

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT JOSEPH A. CURTATONE MAYOR

GEORGE J. PROAKIS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ALTERATION OF A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT (LHD) PROPERTY STAFF REPORT

Site: 49-55 Davis Square

Case: HPC.ALT 2021.54

Applicant: Somerville Theatre

Owner: B.F. Somerville Properties, LLC

Legal Ad: Installation of a sign; Retroactive Commission approval for installation of windows

HPC Meeting Date: November 16th, 2021



The purpose of a staff report is to provide the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) with a professional assessment of alteration proposals made for Local Historic District (LHD) properties. These assessments are based on the Historic District Ordinance (HDO) in compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 40C, and the associated Design Guidelines. A Staff Report is <u>not</u> a determination/decision and does not represent findings. A staff report does not constitute authorization in any form.



Date: November 16th, 2021 Case: HPC.ALT 2021.54 Site: 49-55 Davis Square

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

<u>Subject Property</u>: The locus is a c.1914 Neo-classical structure known as the Somerville Theatre building. This property is located on Elm Street between Dover St. and Meacham Road in Davis Square. A full description of the property is provided in the attached Form B survey held by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC).

Proposal: The Applicant proposes the following:

- a. Installation of a commercial sign
- b. Retroactive Commission approval for installation of windows

II. FINDINGS

The HPC must make findings based on the Historic District Ordinance (HDO) in compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 40C, and associated Design Guidelines. Applicable regulations are discussed below.

A. Installation of a commercial sign

The applicable Somerville LHD Design Guidelines is G. "Signs, marquees, and awnings"

Because the sign will be visible from the public way the HPC has purview over these features and the materials used.

Applicant Proposal

The Applicant proposes to install a commercial sign for a business, measuring 103" x 30"x12".. The name "Crystal Ballroom" will be made from stainless steel and illuminated with exposed white LED lamps . The words "At Somerville Theatre" will be interior lit with push through lighting. Below will be a 12" LED message board. The message board appears to be a raceway. The sign will be placed over the central doorway into the structure.



Above: Proposed sign design

Date: November 16th, 2021 Case: HPC.ALT 2021.54 Site: 49-55 Davis Square



Above: Proposed sign location



Above: Photo of the Somerville Theatre with arrow indicating proposed location of the sign.

Page 4 of 6 Date: November 16th, 2021 Case: HPC.ALT 2021.54

Site: 49-55 Davis Square

Preservation Planning Assessment:

The proposed portion of the sign stating "Crystal Ballroom at Somerville Theatre" while appropriate for the style of the structure should more closely emulate the shape and design of the existing Somerville Theatre sign. The differing signs would create visual clutter and distract form the architecture of the building. A more simplified reverse channel letter in red to match the Somerville Theatre would be appropriate.

Staff finds that the raceway to be an inappropriate for the style of the building and does not match the sign type for the Somerville Theatre. A raceway is an electronic sign that can display programmed messages. It would be more appropriate for the raceway to be a changeable message sign to match the Somerville Theatre; however, the optimal appearance for the building would be for there to be no message board below the sign.

Pursuant to the §10.9.6.a Commercial Signs of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, "Any sign that flashes, moves, blinks, rotates, simulates motion, features electronic sign copy, or has illumination that changes over intensity over time" is prohibited. Currently the proposed design is not permitted by Somerville Zoning Ordinance. Additionally, Zoning has not done a complete review of the proposed sign, as such, Staff cannot say definitively if this sign would be permitted even without the raceway.

Should the HPC vote in favor of the deck installation, Preservation Staff recommends the following conditions be included in addition to those listed in **Section IV 'Recommended Conditions'** below.

1. Staff shall not provide recommended conditions until the sign proposal is one that conforms with the zoning code.

HPC Determination:

- The HPC must determine if, based on a review of the documentation presented, the proposed project complies with the Design Guidelines
- The HPC must structure their motion to include their own specific findings on the prosed project.

B. Retroactive Commission approval for installation of windows

The applicable Somerville LHD Design Guidelines is C. "Windows and Doors"

Due to the change of exterior features the HPC has purview over this work.

Applicant Proposal

The Applicant requests the retroactive approval for the replacement of aluminum one-over-one single or double hung windows with pine one-over-one double-hung windows on the front and left elevations. The previous windows were removed in Summer of 2021.

Alterations to exterior features of Local Historic District (LHD) properties require review and approval by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). Pursuant to the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission Design Guidelines §1(f);

Date: November 16th, 2021 Case: HPC.ALT 2021.54 Site: 49-55 Davis Square

The Commission will give design review priority to those portions of the property which are visible from public ways or those portions which it can be reasonably inferred may be visible in the future.

**Note: The HPC is not obligated to approve work that was done without permission.



Above: 49-55 Davis Sq in 2020



Above: 49-55 Davis Sq in 2021 with windows installed

Page 6 of 6

Date: November 16th, 2021

Case: HPC.ALT 2021.54

Site: 49-55 Davis Square

Preservation Planning Assessment:

The previous windows were replacement aluminum framed windows. The applicant replaced them with Auralast pine windows with the same one-over-one design. For the age and style of the building the replacement windows have more detailing and depth than the replaced windows and are more appropriate for the style of the building.

Should the HPC vote in favor of the deck installation, Preservation Staff recommends the following conditions be included in addition to those listed in Section IV 'Recommended Conditions' below.

