



Milwaukee Auditorium & Milwaukee Arena 412 West Kilbourn Avenue

PERMANENT HISTORIC DESIGNATION REPORT
CCF 250995
NOVEMBER 2025

MILWAUKEE AUDITORIUM & MILWAUKEE ARENA

HISTORIC DESIGNATION REPORT

AND PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

NOVEMBER 2025

PROPERTY NAME

Historic: Milwaukee Auditorium & Milwaukee Arena

Common Name: Milwaukee Theater, High Life Theater; MECCA Arena, Wisconsin Center Arena, U.S. Cellular Arena, UW-Milwaukee Panther Arena

LOCATION

Address: 412 West Kilbourn Avenue (400-500 West Kilbourn Avenue; 402-502 Cedar Street, old)

Legal Description: CERTIFIED SURVEY MAP NO 6245 IN NE & NW 1/4 SEC 29-7-22 PARCEL 1 BID #21

Classification: Site

NOMINATION DETAILS

Owners: Wisconsin Center District

Nominator: Alderman Robert Bauman

Aldersperson: Alderman Robert Bauman, 4th District

BUILDING DATA

YEAR BUILT 1907-1909 (Auditorium); 1948-1950 (Arena)

ARCHITECT Ferry & Clas (Auditorium); Eschweiler & Eschweiler (Arena)

STYLE Neoclassical/Beaux Arts (Auditorium); Contemporary (Arena)

AREA DESCRIPTION

The Milwaukee Auditorium and Milwaukee Arena sit on a rectangular parcel that spans two city blocks between West State Street and West Kilbourn Avenue on the north and south and North Vel R. Phillips Avenue (formerly North 4th Street) and North 6th Street on the east and west. The parcel is approximately 660' long east-west and 425' deep

running north-south. The Milwaukee Auditorium, constructed 1907-1909, occupies the western half of the parcel, from the former North 5th Street west to North 6th Street. The Milwaukee Arena, constructed 1948-1950, occupies the eastern half of the parcel, from the former North 5th Street east to North Vel R. Phillips Avenue. Prior to construction of the Arena, the right of way for North 5th Street was vacated and a hyphen was constructed to connect the two buildings where the original 5th Street entrance to the Auditorium was located.

The buildings are located in the Central Business District in an area characterized by civic and institutional buildings. This area of the Central Business District was developed as the “Civic Center” and encompasses an area spanning from West Wisconsin Avenue on the south to West Highland Boulevard on the north, North Water Street on the east and North 10th Street on the west. The Auditorium and Arena are centrally located in the Civic Center, along with other buildings including the Milwaukee County Court House, Public Safety Building, State Office Building, Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee Public Museum, Fiserv Forum, Baird Center convention and exhibition center, and the newly constructed Landmark Credit Union Live concert venue, along with numerous hotels.

BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS

MILWAUKEE AUDITORIUM

The following description is largely taken from the designation study report for the Milwaukee Auditorium written by Historic Preservation Commission staff in 2000. The description has been updated to include modern names for streets and buildings and to reflect changes to both the area and the building since the prior report was written. The original 2000 study report is available on the Historic Preservation Commission’s website.

The Milwaukee Auditorium was designed by renowned Milwaukee architectural firm Ferry and Clas in 1907 in the Neoclassical/Beaux Arts architectural style. The building is a three-story red brick building with Ionic details. A wide entablature and a belt course of beige stone emphasize the horizontal character of the building and tie the two-part structure together. These horizontals divide the raised basement, the main floors, and the tall parapet that goes around the roofline of the whole building. This lighter stone is also used for the columns originally on the front and the bases and capitals of the piers around the building.

The Auditorium Annex housed the original front façade along Fifth Street. This wing is rectangular in shape and features projecting end pavilions and a projecting center entrance. The entrance featured a series of two-story fluted ionic columns, the middle ones grouped in twos; they have been replaced with flat brick piers similar to others on the building. At the north and south projecting end pavilions are two story engaged columns on either side of centered windows. Five windows flank either side of the original front entrance. Five bays span the south side of the Annex. The windows are separated into bays by Ionic pilasters of brick. The three center bays on the first floor originally contained windows but these were modified with paired entry doors and transom windows on the early-2000s renovation. The entry stairs for the original door in the western bay of the first floor were removed during this renovation and a semi-circular vehicular drive was constructed. A metal canopy with a metal tracery design along the roof edge was also added at that time. The three middle windows on the second floor of the north side have been bricked shut, as have the squat rectangular windows at the basement level. The Annex has a large stone entablature with a dentil cornice. The roof appears to be flat; it cannot be seen from the ground due to the brick parapet wall.



Milwaukee Auditorium, 2025

The south facade of the main auditorium, formerly Bruce Hall and now known as the Miller High Life Theater, has now become the primary front of the building. The roof is hipped, but a parapet wall of beige metal that extends the original brick parapet wall now obscures the lowest part of the roof. This parapet is embossed with “Milwaukee Theater” and is adorned with panels containing artwork showing scenes reminiscent of WPA-era

designs depicting Wisconsin history. Nine entry doors are centered along this façade in a projecting one story pavilion that is fronted by side-oriented stairs and ADA-accessible ramps. The grand stairway entrance was removed during the early-2000s renovations and a metal canopy similar to the one found on the Annex is installed over the entry. To either side is a two-story pavilion with pairs of exit doors on the ground level and windows on the second story. Tripartite fixed replacement windows are located on the upper story across the façade. Semi-circular metal domes were added to the far ends of the façade at the stairwells and a metal-domed cupola at the peak of the hipped roof were added during the early-2000s renovations.

The west elevation is utilitarian in character and consists of a series of large and small tripartite windows. It appears to have been little altered other than the replacement windows and artwork that were installed in the parapet similar to the designs on the south façade.

The north elevation was originally set back from State Street due to the early deed restrictions about the property's public use and were later implemented in the zoning code. With the widening of State Street this buffer zone has been reduced. The façade originally featured a gabled center pavilion that extended above the parapet wall. The gabled center pavilion was removed when the northern part of the building was rebuilt during the early-2000s renovation. Foundation pilings made of wood were found to be deteriorated, necessitating a rebuild.¹ This elevation, like the west front, is utilitarian in character. The façade is symmetrical and void of window openings. Large louvered vents are located in the middle of the center projecting pavilion. This is the primary loading area for the complex and features two truck bays. The hipped roof was removed during renovations and the façade now has a flat roof and flat penthouse level that extend above the historic hipped roof. Building mechanicals are located on the flat roofs.

Alterations to the exterior consist of modifications to the original doors and window areas and the rear (north) façade, as mentioned above. Metal canopies and new circulation were added to the Kilbourn Avenue entrances with the early-2000s renovations. The original main entry on Fifth Street has been modified with the construction of the addition that links the Auditorium to the Arena. This connection itself constitutes a historic 75-year old historic modification as of 2025. The parapet wall has been extended above the original but the original is still intact. The original multi-paned sash and French style windows have been replaced since the 1970s, though the shape of their openings has not changed. Many of these alterations are reversible and do not negatively impact the building's significance to the community.

