



## Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

*Living with History*

**HPC meeting date: 4-15-2014**  
**Ald. Tony Zielinski District: 14**  
**Staff reviewer: Paul Jakubovich**  
**PTS #86338**

<b>Property</b>	<b>2473 S. KINNICKINNIC AV. Avalon Theater, an individually-designed structure</b>	
<b>Owner/Applicant</b>	LEE R BARCZAK 5130 W LOOMIS RD GREENDALE WI 53129	Ascend Design W144 S6305 College Court Muskego, WI 53150
<b>Proposal</b>	Install new marquis and projecting blade sign over entry doors.	
<b>Staff comments</b>	<p>The Avalon Theater, long a fixture of the architectural and commercial history of the Bay View neighborhood, is undergoing extensive restoration and rehabilitation to open it again as a movie theater. One of the few remaining 1920's picture palaces in Milwaukee and the only atmospheric theater (which means the interior was designed to create the feel of a rustic outdoor garden at night) the restoration of the Avalon is a major project and greatly anticipated by Bay View residents and many theater-goers throughout the metro area.</p> <p>The most remarkable change to the exterior will be the installation of a new marquis and sign above the central entry doors. A theater this large and prominent was meant to have sign of this size and design. It will replace an existing lighted marquis that is not original to the building and not part of the historic fabric of the exterior. Its proposed removal to make way for a new sign is a welcome change.</p> <p>The new marquis and towering blade sign above it is not a replica of the original signage, but very much in keeping with traditional theater signage of the early "talking movie" era. The curvilinear top of the marquis reflects the original design of the theater's parapet wall and the blade sign with open-channel, individually-lighted letters will help to re-create the grand experience of entering a 1920's movie palace.</p> <p>The sign and marquis will both be made of aluminum, painted, not anodized, and an electronic message board will be flush-mounted on each of the far sides of the marquis. The message boards are not features found on historic theater signs of course, but they are increasingly necessary to meet the needs of the movie theater business today. The use of these message boards in a local historic district or on an individually- designed building should be carefully scrutinized and approval here should not constitute a blanket approval for this type of signage in other historic districts or on individually-designated buildings. At this point it appears that the discreet use of electronic message boards should be limited to movie theaters and churches because of their unique programming needs and then on a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>A sign this large and so well detailed has not been built in Milwaukee in many years. The sign may require Board of Zoning approval because of its size and other factors, but that is not an HPC issue. The sign fits the building in terms of size, scale, style and materials. Other exterior work such as some new entry doors, replacement windows and brick cleaning are under a separate application and will be staff-approved.</p>	
<b>Recommendation</b>	Recommend HPC Approval	

**Conditions**

**Previous HPC action**