HPC Determination:

- The HPC must determine if, based on a review of the documentation presented, the proposed project complies with the Design Guidelines
- The HPC must structure their motion to include their own specific findings on the proposed project

III. VOTE

When bringing the matter to a vote the HPC must state the reasons why they take their position and adopt them as findings

IV. RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS

Preservation Planning recommends the following conditions be attached to any Certificate of Appropriateness that the HPC might grant for the decision regarding the retroactive installation of windows:

- 1. The Applicant/Owner shall file the Certificate with the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) by uploading it to the CitizenServe permitting portal with their application for zoning compliance/building permit.
- 2. A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be submitted to the Inspectional Services Department with a copy to preservation Planning at least fifteen (15) business days in advance of a request for a final inspection.
- 3. The Applicant shall contact Preservation Planning at historic@somervillema.gov a minimum of fifteen (15) business days prior to final ISD walk-through so that Preservation Planning or their designee can confirm if the project was completed according to HPC approvals.









Above: Atlantic Sign Media | ImaginOn Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library | Charlotte, NC | 8mm | 216 x 432 | 6' x 12' Top Right: Spectrum Sign | Industry City | Brooklyn, NY | 10mm | 630 x 630 | 21' x 21' Middle Right: Luminosity Supply & Solutions | Avalon Theatre | Grand Junction, CO | 6mm | 144 x 1872 | 3' x 39' Bottom Right: Phillips Sign Inc. | Fishermans Inn | Gransonville, MD | 8mm | 216 x 360 | 6' x 10'

We spoke with other Watchfire sign owners along the Jersey shore, and Watchfire received high recommendations for both the product's ability to resist the corrosive effects of the area's salty air and their customer service.

Ben Rose | The Greater Wildwood Tourism Improvement and Development Authority Wildwood, NJ

INSTALLATION

DESIGNED TO SAVE TIME & MONEY

Slim Cabinets

Slim design cabinets present a sleek 5-inch profile for a clean, modern look, while still providing the superior quality and reliability you expect from Watchfire. The slimmer cabinet design makes it easier to match the face of an ID sign to the LED component. Slim cabinets feature our patented front-ventilation and are available on signs with heights up to four feet and any width.

Front Ventilation Cabinets

Watchfire offers a cabinet with full, front-ventilation unlike any other on the market today. Front ventilation is standard on all 5-inch cabinets, and 8-inch cabinets with viewing areas five to seven feet high. This innovation provides additional sign design options for double-face or wall-mounted signs, or those in fully enclosed sign structures.

Mounting Track Channel

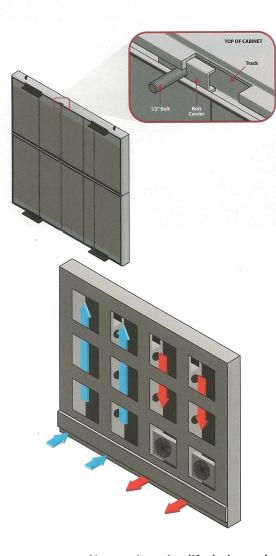
With adjustable attachment points for mounting Watchfire signs, our efficient track channel and clips give you flexibility during installation. This option is less expensive than methods using fixed bolts and saves your techs time in the field. The mounting track channel makes it easier to adjust your stringer to fit the track and makes it possible to attach the sign to any structure—giving you greater creativity with sign designs.

Committed to Conservation

To reduce waste and increase sustainability, Watchfire only paints the back of cabinets on request. Eliminating a step that is often unnecessary for many installations reduces the impact to the environment without affecting the durability of our high-quality aluminum cabinets.



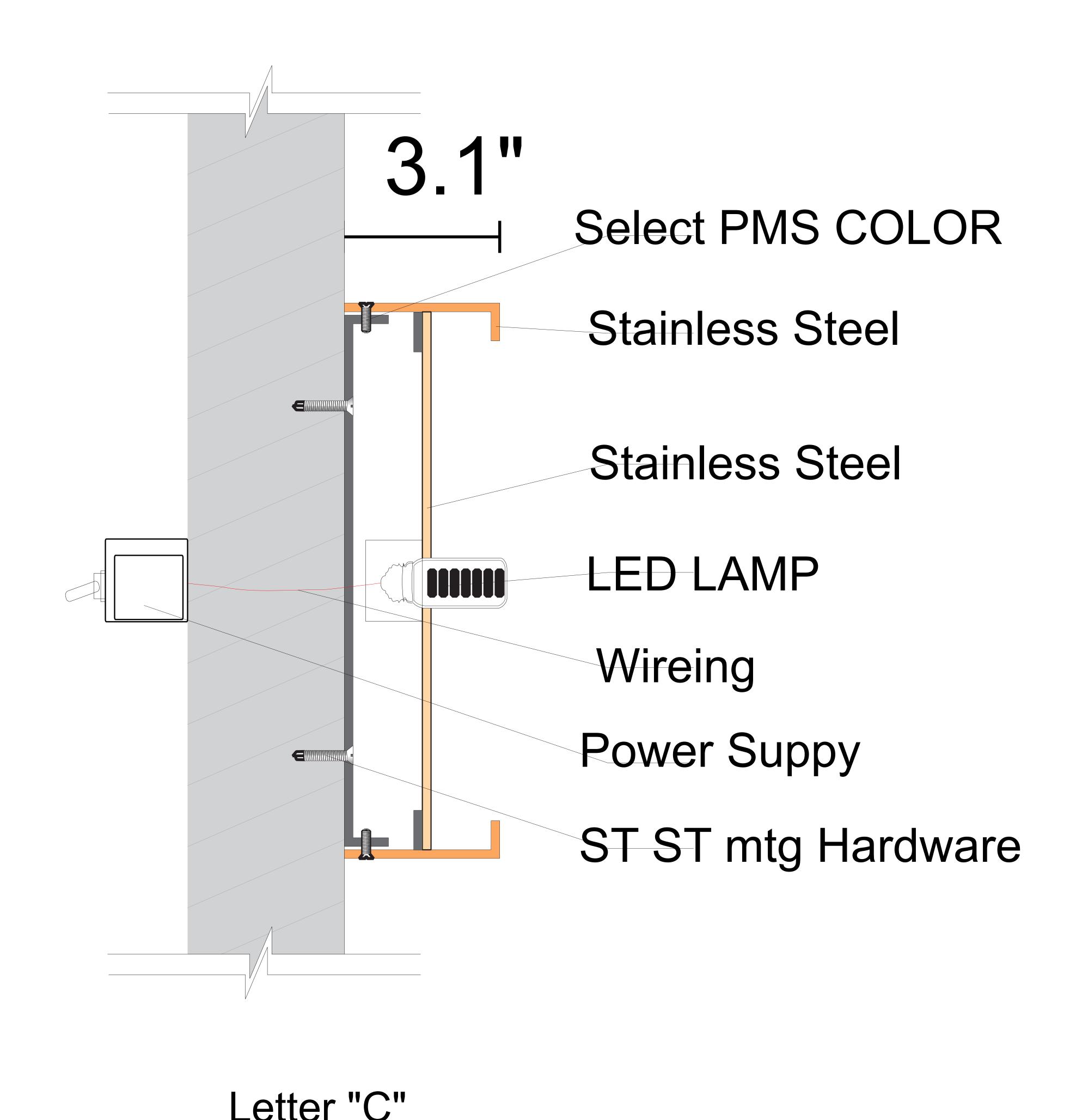
Penn Hodge Properties | Canton Mills | Canton, GA | 8mm | 324 x 576 | 9' x 16'