¹ Bobby Tanzilo, "Urban Spelunking: Miller High Life Theatre & UWM Panther Arena," OnMilwaukee.com, September 20, 2024, <https://onmilwaukee.com/articles/meccaspelunking>



Milwaukee Arena, 2025

MILWAUKEE ARENA

The Milwaukee Arena is an International style building designed by Eschweiler & Eschweiler and constructed in 1948-1950. The building is clad with red brick-veneer set in a six-course common bond. The building has a prominent round-arched, telescoping roof clad with copper panels that projects from the brick mass of the building. The south façade along West Kilbourn Avenue is the primary façade for the building. This symmetrical façade contains a projecting entrance pavilion that extends to the sidewalk, with a rounded flat roof canopy roof with aluminum fascia covering the primary entrances. The entrances consist of five bays of doors, with the center three bays containing six doors each and the outer bays containing three doors each. Between the bays are slightly projecting dividers with round posts that support the canopy. The first floor entrance under the canopy is clad with red granite veneer panels. The second level of the entry pavilion consists of five recessed bays of large windows in aluminum frames and separated by angled concrete piers. This pavilion is framed by red brick matching the rest of the building. On both sides of the pavilion the word “ARENA” in raised metal letters is arranged vertically. Behind the entry pavilion is the primary building face of the building. A large “UW-MILWAUKEE PANTHER ARENA” with Panther logo wall sign is located on the brick wall above the entry pavilion. The building recesses slightly on either side of the front wall, with each side having a band of windows set in a horizontal bay on the first floor and a horizontal band of the same size with louvered vents on the third

floor. The building is canted slightly at the corners, with each corner having banks of exit doors on the first floor covered by small flat-roof canopies. The upper portion contains six vertical bands of brick separated by brick pilasters. The bands are corbelled on the tops and bottoms. Four decorative vertical metal bands set in the center four bands. A modern statue is located to the west of the entry and is not contributing to the building.

The secondary façade faces east along North Vel R. Phillips Avenue (formerly North 4th Street). This façade is also symmetrical and has a center entry pavilion clad with limestone projecting slightly from the primary building front. The entry has three banks of doors set in limestone bands that rise to the second level. Large single-pane windows above the entry doors mirror the layout of the doors below. A flat-roof canopy with aluminum fascia projects above the entry doors. The remainder of the first floor of the east façade contains the Wisconsin Athletic Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame consists of bronze plaques of figures significant to Wisconsin sports history attached to concrete pillars. The Hall of Fame was established in 1951, with plaques originally located within the Arena. The exhibit outgrew the interior of the Arena and was moved to the exterior in 2001. The Wisconsin Athletic Hall of Fame is not contributing to the significance of the Arena. The remainder of the east façade consists of long bands of windows set in limestone surrounds flanking the entry pavilion and spanning nearly the entire length of the façade above the entry. Another large “UW-MILWAUKEE PANTHER ARENA” wall sign is centered on the façade above the band of windows. A triangular electronic projecting sign was added to the southeast corner in 2024.

The west façade largely unadorned and is similar to the east façade. The façade contains large bands of horizontal windows set in simple limestone bands. The corners are canted and have brick bands with decorative metal panels that match the east corners. Banks of exit doors are located at the corners under a flat-roof canopy. The east façade also contains the hyphen connection that connects the Arena with the Auditorium. The hyphen is raised from street level and accessed from the south via concrete stairs and a concrete ramp that lead to a series of entry doors. The north façade of the hyphen contains entry doors set in a limestone surround that mimics the east façade, though at a much smaller scale.

The north façade faces West State Street and is asymmetrical. The center of the façade contains an entry pavilion that resembles a scaled-down version of the east entry. To the left of the entry is a projecting section that is flush to the sidewalk with the entryway. This section contains louvered vents and does not contain any window openings. A modern mural that appears to depict a peacock feather is painted on a panel and attached to the façade at ground level. A wall sign similar to the east and south facades is located just below a modern corrugated metal panels that screen rooftop HVAC equipment. To the right of the entry is a ramp leading to a below-grade loading area. Above the ramp are

two bands of horizontal windows with limestone surrounds similar to the other three facades. A band of louvered vents set in a limestone surround is on the third story in the northwest corner of the building.

HISTORY

The following history of the Milwaukee Auditorium is largely taken from the designation study report for the Milwaukee Auditorium written by Historic Preservation Commission staff in 2000. The history has been edited for brevity, reorganized, edited to include changes since it was originally written, and to include additional information on history the Milwaukee Arena. The original 2000 study report for the Milwaukee Auditorium is available on the Historic Preservation Commission's website.

The land where the Milwaukee Auditorium/Miller High Life Theater now stands has long been used for public purposes and as an important civic center in the city. In 1835, Byron Kilbourn, one of the "founding fathers" of the city of Milwaukee, gave to the city as a bequest most of the land between 5th Street, 6th Street, Cedar Street (now Kilbourn Avenue), and State Street. His only stipulations were that it be used as public grounds, house a public marketplace and a specific part would never be built upon. The area was used for various purposes, and in 1867 a permanent structure, called "Market Hall," was erected on the southern portion. This building was used as a skating rink and later a public market and meeting hall and it was used for bicycle races and as a gathering spot for shows like traveling minstrels. "Market Hall" was torn down in 1880, and the land, along with another parcel bought by the city, was given in a 50-year lease to the Milwaukee Industrial Exposition Association in order to build an exposition hall for the city.

Exposition Hall, designed by Edward Townsend Mix, was opened on September 6, 1881. The building was a dramatic Queen Anne structure with a tremendous dome and both an indoor fountain and a basement aquarium. It was regarded as the city's crown jewel and was regarded as the best exposition center in the country.² For decades, it housed the annual industrial exposition during which the businesses of Milwaukee touted their work. The building was also one of the first in the city to use electric light. In 1903, the Merchants and Manufacturers Association created a committee to consider replacing the aging 1880's Exposition Hall, however, a massive fire destroyed the hall on June 4, 1905, and created an urgent need for a new building.

² Catherine Jones, "Milwaukee Exposition Building," *Encyclopedia of Milwaukee*, accessed October 15, 2025, <https://emke.uwm.edu/entry/milwaukee-exposition-building>.



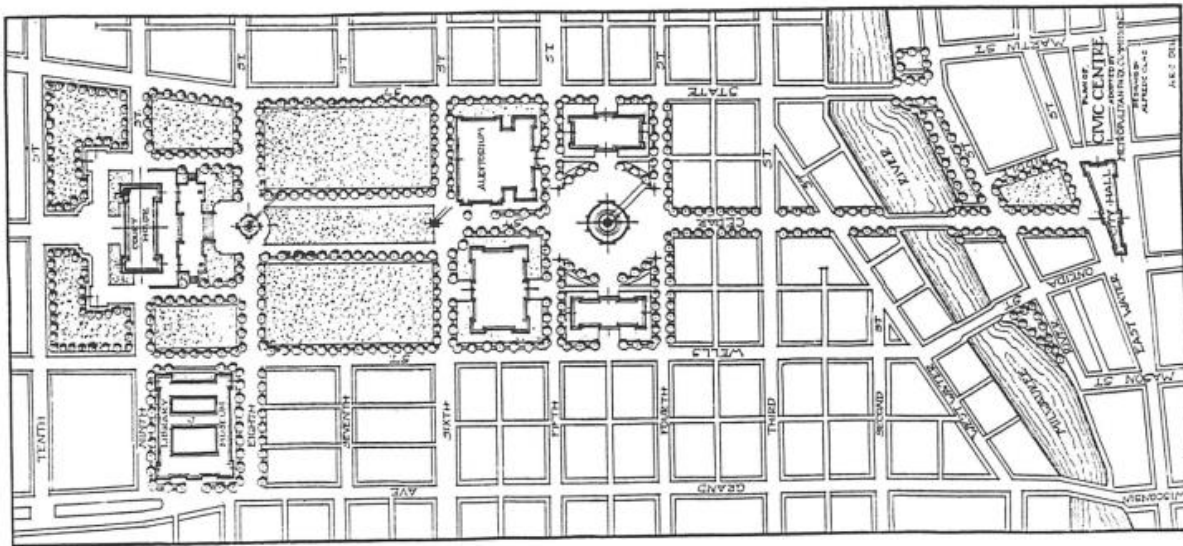
Milwaukee Exposition Building prior to June 4, 1905 fire

The Wisconsin Legislature passed a law which called for the building of a new Auditorium. The Legislature's measure allowed for \$250,000 in public funds, to be matched by private subscriptions of \$250,000, allowing for a total cost of \$500,000 for the structure. The Auditorium committee sent out the call for money and through intensive campaigning, both companies and private individuals gave generously to the cause. The city raised its portion with a bond issue. After some initial disagreement over the location of the structure, the location of the old Exposition Hall was ultimately selected because it was already owned by the city and was conveniently located on streetcar lines.

