

Takoma Theatre Demolition Rejected

BY TANYA SNYDER

Milton McGinty's greatest desire is to see a wrecking ball smash his life's work to smithereens. But he's been handed a few setbacks to seeing that dream come true.

DC North reported last month ("Battle for the Fate of the Takoma Theatre," October 2009) that McGinty wanted to turn the Takoma Theatre – a cinema-turned-live-theater at 6833 Fourth St. NW – into an apartment building. For 11 years, he had written and produced plays about timely topics of race and social justice, but the theater was never a commercial success. Since the mid-1990s, he has rented out the space to community groups.

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B and the Historic Preservation Review Board have both ruled against McGinty's request to demolish the building. Neither has veto

power over the project, but the setbacks show the tough battle that lies ahead if he tries to continue with his plan.

The HPRB decided that "razing the building is inconsistent with the purposes of the [Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection] Act." But they acknowledged that McGinty could still apply for a raze permit, and that the application would be forwarded directly to the mayor's agent, who would make the final decision, without returning to HPRB for further review.


However, to the disappointment of Takoma Theatre Conservancy President Loretta Neumann, none of the HPRB staff recommendations endorsed the idea of keeping the theater a theater (or, in the words of the conservancy, a "cultural arts and education center"). Neumann says, "The best historic preservation of any building is to continue the use for which it was built. Adapting to new uses should be the last resort, not the first."

McGinty continues to push to turn the theater into a 43-unit apartment building.

To contact the Takoma Theatre Conservancy, call Loretta Neumann at 202-882-9274 or visit www.takomatheatreconservancy.org. ★



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