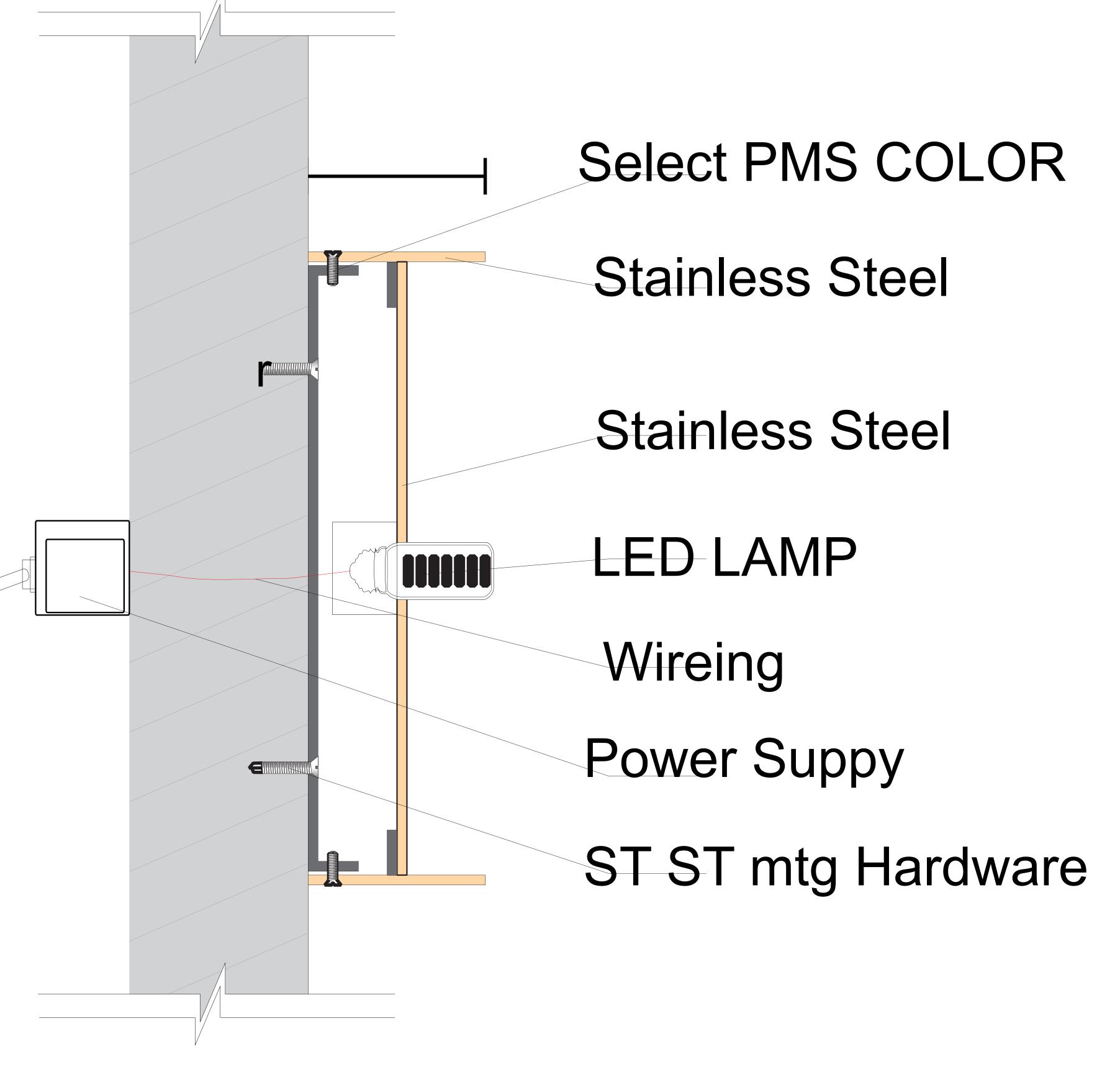


Our patented innovations simplify design and installation to save you time and money.