A nation-wide competition for building plans was announced, which drew responses from architects all over the country. The building cost was set at \$450,000 to allow for unforeseen costs and the cost of furnishings. Twelve plans were anonymously reviewed and the first prize was awarded to the Milwaukee firm of Ferry & Clas. Their plans were chosen largely because the interior arrangement was deemed the most functional for the purpose of the building. The exterior of the building, however, was modified after the competition to "one which is more classic in design and at the same time more graceful and dignified in outline."³

³ William George Bruce, *The Auditorium: A Detailed Description of the Auditorium Building and a Brief Historic Review of the Labors and Incidents Leading to the Erection of the Same* (Milwaukee: Auditorium Governing Board, 1909), 32.

The Auditorium was the first building planned in the newly conceived “Civic Center.” The Civic Center idea was centered on the idea that public buildings are grouped around park-like malls meant to impress visitors with its beauty and to instill pride in the residents of the city. Referred to as the City Beautiful movement, this interest in improving the urban landscape through classically inspired buildings and rational landscaping was presented at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 and later used in the plan of the National Mall in Washington D.C. Milwaukee city leaders first contemplated the idea for a Civic Center in 1905, and the construction of the Milwaukee Auditorium was an integral part in developing the concept. In 1909, the year the Auditorium was completed, Milwaukee’s first civic center plan was brought forward by architect Alfred C. Clas.⁴ It included the Auditorium in its span from Wells Street to State Street and from 4th Street to 9th Street. A 1920 referendum officially designated this area for major civic buildings. The present County Courthouse was integral to this program as the focal point at the western end of the widened Kilbourn Avenue; the courthouse was completed in 1932 in Neoclassical style.



PLAN FOR THE CIVIC CENTER OF MILWAUKEE ON THE AXIS OF CEDAR STREET

1910 Revised Scheme for Civic Center

⁴ Landscape Research, *Built In Milwaukee: An Architectural View of the City* (Milwaukee: City of Milwaukee, 1980). 128.

Auditorium President Alvin P. Kletzsch laid the cornerstone on August 1, 1908, among much fanfare. The festivities included an immense parade in which an estimated ten thousand people from local clubs, organizations, and bands took part. Leaders integral to erecting the building made speeches, and at the lowering of the cornerstone, all of the fireboats on the Milwaukee River blew their whistles. Similar festivities were planned for the dedication of the Milwaukee Auditorium, which occurred over three days in September, 1909.



THE AUDITORIUM. FRONT FACADE ON FIFTH STREET.

Original front façade of the Auditorium circa 1909

The Auditorium has been a well-used facility from its opening day. Statistics from the 1920's show that it was common for 800 to 1,000 events (concerts, lectures, sports, expositions, etc.) to take place there annually. The Milwaukee Auditorium was such a success it became the prototype for such buildings in cities throughout the country. The mayor of Detroit and a committee of citizens visited the opening celebration because his city was looking to build an auditorium. The Mayor of Milwaukee at the time, David S. Rose, called the Auditorium "a monument to the triumph of optimism. In it is manifest the spirit of progress, for it incomparably excels all that have preceded it."

One of the most famous incidents occurred on October 14, 1912, when President Theodore Roosevelt was slated to speak as Progressive Party candidate. Half an hour before his

[illegible]

At the beginning of the Great War (WWI), the men who enlisted in the first unit from Milwaukee to be sent overseas were barracked in the building. The night before their departure, civic leaders organized a dinner for the soldiers and their families. Upon their return, a large celebration was held in the Auditorium. During the Spanish Flu pandemic that swept the country in 1917 and 1918, the Auditorium instigated "influenza seating;"

rows were spaced widely, and monitors sat at the ends to catch signs of sickness. When the sickness was at its height, the building became a hospital to care for the afflicted.



Milwaukee Auditorium decorated for American Legion convention, 1941. Milwaukee Public Library Digital Collections

Political organizations often used it for meetings and rallies, sometimes leading to controversy. In the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan wanted to have a rally in the building "to teach [Milwaukee] law and order." Then Mayor Daniel W. Hoan wrote back, "you come here and touch a hair on the head of one Catholic, one Jew, one chiropractor, or one anything else, and I'll make this the hottest place this side of hell for the Ku Klux Klan."⁵ In 1935, many protested the communist utilization of the facility, but others championed free speech to all. It took a plea from local church leaders, citing the Milwaukee Auditorium's availability for orderly meetings, to authorize the communist rental. In 1938, a German group was not allowed to meet in the structure because of tension caused Nazi Germany's aggression in Europe; this troubling time was particularly evident in Milwaukee, a city with a large German immigrant population. During World War II, the Auditorium was used to host bond concerts to raise funds for the American effort in the war.

When not reflecting world history, however, the Milwaukee Auditorium contributed to the lives of those who came to see its cultural events. Music was an essential part of the

⁵ Kuklux Barred From Auditorium," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 19, 1922.

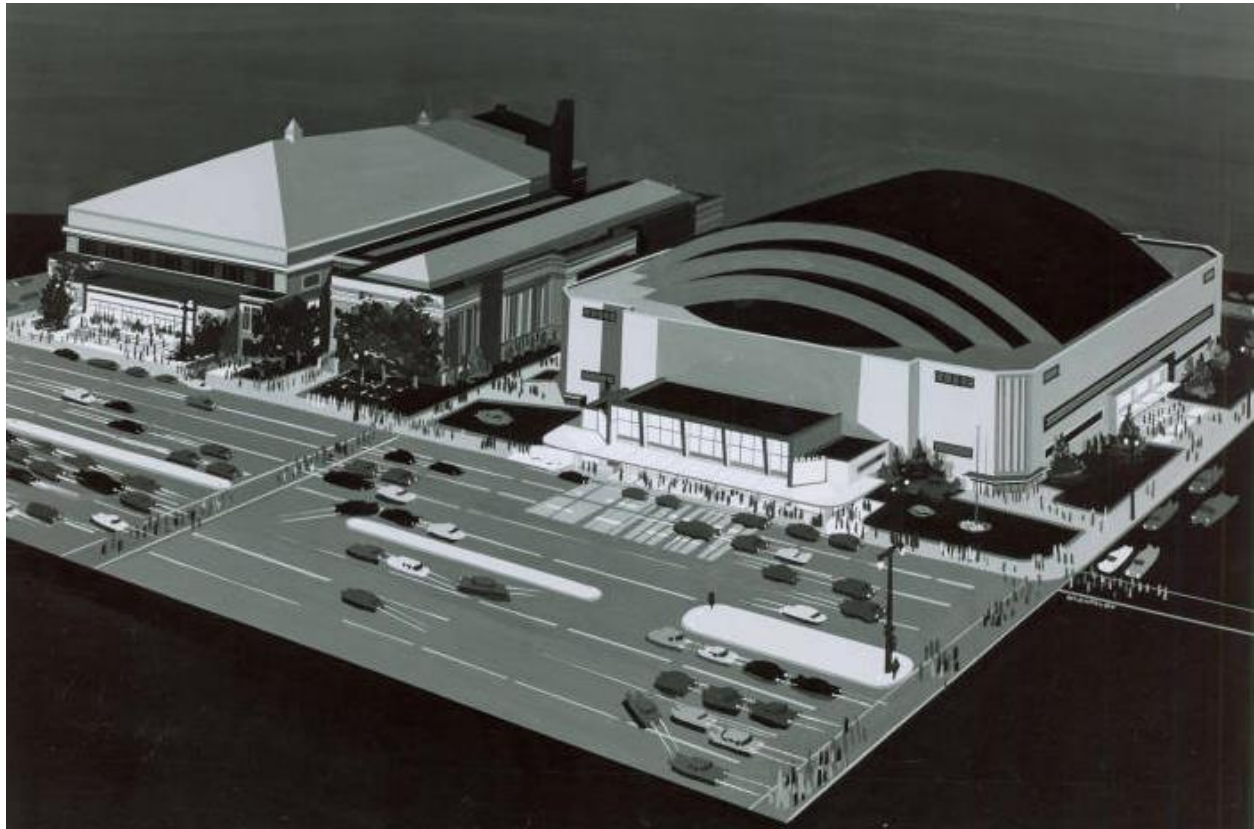
Auditorium's role. Opera stars Geraldine Farrar and Olga Samaroff kicked off the Auditorium's list of legendary headliners in 1909. New York's Metropolitan Opera Company with singers such as Enrico Caruso included the Auditorium on its tour. The main stage was host to Yascha Heifetz, John Philip Sousa, and Louis Armstrong. In its early years, Oscar Wilde and Richard Strauss' opera *Salome* played in Bruce Hall after being banned in major cities across Europe and in the United States. The sensuous "Dance of the Seven Veils" and its violent content did little to perturb Milwaukee viewers. In 1948, the Polka King contest crowned legendary Frankie Yankovic and Four Cleveland Kids as the best polka band. In the 1960's, Herman's Hermits entertained a crowd of screaming fans, while the television show *Shindig* taped an episode of its show at the Auditorium.

