



June 12, 2015

Regarding item 7.23 on the Public Hearing Agenda, June 15, 2015: CPC 2015-095; Bylaw 94D2015 regarding the Barron Building.

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

The Calgary Heritage Initiative asks that you make a minor amendment to the land use application for the Barron Building, to add the marquee canopy to the list of character defining elements to be protected by this Direct Control Bylaw (this change would also require any associated Development Permit Application to be modified).

The feature is described by the Statement of Significance on the City of Calgary Inventory of Evaluated Historic Resources as the:

- Projecting, structurally integrated (concrete-frame) theatre marquee of angled profile;

While this is in our view a relatively minor modification of the plans for the Barron Building, retention of the marquee canopy is of significant historical and symbolic importance. The Barron Building was built as both a theatre and office building by lawyer and local theatre impresario J.B. Barron (as a mixed-use building like the older Grand Theatre/Lougheed Building, which Barron also owned; indeed Barron had initially planned to build only a theatre and entertainment centre on the Barron Building site). The Uptown Theatre, and its spectacular, intact, mid-century modern lobby, have always been integral to the building, and the part of the building most familiar to generations of Calgary moviegoers. Unfortunately, these interior features are not protected by this bylaw, and are proposed to be demolished in the proposed project.

That would leave the marquee canopy as the last remaining visual reminder of the theatre aspect of the Barron Building, and the theatre origins of its visionary builder, J.B. Barron.

The original marquee signage was removed many years ago, and signage of more recent vintage was removed in the last couple years. What remains is the cantilevered marquee canopy that would support new signage (this distinction is why we describe the feature in this letter as the "marquee canopy"). The integrity of the canopy makes it an ideal platform for new and creative signage suitable for whatever new uses and tenants occupy the revitalized Barron Building. This canopy is almost unique downtown and it would not be permitted to be built so far over the

sidewalk under current rules. It is a competitive advantage that makes the building stand out, and with good signage can be seen by pedestrians walking down the block, as was the original intent. Its demolition would undermine this distinctiveness, remove a creative opportunity, and do unnecessary damage to the structure.

The marquee canopy has been part of the public realm on 8th Avenue for over 65 years, sheltering passers-by and customers alike from rain, snow, hail and scorching sun depending on the time of year (or the time of day, this being Calgary). Policy and best practice encourages good pedestrian environments, including canopies to shelter pedestrians, café tables or what have you. The Historic Resource Impact Assessment (HRIA) prepared at the order of the Province suggested that the canopy might even serve as accessible space, such as a second floor restaurant patio. To be out on that deck, over top of 8th Avenue on a warm night, would be an amazing experience. While it might not be in applicant's plans now, this is an option that the conservation of the marquee preserves for the future.

As for the rest of this application:

We are pleased that the application before you preserves a significant portion of the façade of the Barron Building, more of the façade than was first proposed. We congratulate the applicant and Administration on this improvement.

We are supportive of the decision made by Calgary Planning Commission, to not require that parking (or cash in lieu of parking) be required for the historic Barron Building portion of the project. We agree that heritage conservation merits parking relaxation, and is consistent with best practice and heritage policy.

We are disappointed that the applicant proposes to demolish, rather than re-use, the rare and spectacular modern-style theatre lobby, and the associated theatre. This would be a unique commercial and event space. We are very happy to see that the owner is providing this space as a venue for Beakerhead this September, and hope that this might inspire a change of heart, and plans, for the interior of the building.

Finally, while we appreciate that this Direct Control district is meant to provide protection for character-defining heritage elements of the project, City bylaws and the Historical Resources Act already provide a mechanism of Municipal Heritage Designation, with which Council will be familiar. Municipal Heritage Designation would protect heritage elements agreed upon by the City and the building owner, and open the door to municipal and provincial grant streams to assist in conservation. If this DC route is equivalent to designation in securing heritage elements, then why not designate? If it proves not as good as designation in protecting heritage, then we may find that out the hard way. To conclude this point, having gone this far in preserving the Barron, we encourage the owner to pursue Municipal Historic Designation in due course.

The Calgary Heritage Initiative Society is Calgary's premier volunteer-based built-heritage advocacy group, with over 100 members in good standing, and over 2000 friends on our email contact lists and social networks. We support conservation, productive use, adaptive re-use and interpretation of buildings and sites of historic and architectural interest.

Our organization presented, along with the Calgary Heritage Authority, on the importance of the building to the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation board last year when the Minister of heritage was considering Provincial designation of the Barron Building. Our members, and the community of heritage supporters we represent, have a significant interest in the retention and preservation of Calgary's historic resources, including the Barron Building.

We are partners with other groups on many initiatives and projects that make Calgary more vibrant, including the Governor General Award-winning Century Homes Calgary. And we are part of the local organizing group of the national conference of Heritage Canada – The National Trust, which will happen in Calgary this October.

We want to show off Calgary heritage to all of Canada, and ask that Council and the building owner join us in that effort

Signed, for the Calgary Heritage Initiative,

Chris Edwards

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Scott Jolliffe, Chair, Calgary Heritage Authority

Ken Toews, Vice President Development, Strategic Group

City Clerk

Attachments

Glenbow Archives NA-5093-247



Original look of Barron marquee

Marquee canopy today, ready for re-purposing



Uptown Theatre interior