MESSAGE Board 12.25" x 103"







Zoom in on this





Revision Description:

Approved

Open Faced Chanell letters with LED

This drawing contains original elements subject to all applicable copyright laws. AGSI and it is intended for your review and not to be reproduced, copied, or exhibite anyone outside your organization without of Architecturtal Graphics & Signs Inc. AGS	This drawing is the property of approval purposes only. It is ed in any fashion or shown to the expressed written consent

lame/N°.		
ocation		
escription		
A-1		

Scale As noted	Date 07/26/21
Drawn CSt	Checked SIGN TO BE U.L. LISTED AND SHALL MEET N.E.C. STANDARDS Laboratories Inc. LISTED Laboratories Inc. LISTED LABORATORIC SIGN PRIMARIES AND FINAL CONNECTION TO SIGN BY: CERTIFIED ELECTRICIAN ALL ELECTRICAL COMPONENTS TO BE U.L. LISTED, APPROVED AND MARKED PER N.E.C. 600-4. ALL TO BE ELECTRICALLY GROUNDED PER N.E.C. 250. ALL POWER SUPPLIES TO BE FUSED PER U. L. 48, 28.2.1 GROUNDING AND BONDING PER N.E.C. 250-90, -92, -94, -96. SIGN TO MEET N.E.C. AND U. L. 48 STANDARDS FOR ELECTRICAL SIGNS. GROUNDING & BONDING AS PER N.E.C. 250-90 & NEC 600-7
Sheet 1/1	Dwg. N°. SK-1

Crystal Ballroom at Somerville Theatre

Crystal Ballroom Somerville Theatre 55 Davis Square Somerville, MA

Phone: 617-625-5700



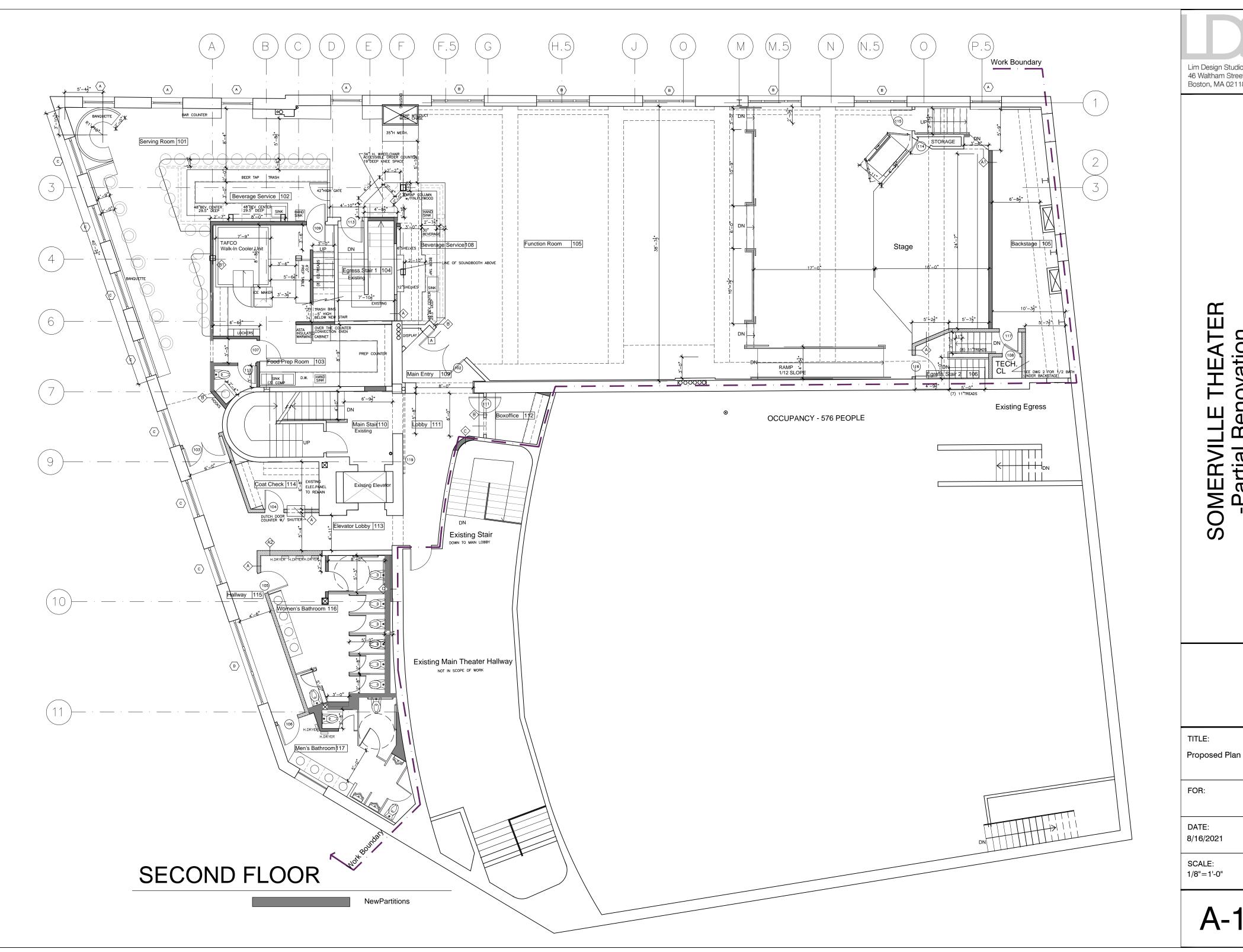
Propose to install one (1) new single faced illuminated sign/digital reader board for recessed area above doors. Overall size is 30" x 103" x 12" in depth, with "Crystal Ballroom" illuminated with exposed white LED lamps and accent lines and AT SOMERVILLE THEATRE having push thru halo lighting. Reader Board is 12" high with possible changing message and graphics for Theatre and Community messages.

Friday, August 13, 2021 Jim Did It Sign Co.