Besides cultural events, community shows and fund-raisers regularly utilized the many rooms of the Auditorium. Exhibitions such as the Milwaukee Auto Show, the Milwaukee Sentinel Sports Show, the annual Home Show and the Holiday Folk Fair were booked at the Auditorium for decades. Numerous organizations and clubs planned fairs, dinners, and dances in the building. The Shriners' circus regularly thrilled visitors. The Masonic organization called Job's Daughters entertained with their Carnival, and Marquette University performed commencement services in Bruce Hall. However, as early as the 1930's, Milwaukee's Auditorium ranked smaller than many public halls in other communities and by World War II, it was evident that there were problems in using the Auditorium as a sports arena.

Following the Great Depression and World War II, there was a pent up appetite for large civic improvements and in 1945 the city began to raise money to build a new structure devoted to sports. The 1948 Corporation, later changed to Greater Milwaukee Committee, was organized in 1945 to celebrate the state's centennial. The organization was a "non-partisan, non-political, non-sectional" group committed to community improvement.⁶ The organization proposed a series of civic improvements, including an indoor sports arena, an outdoor stadium, a war memorial, a new museum, modernization of the library and new zoo facilities, as well as seeking freeway and downtown parking development. The Arena project was the first of many completed projects, including Milwaukee County Stadium (1950-53, demolished 2001), a new terminal at Mitchell Field (1955), a new location for the Milwaukee County Zoo (1956-61), the War Memorial Center (1957), an

⁶ John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999), 347.

addition to the Central Library (1957), and a dedicated building for the Milwaukee Public Museum (1960-63).



Early rendering showing the Auditorium and Arena

The city acquired the land adjacent to the Milwaukee Auditorium by the late-1940s and a supportive Auditorium Board encouraged locating the new Arena next to, and ultimately attached to, the existing Auditorium. The Arena was financed through a mix of revenue bonds of \$750,000 from the Auditorium Board and a one million dollar appropriation from the City of Milwaukee. Profits from both the Auditorium and the Arena were to be applied to the bond interest and principle.⁷ Milwaukee firm of Eschweiler & Eschweiler, led by Alex Eschweiler, Jr. was selected to design the new arena. A ground breaking ceremony for the Arena was held on November 3, 1948, with a raucous ceremony attended by city officials, business leaders, and other dignitaries. Ninety-two year old William George Bruce, instrumental in getting the Auditorium constructed in 1907 and the namesake of Bruce Hall, was present and broke ground with a gilded shovel.⁸ The

⁷ Michael T. McQuillen, "Milwaukee Arena," National Register of Historic Places Determination of Eligibility Form, December 2010, 9.

⁸ "Bruce Breaks Ground For Arena," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 4, 1948.

cornerstone was laid on August 26, 1949 and construction continued through the year, with anticipation building for the new Arena.



Arena under construction, circa late-1949. Milwaukee Public Library Digital Collections

Newspaper articles and editorials through this time were effusive in their excitement for the new building. Businesses such as Gimbels, Pabst, Schuster's, The Heil Co., and the Schroeder Hotel took out advertisements celebrating the opening of the Arena. Gimbels ad proclaimed "the completion of the Arena marks a new era in the history of our city. It's a dream-come-true for forward-looking citizens who have worked for Milwaukee's progress."⁹ Articles celebrated the city's progress and heralded the opening as a huge step forward for the city and inspiration for the future. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* asserted the Arena "is the embodiment of the hope and dreams of forward-looking citizens who would not be defeated. It is not alone the city's most important step forward physically and psychologically in many years – it is the best possible proof that the next steps can be taken."¹⁰

The new, five-million dollar structure opened on April 9, 1950, kicking off a week-long celebration called "Progress Week." More than 11,000 citizens attended the opening night ceremony, which was also attended by public officials including U.S. Senator Alexander

⁹ "Gimbels salutes a job well done! Congratulations Milwaukee on it's new Arena," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 9, 1950.

¹⁰ "Forward-Looking City Made Arena Possible," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 9, 1950.

Wiley, U.S. Congressmen Andrew Biemiller and Clement J. Zablocki, and former mayors Daniel Hoan and John Bohn.¹¹ President Truman was also invited to the ceremony, as he had not been to the city since his 1948 presidential campaign. Programming included a procession of fraternal organizations, music and dancing, and performances by national stars including Frances Langford, Art Linkletter, William Bendix, Lawrence Welk, Eddy Arnold, the Carter Family and Chet Atkins.¹²

Speakers for the evening touted the city's bright future and the "new conventions, new and bigger sporting events, more spectacular shows and events that heretofore had bypassed Milwaukee" that were in the city's future.¹³ Those unable to attend the sold-out program were able to watch a 90-minute program on WTMJ-TV. With a seating capacity



Milwaukeeans fill the Arena during opening celebrations. <https://www.jsonline.com/picture-gallery/life/green-sheet/2025/04/09/a-look-back-at-when-milwaukee-threw-a-weeklong-party-for-its-new-arena/82571253007/>

¹¹ McQuillen, "Milwaukee Arena," 9.

