York County’s Hanover Theater, once “At Risk,” now slated for redevelopment

The Hanover Theater (originally State Theater) at 37-41 Frederick Street in downtown Hanover will be sold to a redevelopment group led by Jordan Ilyes. The historic theater was named to Preservation Pennsylvania’s list of threatened and endangered historic properties in 2011. The building is a contributing resource in the National Register-listed Hanover Historic District.

“We are delighted to see progress toward returning this wonderful building to productive use,” said Mindy Crawford, Executive Director of Preservation Pennsylvania. “Saving a historic building takes patience and perseverance, so the news of a new owner and a new use for the State Theatre is most welcome and rewarding after so many people worked to make this happen.”

Preservation Pennsylvania, in addition to listing the building to its Pennsylvania At Risk list to raise awareness and build support for its preservation, had also marketed the building by posting the real estate listing to its website. Working with a local preservation architect, Preservation Pennsylvania funded a feasibility study using their Intervention Fund for At Risk properties to evaluate the building for reuse.

Ilyes’ other area projects include the historic McAllister Hotel in downtown Hanover and the Keystone Color Works in downtown York.

About the Hanover/State Theater

Originally known as the State Theater, it began as a movie and live performance venue on September 21, 1928. Architect William Harold Lee, who was involved in the design of over 80 theaters, created a design featuring elements of the Spanish Colonial Revival and Moderne styles that were popular at the time.

The interior featured extensive ornamental plasterwork designed by Arthur Brounet, known for his extravagant murals and paintings. It is one of only two complete Brounet-decorated theaters still standing. While it is not known if any of Brounet’s murals exist beneath layers of paint added during renovations, he did design the elaborate plaster details that adorn the theater’s elegant interior.

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The State Theater's name was changed to the Hanover Theater in 1960 after the building was renovated. Its use as a theater continued until 1986, when owner Fox Brothers sold the theater to an antiques dealer who intended to turn it into an antiques mall. That plan was abandoned in 1991 and the Hanover Theater was instead used as a warehouse. Years of deferred maintenance have taken their toll on the building.

In 2007, members of an organization called Casual Arts, which assists in the restoration of theaters as part of downtown revitalizations, discovered the ailing theater and sought to preserve the rare Broun interior. A group of committed individuals formed a holding company called Historic Hanover Theater, LLC, and provided $500,000 to purchase and stabilize the building, with the understanding that Casual Arts would work to raise funds to purchase the theater within two years and begin rehabilitation of the mothballed structure. Unfortunately, in 2009, Casual Arts decided that the restoration project should be postponed until the revitalization of downtown Hanover was farther along, and the group would not take over the theater as planned. Historic Hanover Theater, LLC, considered keeping and rehabilitating the building, but decided that they did not have the means. The group attempted to find an interested buyer who would preserve the building as a theater.

By June of 2011, with no potential buyers and the building vacant, in decline and subject to vandalism, Preservation Pennsylvania listed the building on Pennsylvania At Risk. The annual listing is an effort to draw statewide attention to the plight of Pennsylvania’s historic resources; promote and support local action to protect historic properties; and encourage funding and legislation that supports preservation activities. Preservation Pennsylvania worked to find a new owner who would preserve the building as a performance venue. The size and location of the building make it vulnerable to conversion to apartments, retail, or other uses that would not allow for the retention of the theater's beautiful and character-defining features.

The theater is very well known in the community and sits in the heart of downtown, along one of Hanover's main streets. Many of the town's residents - past and present - have attended movies and performances in this building, creating memories that connect them to this special place.

About Preservation Pennsylvania

Preservation Pennsylvania is the commonwealth's only statewide, private, nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection of historically and architecturally significant resources. Helping people to protect and preserve Pennsylvania’s endangered historic properties is a top priority for Preservation Pennsylvania. The organization is committed to engaging with people interested in working to preserve and rehabilitate the landmarks they love. The Pennsylvania At Risk Intervention Fund offers small grants to listed At Risk properties to assist in seeking a positive outcome for the property. The fund is supported by donations from the public.

For more information about Preservation Pennsylvania, visit the website at www.preservationpa.org.

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