Salesperson: Bob Thompson Jim Did It Signs & Awnings 10 Draper Street Unit 11 Woburn, MA 01801 Phone: 781-933-1865

Phone: 781-933-1865 Fax: 781-933-1864

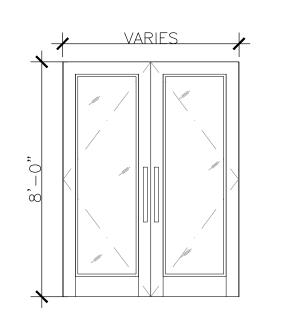
E-Mail: bthompson@jimdidit.com



Lim Design Studio, Inc. 46 Waltham Street #3 Boston, MA 02118

SOMERVILLE THEATI -Partial Renovation

A-1



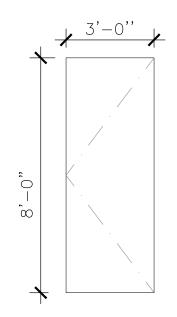
JELD WEN
DESIGN-PRO FIBERGLASS
CLAD OAK FULL VIEW GLASS
DOUBLE SWING W/
TRANSLUCENT FILM

MAIN THEATER LOBBY

004

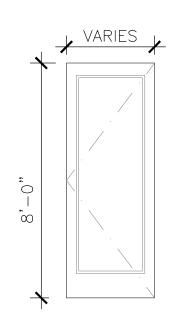
005

 \bigcirc A



USA FIRE DOOR
PTD. METAL DOOR
3HR. FIRE RATED
G-S10-161
OR SIMILAR

 \bigcirc B



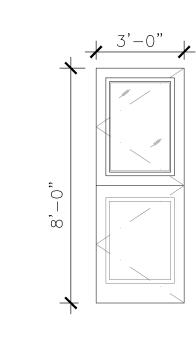
JELD WEN MOLDED WD.
COMPOSITE DOOR
PRO-CORE W/ NAUF
JW191200577
OR SIMILAR

(C)

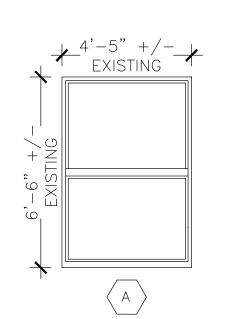
DBL

MAIN THEATER

EXIST. EXIST.



JELD WEN
MOLDED WD. COMPOSITE DOOR
DUTCH INTERIOR DOOR
W/ 1 LITE
OR SIMILAR CUSTOM



WINDOW SCHEDULE

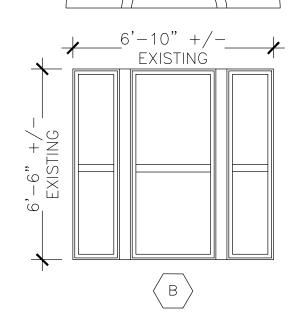
NEW WINDOWS AT EXIST. MASONRY OPENINGS

Jeld-Wen Aluminum Clad Wood or Similar

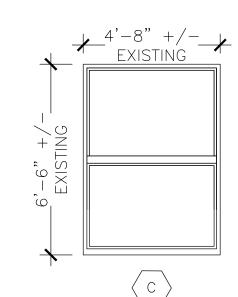


Jeld-Wen Aluminum Clad Wood (3)

REPLACE EXIST. W/ SOLID CORE



Jeld—Wen Aluminum Clad Wood (3) Arch Transom to remain or Similar



Jeld-Wen Aluminum Clad Wood or Similar

					SIZE							
DR#	FROM	ТО	TYPE	W	Н	TH	STYLE	MATERIAL	FINISH	HARDWARE	NOTE	JAMB
101	NOT USED	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	
102	MAIN ENTRY	FUNCTION ROOM	DBL	6'-0"	8'-0"	1-3/4"	А	_	SPLIT	_	FULL VIEW GLASS, FBR. GLASS/WE	6"
103	HALLWAY	SERVING ROOM	DBL	5'-4"	8'-0"	1-3/4"	А	_	SPLIT	_	FULL VIEW GLASS, FBR. GLASS/WE). 6"
104	HALLWAY	COAT CLOSET	SGL	2'-8"	8'-0"	1-3/4"	Е	MDF/GLASS	PTD	2	DUTCH DOOR	
105	HALLWAY	WOMAN'S BATHROOM	SGL	3'-0"	8'-0"	1-3/4"	С	MDF	PTD	2	-	
106	HALLWAY	MAN'S BATHROOM	SGL	3'-0"	8'-0"	1-3/4"	С	MDF	PTD	2	-	
107	SERVING ROOM	FOOD PREP ROOM	SGL	3'-0"	8'-0"	1-3/4"	С	MDF	PTD	1	-	
108	EGRESS STAIR 2	TECH. CL	SGL	2'-6"	6'-8"	1-3/4"	С	MDF	PTD	2	-	
109	BEVERAGE SERVICE	FOOD PREP ROOM	SGL	2'-8"	8'-0"	1-3/4"	С	MDF	PTD	4	TRAFFIC DOOR	
110	EGRESS STAIR 2	BELOW STAGE STORAGE	SGL	2'-6"	6'-0"	1-3/4"	В	METAL	PTD	2	120 MIN. DOOR	7-1/4"
111	LOBBY	BOX OFFICE	SGL	2'-3''	8'-0''	1-3/4"	Е	MDF/GLASS	_	2	DUTCH DOOR	
112	FOOD PREP ROOM	BATHROOM	SGL	2'-6"	8'-0"	1-3/4"	С	MDF	PTD	2	_	
113	FUNCTION ROOM	EGRESS STAIR 1	SGL	3'-0"	8'-0"	1-3/4"	В	METAL	PTD	3	120 MIN. DOOR	6"
114	STAGE	STORAGE CL	DBL	4'-0"	8'-0"	1-3/4"	_	MDF	PTD	_	BLIND-CUT DOOR	
115	FUNCTION ROOM	BACKSTAGE	SGL	3'-0"	8'-0"	1-3/4"	В	METAL	PTD	2	120 MIN. DOOR	6"
116	FUNCTION ROOM	EGRESS STAIR 2	SGL	3'-0"	8'-0"	1-3/4"	В	METAL	PTD	3	120 MIN. DOOR	6"
117	BACKSTAGE	EGRESS STAIR 2	SGL	2'-8"	6'-8"	1-3/4"	В	METAL	PTD	3	120 MIN. DOOR	6"
118	EGRESS STAIR 2	1/2 BATH	SGL	2'-6"	6'-8"	1-3/4"	С	MDF	PTD	2	_	
119	MAIN STAIR	LOBBY	G/SLIDE	6'-0"	7'-6"	1-3/4"	F	MDF/GLASS	PTD	_	SLIDING 'BARN' DOOR	
MAIN	THEATER LOBBY											
001	MAIN THEATER LOBBY	BOX OFFICE	SGL	2'-8"	6'-8"	1-3/4"	_	MDF/GLAS\$	PTD	2	1/2 LITE DOOR	
002	MAIN THEATER LOBBY	STORAGE	SGL	2'-8"	6'-8"	1-3/4"	С	MDF	PTD	2	_	
003	MAIN THEATER LOBBY	HC RESTROOM	SGL	2'-8"	EXIST.	1-3/4"	С	MDF	PTD	2	_	