¹² "Wisconsin Center District facilities timeline," Wisconsin Center District, accessed October 20, 2025, https://wcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/facilities-timeline_200825.pdf

¹³ "Arena Unveils Its Space to Cheers of 11,000," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 10, 1950.

of 12,570, the city's convention center space had more than doubled and allowed for the professional basketball, hockey, and other sports the speakers that evening anticipated.¹⁴

The Arena turned a profit in its first year of operation and was declared a success. The success of the project was cited as tangible evidence of a civic-reawakening in the city.¹⁵ The Greater Milwaukee Committee in their 1950 annual report noted:

Until this year, there was little real proof that Milwaukee could regain the spirit of its pioneer past, or that Milwaukee could march forward to a better living for its citizens. Today Milwaukee has that proof. The Arena, constructed despite obstacles, constructed by sheer concentration of unselfish, forward-minded action by both public officials and citizens alike, is proof that when there is a need in Milwaukee there will be a way. Here is a completed project... in use... bringing to almost a million Milwaukeeans real, tangible benefits, both financial and psychological.¹⁶

The Arena was home to the first professional basketball team in the city, the Milwaukee Hawks, starting in 1951, when the Tri-City Blackhawks relocated from Moline, Illinois, that year. The team was secured when Fred Miller of Miller Brewing Company agreed to financially back the team's relocation. The team played four seasons before moving to St. Louis in 1955, before ultimately ending up in Atlanta starting in 1968. Professional basketball returned to the Arena in 1968, when Milwaukee was awarded an expansion team. The Milwaukee Bucks made the Arena their home from 1968 until the opening of the nearby Bradley Center in 1988. The team's early success, led by Lew Alcindor (later known as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar) and Oscar Robinson, culminated in an NBA championship in the 1970-1971 season. In 1977, pop artist Robert Indiana was commissioned to paint a brightly colored MECCA floor for on the Bucks basketball court. The Arena was also the home for Marquette University's men's basketball team from 1974-1988 and has been the home of the Milwaukee Admirals hockey team from 1973-1988 and again from 2016-present. Additional sports tenants have included the Milwaukee Does (1978-1980) of the Women's Professional Basketball League, the UW-Milwaukee Panthers men's basketball team (1992-1998, 2003-2012, 2013-present), and Milwaukee Wave (2003-present) of the Major Arena Soccer League. The Chicago Blackhawks of the National Hockey League also played occasional regular-season games at the Arena.

¹⁴ Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 348.

¹⁵ McQuillen, "Milwaukee Arena," 10.

¹⁶ Greater Milwaukee Committee, *Annual Report* (1950), 5.



The Bucks playing on Robert Indiana's colorful MECCA floor. <https://www.thebozho.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/bucks.jpg>

In addition to sporting events, the Arena was also the host to numerous political rallies, and music concerts. Highlights include a campaign rally in 1952 featuring infamous Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy and presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower, President John F. Kennedy addressing the Democratic Party of Wisconsin's Jefferson-Jackson Dinner in 1962, concerts by The Beatles, Rolling Stones, The Beach Boys, Led Zeppelin, David Bowie, The Kinks, Elvis Presley, Bruce Springsteen, Black Sabbath, The Cars, Run DMC, and Beastie Boys, amongst numerous others.¹⁷

Throughout the late 50's and 60's, while the Arena hosted the popular sports and music events, the question of what to do with the Auditorium remained. In 1966, the Milwaukee firm of Daverman Associations, Inc. was hired to develop another plan for the civic center, particularly the Auditorium and the Arena. In order to make it competitive with other convention centers around the country, the plan called for such things as air conditioning, however the costs were prohibitive and the project was delayed for decades. Daverman also offered a streamlined, cohesive exterior to the Auditorium/Arena complex

¹⁷ "Wisconsin Center District facilities timeline," Wisconsin Center District, accessed October 20, 2025, https://wcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/facilities-timeline_200825.pdf

and further developed the plan for the boulevard on Kilbourn Avenue, but these ideas were also dropped because of lack of funds.

By the early 1970's, with the question about the functionality of the Auditorium was once again put forward, the city opted to keep and renovate the structure. Improvements included new sound systems, lighting systems, air conditioning, as well as exterior renovations, which were all completed by 1978. Meanwhile, a new convention center building was constructed in 1974 on the two city blocks south of the Auditorium between 4th Street, 6th Street, Kilbourn Avenue and Wells Street. It was hoped that this convention hall would lure more national conventions to the city. The new hall together with the existing Auditorium and Arena would be known as MECCA, the Milwaukee Exposition & Convention Center & Arena. It was larger than the Auditorium/Arena, and it was joined via a skywalk over West Kilbourn Avenue.

At the time, the use of the Milwaukee Auditorium for cultural events such as concerts, operas, and ballets was dwindling with the influx of new buildings for these happenings. The Milwaukee County War Memorial Performing Arts Center, now the Marcus Performing Arts Center, was built in 1969 to house the permanent music and theater companies of Milwaukee, as well as offer a place to stage touring musicians, musicals, and ballets. The Arena was used to host rock concerts and ice shows. The Bradley Center, which opened in 1988, also sapped the function of the Auditorium and Arena with its newer, bigger facilities for sports, concerts and shows. Meanwhile, Milwaukee was losing ground in the convention market because other cities were building bigger accommodations. Finally, in 1995, a state law created the Wisconsin Center District, which, through funding by sales and room taxes, maintains the Auditorium/Arena. The 1970s MECCA convention center building was razed in 1998 and the Wisconsin Center District completed construction of a larger convention center, the Midwest Express Center (now Baird Center), in 1996-1998.

By the early-2000s, the future of the Auditorium was once again in question. In 2000, after studies on replacing, renovating, or deferring actions on the building, the Wisconsin Center District Board voted to undergo a major renovation project of the Auditorium. The renovation reduced the size of the hall from 6,120 to 4,086, with the ability for it to be further converted down to seat 2,500, to better align with the needs of smaller events. The renovation created a sloped seating area, upgraded the balcony seating, modified the secondary ballrooms in the Annex, and created a new galleried rotunda at the Kilbourn Avenue entrance. Exterior modifications included circulation modifications, removal of the grand stair to accommodate ADA-accessible ramps, and the canopies over the entrances. The north façade was rebuilt due to failing foundation pilings. The Auditorium closed in 2001 to undergo what ended up as a \$42 million dollar project, reopening in 2003 as the rebranded Milwaukee Theater. A new sponsorship agreement with

MillerCoors rebranded the Auditorium to its present Miller High Life Theater moniker in 2017.

In 2000, the Arena, then known as the Wisconsin Center Arena, was renamed U.S. Cellular Arena following a naming rights agreement with that company. The Wisconsin Athletic Hall of Fame “Walk of Fame” project was completed in 2001, relocating the exhibit from inside the arena to the east façade of the building along North 4th Street. The Arena underwent a \$3 million upgrade starting in 2014, adding a new scoreboard and new seats. The Arena was rebranded to its current name, UW-Milwaukee Panther Arena, in 2014. The Arena underwent an additional \$6.2 million renovation starting in 2016, with upgraded concession stands and restrooms, new locker rooms, and new lighting.

Today, both the Auditorium and Arena still host concerts, sporting events, community events, and meetings of local organizations. Generations of Milwaukeeans have attended events at the venues and have created lasting memories there. Both venues continue to serve the city and provide entertainment throughout the year.

ARCHITECTS

FERRY & CLAS

The Milwaukee Auditorium was designed by the architectural firm of Ferry & Clas. The firm was formed in 1890 and consisted of George Bowman Ferry and Alfred Charles Clas. Until their separation in 1912, they worked from their downtown offices located on Broadway between Wisconsin Avenue and Mason Street. Together the men designed high-profile buildings such as the Milwaukee Public Library and Museum (Beaux Arts, 1893-97), the Northwestern National Life Company's central office (Beaux Arts, 1906), Buena Vista Flats (Beaux Arts Apartment Building, 1908-09), and the Lake Park Pavilion (1903). They caught the national spotlight when they designed the Wisconsin State Building at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo and the Wisconsin State Building for the St. Louis Exposition. Their range of talent spanned all types and styles. Among their Milwaukee designs were office buildings such as Matthews Building (Romanesque Revival, 1892), warehouses and storefronts such as the Steinmeyer Building (Romanesque Revival, 1893), private homes such as the Gustav G. Pabst Mansion (Neoclassical, 1906) and Fred T. Goll Residence (English Tudor, 1898), and churches such as the First Unitarian Church on Ogden Avenue (Gothic Revival, 1891-92). These two architects reflected not only the flexibility and eclecticism of American Architecture, but also the blossoming identity of Milwaukee's civilization.



