inc. York Road Partnership, The Homeland Association, Inc., and North Baltimore Neighborhood Coalition of this action.



**Thomas J. Stosur**  
**Director**