MAIN THEATER LOBBY	MAIN THEATER	DBL EXIST.	EXIST. 1-3/4"	C MDF	PTD –	REPLACE EXIST. W/ SOLID CORE
	- ROXUL INSULATION OR SIMILAR - 5/8" DRYWALL - DRYWALL SCREW - 2 X 4 WD. STUD - BASEBOARD	5/8" DRYWALL 1/2 DUROCK 2 X 4 WD. STUD OR EQ.MTL STUD 5/8" SHEET ROCK ILE ROXUL INSULATION OR SIMILAR	5/8" DRYW DRYWALL S 2 X 6 WD. OR EQ.MTL	ALL CREW STUD STUD	ROXUL INSULATION OR SIMILAR 5/8" DRYWALL DRYWALL SCREW 2 X 4 WD. STUD 5/8" DRYWALL BASEBOARD	5/8" DRYWALL EXISTING EXTERIOR BRICK WALL
\bigcirc	2>		TILE FINISH ON ONE S	iDE 4		⟨ 5⟩
TYP. INTERIO	R WALL TYP. BATH	TILE WALL	TYP. 2X6 WALL	TYP. SOUND I	NSULATED WALL	TYP. EXTERIOR WALL

1-3/4"

MDF

PTD

DOOR HARDWARE

\bigcirc) ENTRY	DOOR	HARDWARE	_	DOUBLE	DOOR

(2) INTERIOR LEVER KEYED LOCK

(3) INTERIOR LEVER PASSAGE HANDLE

(4) INTERIOR PUSH PLATE

(5) INTERIOR POCKET DOOR HARDWARE

MOLDING PROFILES

5"	DOOR/WINDOW TRIM-Everywhere A&M #3658 + A&M #607
10,,	BASE MOLDING — Everywhere 1x8 FLAT STOCK+A&M CAP #1666
	FUNCTION ROOM COVE 9" COVE MOLDING
47,	FUNCTION ROOM EGG&DART EGG & DART MOLD.
2 TATB	FUNCTION/SERVING CHAIR RAIL A&M CHAIR MOLD. #1527
274	SERVING ROOM — COVE MOLDING A&M CROWN #5711

SOMERVILLE THEATER
-Partial Renovation

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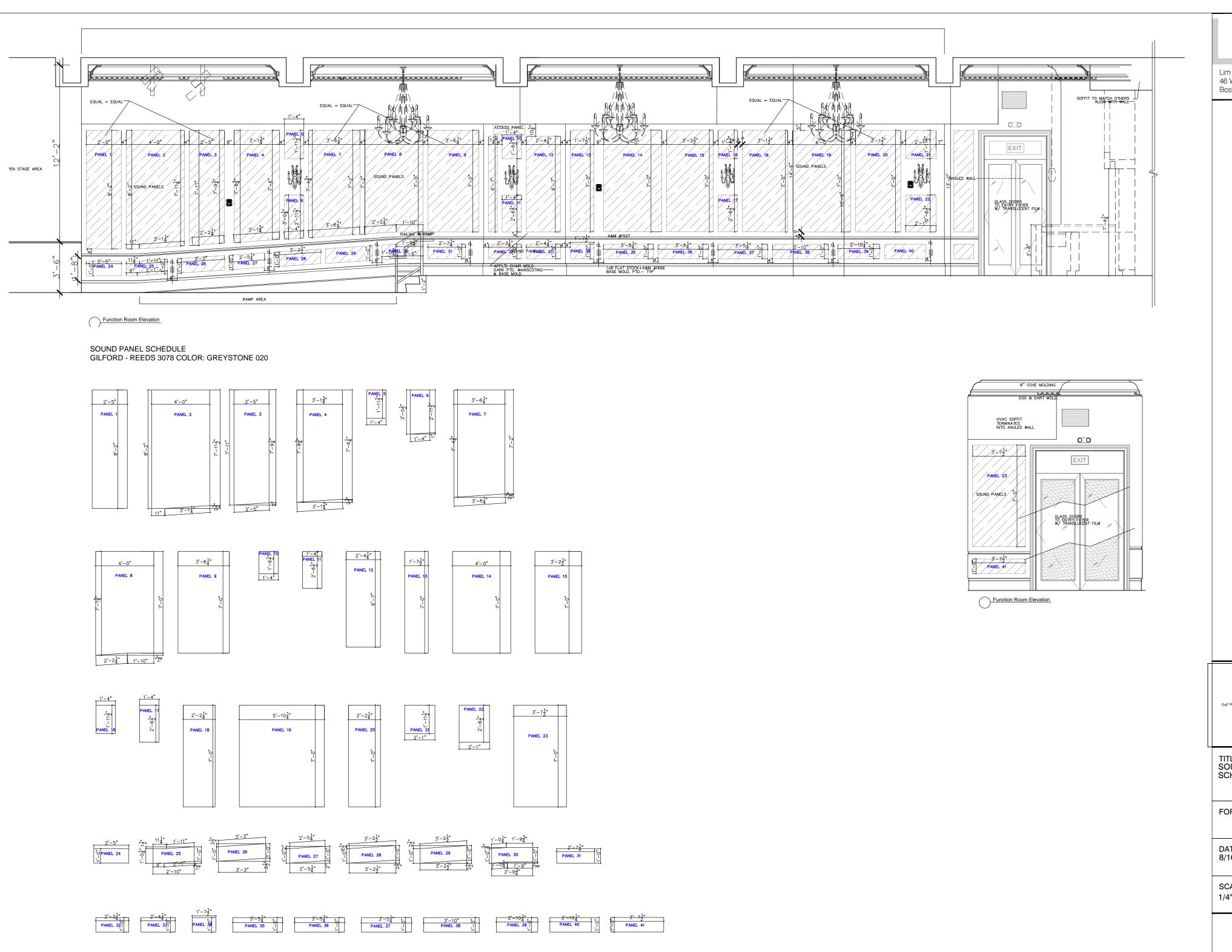
TITLE: Door Schedule, Wall Types, & Molding Set