Milwaukee Public Library & Museum (1895). Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory #16279

George Bowman Ferry was born on February 7, 1851 in Springfield, Massachusetts. In 1871-2 he studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and then he returned to his hometown to practice. He moved to Milwaukee in 1881. As an independent architect he designed the Woman's Club of Wisconsin on Kilbourn Avenue (Victorian Gothic 1887) and the Frederick Pabst Mansion on Wisconsin Avenue (Flemish Renaissance, 1890). In addition, he was honored for his contribution to the International Architecture Exhibit at the Paris World's Fair. After he and Alfred Clas dissolved their partnership, Ferry kept the offices on Broadway until 1916. On January 29, 1918, he died at the home of his son, Robert, on Royall Place. He was praised highly as a nationally known architect with a great sense of design. In addition to his work as an architect, Ferry helped organize the first architectural association in Wisconsin, assisted in writing the constitution of the American Institute of Architects, chaired Milwaukee's building code commission, was president of the Milwaukee Art Commission, and was a member of the National Academy of Sciences.

Alfred Charles Clas, the son of German immigrants, was born December 26, 1859 in Sauk City, Wisconsin. There he worked as an apprentice to an unnamed architect for two years, and from 1879-1881 he was employed in an architect's office in Stockton, California. By 1884, he returned to Wisconsin and settled in Milwaukee. Here he worked in the office of James Douglas, where he was promoted from draftsman to architect, and in 1885 he

and Douglas formed the firm of Jas. Douglas & Co. He left this partnership in 1887 in order to work on his own from offices on Milwaukee Street. During this time he designed the E.D. Adler Residence (Queen Anne/Romanesque, 1888) and the Bernard Eiring Residence (1888) as well as the William H. Osborne House (1888). He then formed the partnership with George Ferry in the firm of Ferry & Clas from 1890 until 1912. After leaving Ferry, Clas joined his son to form Alfred C. Clas & Angelo Clas until 1921, when he joined his other son, Rubens Frederick Clas, and another architect, John S. Shepherd, in the firm Clas, Shepherd, & Clas until 1931. Clas, Shepherd & Clas designed the Tripoli Temple Shrine Mosque (Islamic Indian, 1926-28). When Shepherd left in 1931, Alfred and his son continued as Clas & Clas until 1936 when Alfred retired. The Clas & Clas firm continued until 1940 with his son Rubens. Alfred Clas died on July 8, 1942 at the Masonic Home in Dousman, near Milwaukee, of complications from a fall on ice the previous year. Besides designing Milwaukee structures, Clas was an active proponent of the City Beautiful movement in Milwaukee. Not only did he help plan the Civic Center and Lincoln Memorial Drive and Parkway, he also mapped out many of the city's boulevards and parks. Accordingly, he was on the County Parks Commission and served as president of the Metropolitan Park Commission.¹⁸

Ferry and Clas' work on the Milwaukee Auditorium fits into the Neoclassical/Beaux Arts style for which the firm is most remembered. It is a fine example of their ability to lend monumentality and grace to a building that was not budgeted for the rich marble and bronze and costly embellishments that can be found on some of their other commissions as the State Historical Society' Building in Madison. It is unique in their body of work, however, as the only known civic auditorium building that they designed. It is important for the fact that Clas was a local leader in bringing the ideals of the City Beautiful movement to Milwaukee, ideals he and his partner were attempting to embody in the Auditorium.

ESCHWEILER & ESCHWEILER

The Milwaukee Arena was designed by Eschweiler & Eschweiler, then lead by Alex Eschweiler, Jr. Alexander Chadbourne Eschweiler was born in Boston in 1865 and spent most of his early childhood in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The family moved to Milwaukee in 1882. Eschweiler began his architectural career as a draftsman in 1886. He graduated with an architecture degree from Cornell University in 1870 and returned to Milwaukee to work at the prestigious firm of H.C. Koch & Company. Eschweiler was with the firm when they worked on plans for Milwaukee City Hall.

¹⁸ City of Milwaukee, Historic Preservation Commission. "Final Historic Designation Study Report, Milwaukee Auditorium." 2000.

Eschweiler opened his own firm in 1893 after winning a design competition for the Milwaukee Downer College buildings on what is now the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee campus.



Milwaukee Gas Light Company (1930)

The first three decades of the twentieth century were busy ones for the firm that developed an outstanding reputation for their original designs in English-inspired styles for fine residences. Representative examples of their design work include the Elizabeth Black Residence (1901, 1537 North Prospect Avenue), The Robert Nunnemacher residence

(1906, 2409 North Wahl Avenue), and the Charles Allis House, (1910, 1630 East Royal Street). All are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.¹⁹

In 1923, the senior Eschweiler was joined by his sons Alexander Jr., Theodore, and Carl, all of whom had graduated from Cornell University. The firm operated as Eschweiler & Eschweiler. During this period, prominent commercial examples of the firm's work includes the Art Deco style office tower for the Wisconsin Gas Co. (1930, 626 East Wisconsin Avenue) and the Wisconsin Telephone Co. tower (1917-30, 722 North Broadway). Both buildings are outstanding examples of early skyscraper design and are veritable icons of the downtown Milwaukee skyline. Following the retirement of the senior Eschweiler in the late-1930s, the firm continued with such commissions as The Milwaukee Journal Company's Radio City (1941, 720 E. Capitol Drive), Frank P. Zeidler Municipal Building (1958, 841 N. Broadway), and Milwaukee Public Museum (as Eschweiler, Eschweiler & Sielaff, 1963, 800 W. Wells Street). The sons continued the firm until 1972.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Milwaukee Auditorium & Milwaukee Arena, 412 West Kilbourn Avenue, and its attached land be given historic designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic Site as a result of its fulfillment of criteria f-1, f-2, f-5, f-6, and f-9 of Section 320-21(3) of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

- f-1. Its exemplification and development of the cultural, economic, social or historic heritage of the city, state of Wisconsin or the United States.

It is difficult to overstate just how immensely important both the Auditorium and Arena were to the development of Milwaukee. Though built a generation apart, both developments were instrumental in ushering in a flourish of civic improvements. The Auditorium was the first building constructed in the newly conceived Civic Center and was a catalyst for additional developments culminating in the Milwaukee County Courthouse development and including the Public Safety Building and the widened boulevard along Kilbourn Avenue connecting City Hall to the Courthouse.

The immediate success of the Arena proved that Milwaukee was hungry to shake off the stagnancy and despair of the Great Depression and World War II and move fully into modernity and progress. The Arena jumpstarted a reawakening in civic pride that resulted in the construction of many large-scale, city-wide civic projects

¹⁹ City of Milwaukee, Historic Preservation Commission. "Final Historic Designation Study Report, Manegold/Gramling House." 2003.

such as Milwaukee County Stadium, a new terminal at Mitchell Field, the Milwaukee County Zoo, the War Memorial Center, an addition to the Central Library, the Milwaukee Public Museum. Following the Arena, additional civic buildings arose in the western Civic Center, including the State Office Building (1961), Milwaukee Public Museum (1963), MECCA (1974, demolished 1998) and later the Bradley Center (1988, demolished 2019), Baird Center (1998, expanded 2024), Fiserv Forum (2018), and the under-construction Landmark Credit Union Live concert venue.

f-2. Its location as a site of a significant historic event.