FOR:

DATE: 8/16/2021

SCALE: NTS.

A-6





THEATER Renovation SOMERVILLE -Partial I

G:/My Drive/LDS Projects/newstamp.JPG

TITLE: SOUND PANEL SCHEDULE

FOR:

DATE: 8/16/21

SCALE: 1/4"=1'-0"

A-8

Close-up of windows before removal:





After Installation:







AREA

FORM NO.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION 80 BOYLSTON STREET *OSTON, MA 02116

Davis Square

SOMERVILLE

55 Davis Square

storic Name _Somerville Theatre/

Hobbs Building

359



Sketch Map: Draw map showing property's location in relation to nearest cross streets and/or seegraphical features. Indicate all buildings tween inventoried property and nearest atersection(s).

See Attached Assessor's Map

	::	Present	Movie	and	concert	theat
	į	Origina]	Movie	/vaud	leville	theatr
		IPTION				
	e	1914				
	1	News				
(A)		Neo				
Arc	1	ect Fu				
		or Wall i				
Out	bui	ldings _	none			
		-				
		ion fai	·			
MOV	ed _	n/a				
		11/ 4	Da	ite _	····	
		less				
Acre	e ag e		than o	ne a	cre	
Acre Seti	ag e ∶ing	less	than o	ne a	cre area; p	oromin∈
Acre Seti	age ing	less	than o	ne ao ical de of	cre area; p Davis	Promine Square
Seti	eage ing	less Urban on on we ersection	than ocommers est side on of H	ical de of Holla	area; r Davis nd, Dov	Promine Square
Seti	eage ing ati int	less Urban on on we ersection	than o	ical de of Holla	area; p Davis nd, Dov	Promine Square
Seti locat at Col:	eage ing ati int leg	less Urban on on we ersection	than ocommers est side on of H land, a ankie I rgen Ke	ical de of Holla and E Liebe	area; p Davis nd, Dov lm rman	Square er,

UTM REFERENCE			-sie
3 QUADRANGLE	Boston	North	
SCALE 1:2	5,000		

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA STATEMENT (if applicable)

The Somerville Theatre/Hobbs Building retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, and association with local entertainment which developed as a result of the suburbanization of Davis Square. It is Somerville's only remaining early 20th century theater still intact and in operation. The theater's significance falls from 1914 to 1932 when it served primarily as a stock house and from 1932 to 1940 when its interior was redone in the Art Deco style and it served as a movie house. The Somerville Theatre/Hobbs Building fulfills Criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places on the local level.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.

The Hobbs Building, prominently located at the central intersection of Davis Square, is typical in style and scale to the few remaining structures of its age in the square. In addition to a 1200 seat theater, the building was designed for numerous commercial and recreational uses including a bowling alley, billiard and pool room, a cafe, 23 business including 10 stores along the street level, 5 offices, and a 750 seat meeting hall with dance floor. Its plan is more complex than the other five theaters that existed in Somerville by 1914 when it opened. This sole survivor of the vaudeville era in Somerville is also the oldest theater built for the purpose of showing silent movies and vaudeville acts in the Boston area and was a possible prototype for the Strand Theatre (1918) in Dorchester designed by the same architects. (cont)

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how building relates to the development of the community.

The development of Davis Square is typical of Somerville's growth which paralleled the development of the railroad. The city began losing its rural character in 1843 when the first tracks of the Fitchburg Railroad were laid. Gradually pasture land, market gardens and country estates gave way to residential subdivisions with their own commercial centers. Davis Square was the estate of Person Davis, a grain merchant, and was suburbanized by the twin pressures of the Boston & Main Railroad Arlington line which came through in 1870 and then the coming of the electric streetcar in 1889 which converted the area to the transportation hub of a streetcar suburb. This trend is still in effect today as evidenced by the opening of the Davis Square MBTA station in 1984 within 50 feet of the location of the original B & M station and immediately adjacent to the theater.