The Auditorium will always be featured in American history texts for its association with the assassination attempt on President Theodore Roosevelt. While in Milwaukee to speak, the then ex-President Roosevelt was shot by John Flammang Schrank at 8:10p.m. on October 4, 1912 while standing in an automobile outside the nearby Gilpatrick Hotel. Although bleeding from his wound, Roosevelt insisted that the car continue on to the Auditorium where he proceeded to speak to an audience of 9,000 people for 50 minutes stating “I have just been shot, but it takes more than that to kill a bull moose.”²⁰

f-5. Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.

The Milwaukee Auditorium shows its “spirit of progress” in its interpretation of its Neoclassical/Beaux Arts style following the success of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, also known as the World’s Fair. The classically designed buildings displayed at this fair became the style of choice for buildings of public and business use. In Milwaukee, the Central Public Library, Northwestern National Insurance Company’s central office, and the County Courthouse all use this style’s classical details such as columns, a monumental appearance, and ordered, symmetrical facades. The Milwaukee Arena similarly shows its “spirit of progress” in the International style popular starting in the middle of the 20th century. The International style is noted for a lack of features associated with architecture of the past and a clean, streamlined appearance. The Arena is minimally decorated, with the entry pavilion on West Kilbourn Avenue being the most decorated area on the building. The large red brick mass and telescoping, arched roof are the primary focal point of the building. Though designed thirty years apart, the buildings have now been joined for seventy-five years and were intended to complement each through their connection. While both buildings represent their respective styles

²⁰ “Insane Man Shoots Roosevelt,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 15, 1912.

and time periods well, the red brick and scale of both buildings present a feeling of cohesion between the two.

- f-6. Its identification as the work of an artist, architect, craftsman or master builder whose individual works have influenced the development of the city.

Both the Milwaukee Auditorium and the Milwaukee Arena were designed by arguably the top architecture firms of their respective eras. The Auditorium was designed by Ferry & Clas, “one of the most prominent [architectural firms] in Milwaukee,” known for their numerous fashionable residential commissions and elegant public buildings.²¹ Among the firms other numerous commissions are State Historical Society Building (1900, 816 State St., Madison), the Milwaukee Public Library and Museum (1895, 800 W. Wisconsin Ave.), Frederick Pabst House (1890, 2000 W. Wisconsin Ave.), Steinmeyer Building (1898, 205 W. Highland Ave.), and First Unitarian Church (1892, 1009 E. Ogden Ave.). The Arena was designed by Eschweiler & Eschweiler, one of the most prolific architectural firms in Milwaukee’s history.²² Alexander C. Eschweiler opened his architectural firm in 1890 and was joined by his three sons as Eschweiler & Eschweiler starting in 1924. The firm was known for both its handsome and stately residential commissions and its large-scale commercial and institutional designs. Many of the firms commissions are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and numerous are locally designated as historic by the City of Milwaukee. Amongst the firm’s notable designs are Milwaukee Gas Light Building (1930, 626 E. Wisconsin Avenue), Wisconsin Telephone Company Headquarters Building (1930, 722 N. Broadway), WTMJ Radio City (1941, 720 E. Capitol Drive), Frank P. Zeidler Municipal Building (1958, 841 N. Broadway), and Milwaukee Public Museum (as Eschweiler, Eschweiler & Sielaff, 1963, 800 W. Wells Street).

- f-9. Its unique location as a singular physical characteristic which represents an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the city.

The Auditorium and Arena are notable landmarks and have been destinations in downtown for over one hundred years and seventy-five years, respectively. The Auditorium and Arena are anchors of the Civic Center and are where generations of Milwaukeeans and Wisconsinites have gathered for entertainment, rallies, education, and meaningful experiences and where they have created personal

²¹ M. Caren Connolly, “Saint James Court Apartments, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 9.

²² Catherine Jones, “Eschweiler Buildings,” *Encyclopedia of Milwaukee*, accessed October 20, 2025, <https://emke.uwm.edu/entry/eschweiler-buildings/>

memories. Both the Auditorium and Arena stand as the physical embodiments of some of the most important events in Milwaukee history.

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PRESERVATION GUIDELINES FOR THE MILWAUKEE AUDITORIUM & MILWAUKEE ARENA

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon design submissions. Building maintenance and restoration must follow accepted preservation practices as outlined below. The intent of the guidelines is to preserve the buildings as closely as possible to their original form and details. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

Any exterior alteration, exclusive of painting of non-masonry surfaces, will require a Certificate of Appropriateness. Any existing exterior features can remain for their lifespan. The historic designation does not mean that owners are required to restore their buildings to original condition, but that changes are subject to review so that they are compatible with the historic character of the building.

These guidelines are based upon those contained in MCO 320-21-11 & 12 of the historic preservation ordinance. These guidelines serve as a guide for making changes that will be sensitive to the architectural integrity of the structure and appropriate to the overall character of the buildings.

I. Roofs

- A. Retain the roof shape. No changes can be made to the roof shape which would alter the building height, the roofline or its pitch as seen from ground level.

- B. Historic Preservation staff acknowledge that there are pre-existing mechanicals and vents on the rooftop associated with the buildings. Virtually all of them are not visible from the street. Continue to locate mechanical systems and vents on portions of the roof not visible at all from the public right of way and paint them out to minimize impact. Re-roofing requires consultation with historic preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness to ensure appropriate materials and installation and proper construction of flashing, gutters, downspouts and valleys.
- C. Electronic devices such as, but not limited to, satellite dishes, antennas, and so on require review with historic presentation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness. Historic Preservation acknowledges that there are preexisting cellular communications equipment present on the rooftop and attached to the facades of the buildings. New and replacement antennae can only be located on the rooftops and must not be visible from the right of way. New or replacement equipment should be sited, painted, or screened to minimize visibility from all other facades. Equipment swaps and upgrades will not be permitted where presently existing. Rooftop mounting solutions that do not mount to the façade will be required. The request for installation of solar devices will be reviewed on a case by case basis based on provisions of 66.0401, Wis. Stats.

II. Masonry, Stone, & Terra Cotta

- A. Unpainted brick or stone or terra cotta must not be painted or covered. Painting masonry is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date. Covering masonry with other materials (wood, sheet metal, vinyl siding, etc.) is not allowed.
- B. Re-point defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, hardness, texture, joint finish and joint width. See the masonry chapter in the book *Good for Business* for explanations on why the use of a proper mortar mix is crucial to making lasting repairs that will not contribute to new deterioration of the masonry. Using much harder, contemporary Portland cement mortar will not make a lasting repair and can damage the historic brick and stone and terra cotta. Replaced mortar joints should be tooled to match the style of the original. Do not use mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed. Consultation with historic preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness is required before starting any re-pointing.
- C. In the future should masonry cleaning be necessary it should be done only with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting or high-pressure water

blasting or the use of other abrasive materials (baking soda, nut shells, dry ice, etc.) on limestone, terra cotta, pressed brick or cream brick surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. The use of accepted chemical products to clean masonry is allowed and a test panel is required before general commencement of the work. Work should be done by experienced individuals as the chemical cleaning process can have a negative impact on the masonry. Consultation with historic preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness is required before any cleaning would begin.

- D. Repair or replace deteriorated masonry with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. The use of EIFS (exterior insulation and finish systems) which is synthetic stucco is not permitted. Neither is fake brick veneer. Consultation with historic preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness is required before attempting work on the masonry.

III. Wood/Metal

- A. Retain any original wood material, if it exists, whenever possible. Do not remove architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance.
- B. Retain or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Covering wood or metal with aluminum, artificial stone, brick veneer, asbestos or asphalt shingles, or vinyl, aluminum or other substitute material is not permitted. Spot replacement or spot repair of any deteriorated elements is encouraged rather than complete removal and replication. Structural wood epoxies are suggested for the lasting repair of damaged or decayed areas of wood trim. Any new elements must replicate the pattern, dimension, spacing and material of the originals.