As the City grew, centralized commercial squares developed within neighborhoods. The Somerville Theatre is the culmination of the suburbanization of Davis Square. Built in 1914 by Joseph O. Hobbs, a local businessman and lawyer, the theater provided commercial, recreational and cultural facilities for the community. The availability of public transportation made the appeal of the theater broad based. As one of six theaters that sprang up in the city between 1908 and 1914, it indicates the expanding population's need for nearby entertainment facilities. By 1925, ten theaters existed in the community. A total of fourteen different theaters existed in Somerville between 1908 and 1940, however, they were never all operational at one time. Some theaters were part of lodges or fraternal organizations and only operated for a few years. (cont)

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

- 1. Somerville Journal, May 8, 1914, March 11, 1933
- 2. City Directories: 1905 1940
- 3. Sanborn Map Company, Insurance Map of Somerville, MA, 1900, revised to 1928
- local history file, Somerville Library

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community:	Form No:
Somerville	35 9
Property Name: Somervill Hobbs Bui	e Theatre/ lding

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE (cont):

This three story Neo Classical Revival style building is made of yellow-grey brick with accents in stone, including a simple geometric pattern on the two major facades facing Holland and Dover Streets, classical details on the storefronts, and a dentil cornice. The corner of the front facade has a distinctive three story ornamental archway that marks the theater entrance, while the side facade has five large arched windows on the second floor for the meeting hall.

The exterior of the Somerville Theatre is somewhat altered although not irreversibly. Only two of the original ten storefronts are still in use, although several have been combined to create one larger storefront. The others are gutted and their door and window openings have been covered over with cement. Window openings originally blank are now in use and the sash have been replaced over the years, but there is no change in ornaments from the cornice and parapet over the theater entrance.

The interior of the theater has been neglected, but also does not appear to be irreversibly changed. The small lobby, typical of a vaudeville house where the audience came and went, has suffered the most change, probably in the 1960s. Wood paneling and tile sections have been applied over the walls. A dropped ceiling is suspended from the original which is a geometric tile mosaic in blue with bands of silver and gold which echoes the floor, also a tile mosaic in white with bands of red and black.

The theater interior was originally decorated in mixed 19th century style, pastel floral medallions with cherubs and was redone in Art Deco/Aztec geometrics, probably in 1932. Some of the original interior remains such as the red and gilt molded plaster of the proscenium and the capitals of the pilasters along the walls. These features are overlaid with the current and very unusual scheme of a painted tan and gilt background highlighted by green triangles, red circular shapes and black lines. The vertical accents of the exterior of the boxes and balcony are picked out in red and green. The balcony still has its original rose brocade panels on the walls and its original half moon wood and glass doors leading to the lobby. The narrow stage is still framed by red velvet curtains and a large movie screen forms the rear wall. Aside from these cosmetic changes, a few minor structural changes have also occurred. The lower boxes on both sides of the stage were removed and the orchestra pit was covered over to provide more seating. Otherwise the interior is intact. These changes have not affected the theater's excellent acoustics or its virtually unobstructed sightlines. (A few seats in the rear of the mezzanine are blocked by the columns which support the balcony.) These slight alterations probably occurred in 1932 when the theater reverted to being a movie house and live shows were no longer produced.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (cont)

The Somerville was the first theater built exclusively to show silent movies in conjunction with vaudeville shows. Its opening year was successful but a demand for live performance led to its conversion as a stock house in 1915. For the following seventeen years the theater produced a steady stream of plays ranging from comedies like "Charley's Aunt" to musicals like "Leave it to Jane" to serious drama like "Why Women Leave Home". Busby Berkeley acted, directed and tried out his radical choreography here before going to Hollywood. Nationally recognized artists such as Talluluh Bankhead and Francis X. Bushman appeared in productions as did local performers like Kay Corbett and her sisters. Kate Smith made her debut here at the age of 18 in 1927.

By 1932 the Depression had taken its toll and stock was no longer profitable. The theater, under the direction of the Viano family, closed briefly and reopened as a motion picture theater, again mirroring events elsewhere in the greater Boston area. At this time, the interior was redone in the unique Art Deco style which remains intact today. By 1940, it was one of eight movie theaters providing popular entertainment for the community, and today it survives as the only one still in operation. Over the years, Somerville's other theaters faced similar financial problems competing with television and other forms of entertainment and closed down one by one. The Somerville Theatre has been continuously in use as an entertainment and cultural resource since 1914 and this tradition continues today with the current theater operator's programming of films and live concert performances.

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INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community:

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Somerville

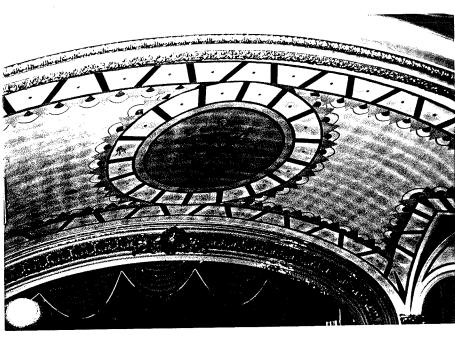
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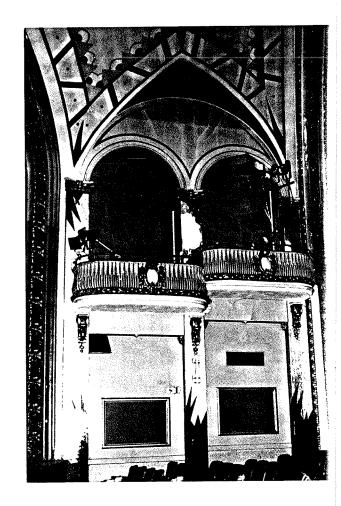
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