IV. Windows and Doors

- A. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain original doors and windows within those openings. The infilled entrances may be opened at a later date to bring the entries back to their historic appearances.
- B. Retain original windows within those openings if any are extant. Restoration to the original condition is encouraged. Do not make changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Do not change the size or configuration of original window panes or sash. Do not fill in or

cover openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block or concrete block.

- C. Should doors need to be replaced, there are examples being made today that would be appropriate for the building. Consultation with Historic Preservation staff is required for replacements.
- D. In the event any windows need to be replaced, consultation with Historic Preservation staff is required to determine appropriate replacements. New glass must match the size of the historic glass. Do not fill in or cover openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block or concrete block.
- E. Any original windows on the building must be retained and repaired if possible. Vinyl, vinyl clad, or fiberglass prime or other non-wood window units are not permitted. Storm windows and storm doors are encouraged for the preservation of the prime windows and doors. Any changes to doors and windows, including installation of new doors and windows, require consultation with Historic Preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness.
- F. Steel bar security doors and window guards are discouraged. If permitted, the doors or grates must be of the simplest design and installed so as to be as unobtrusive as possible. A Certificate of Appropriateness is required for this type of installation.

V. Trim and Ornamentation

- A. Avoid the removal of trim and decorative ornamentation that is essential to the maintenance of the building's historic character and appearance.
- B. Repair or replace, where necessary, deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using replacement materials that do not accurately reproduce the appearance of the original material.

VI. Additions

- A. Additions must be smaller than the original building and not obscure the historic building. Additions will be reviewed in context of their size, scale and form. They should either complement the historic building or have a neutral effect on it.

- B. Additions are additionally subject to the new construction guidelines found below.

VII. Guidelines for Streetscapes

The streetscape of the Auditorium and Arena consists of minimal landscaping and primarily consist of plantings in the courtyard and at the corners of the buildings. The buildings are built to the property lines on three sides.

New plant materials, paving, or fencing shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the building. Should a new fence be considered in the future, examples of appropriate fencing can be found in *As Good As New* and *Living with History*. Avoid introducing landscape features or fencing that are inappropriate to the character of the site.

VIII. Signs/Exterior Lighting

Should there be an application for signage, plastic internally illuminated box signs with a completely acrylic face are not permitted. Approval will be based on the sign's compatibility with the architectural character of the historic buildings.

IX. Guidelines for New Construction

See also Additions above. It is important that any proposed new accessory structures be designed to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the buildings. It is unlikely that there will be new large scale construction on the site. The following guidelines are consistent with all sites that receive local historic designation.

- A. Site work. New construction must respect the historic site and location of the building. The primary building on the site must maintain the appearance of a freestanding structure as it was built.
- B. Scale. For new construction, overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components, such as overhangs and fenestration that are in close proximity to the historic building must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the original historic building. New construction is to be smaller in size and shorter in height than the historic buildings. New construction will not extend over the top of the current complex.
- C. Form. The massing of new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the historic building as a freestanding structure.

Arrangement of windows, doors, roof shape, and foundation openings must be compatible with the historic property.

- D. **Materials.** The building materials which are visible from the public right-of-way and in close proximity to the original building should be compatible with the colors, textures, proportions, and combinations of original cladding materials used on the historic building. Faux wood grained panels, wood panels, cementitious panels, panels constructed of pressed wood, metal panels or corrugated metal, or panels made of other materials would be inappropriate for new construction.

X. Guidelines for Demolition

It is not anticipated that the Auditorium or Arena would be demolished, either in whole or in part. Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there may be instances when demolition may be acceptable if approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. The following guidelines, with those found in subsection 9(h) of the ordinance, shall be taken into consideration by the Commission when reviewing demolition requests.

- A. **Condition.** Demolition requests may be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that the condition of a building or a portion thereof is such that it constitutes an immediate threat to health and safety.
- B. **Importance.** Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is of historical or architectural significance or displays a quality of material and craftsmanship that does not exist in other structures in the area.
- C. **Location.** Consideration will be given to whether the building contributes to the neighborhood and the general street appearance and has a positive effect on other buildings in the area.
- D. **Potential for Restoration.** Consideration will be given to whether the proposed demolition is a later addition that is not in keeping with the original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character.
- E. **Additions.** Consideration will be given to whether or not the proposed demolition is a later addition that is not in keeping with the original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character.

IMAGES



ENTRANCE ON CEDAR STREET.

Figure 1. Auditorium, circa 1909. William George Bruce, *The Auditorium*.



Figure 2. Auditorium & Arena, 1949. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, <https://www.jsonline.com/picture-gallery/life/green-sheet/2025/04/09/a-look-back-at-when-milwaukee-threw-a-weeklong-party-for-its-new-arena/82571253007/>.



Figure 3 A model of the Milwaukee Arena is examined Nov. 30, 1949, by Harold J. Fitzgerald (from left), Civic Progress Commission president; Alderman Fred Steffan; and Milwaukee Public Museum Director W.C. McKern. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, <https://www.jsonline.com/picture-gallery/life/green-sheet/2025/04/09/a-look-back-at-when-milwaukee-threw-a-weeklong-party-for-its-new-arena/82571253007/>.



Figure 4 Milwaukee Journal headline, April 9, 1950

A BLUE RIBBON TRIBUTE TO THE CITY OF MILWAUKEE

(MILWAUKEE PROGRESS WEEK — APRIL 9-15)

With the opening of the beautiful new Milwaukee Arena, another of Milwaukee's golden dreams becomes a reality.

For here is not only a magnificent example of modern architecture, but proof of the growing greatness of modern Milwaukee. It gives us all a new reason to be proud of the friendly, progressive city in which we live and work.

As Milwaukee's oldest and most famous brewer, Pabst Blue Ribbon is proud to salute the men and women who so ably planned, designed and constructed this fabulous new Arena. Like "The Little Brewery on the Hill" where Pabst was founded back in 1844—the Milwaukee Arena is a welcome addition to our home town. And with pleasant anticipation, we are looking forward to many an evening of exciting sports and great entertainment.

Yes, with glasses filled to the foaming brim with that smoother... smoother... smoother Pabst Blue Ribbon—finest beer served... anywhere—we toast the new MILWAUKEE ARENA! Long may it serve Milwaukee!

Figure 5 Pabst Brewery advertisement celebrating the Arena and Progress week, Milwaukee Journal headline, April 9, 1950

HEART OF THE CITY



Civic Center—Looking West

Figure 6 Cover of the 1957 Directory and Report of Milwaukee's Government in '56. Civic Center looking west, Auditorium & Arena at bottom right.



Figure 7 Civic Center plaza, 1960. Auditorium & Arena at left. Milwaukee Public Library Digital Collections.



Figure 8 Auditorium, 1975. Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory #73319.



Figure 9 Auditorium, 1985. Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory #73319.



Figure 10 Arena, 1985. Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory #118240.



Figure 11 Auditorium, 2002. Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory #73319.



Figure 12 Arena, 2013. Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory #118240.



Figure 13 Auditorium, 2025.



Figure 14 Auditorium, 2025.



Figure 15 West façade of the Auditorium, 2025.



Figure 16 North façade of the Auditorium, 2025.



Figure 17 Original 5th Street façade and hyphen courtyard of the Auditorium, 2025.



Figure 18 North façade of the hyphen between the Auditorium and Arena, 2025.



Figure 19 Arena, 2025.



Figure 20 North and west façades of the Arena, 2025.



Figure 21 North façade of the Arena, 2025.



Figure 22 East façade of the Arena, 2025.