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November 5, 2013

Mayor Gregor Robertson and Council
Vancouver City Hall
453 W. 12th Ave.
Vancouver, BC, V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor Robertson & Council Members;

Re: The Hollywood Theatre, 3123-3129 West Broadway

I am writing on behalf of the membership of Heritage Vancouver to express our strongest possible support for the motion that Council issue a 90-day protection order for **The Hollywood Theatre**, to allow for public consultation and potentially find a conservation solution so that this unique community venue can continue to exist as a public space, rather than be gutted as just another retail outlet.

Vancouver's historic movie theatres are closing, leading to the loss of beloved neighbourhood landmarks and cultural spaces. We have lost many historic theatres in recent years, including the **Varsity** on 10th Avenue, the **Imperial** (1912) (last known as the Venus) on Main Street, **the Van East Cinema** on Commercial, the city's oldest theatre, the **Pantages** (1907), **The Fraser** on Fraser Street, and most recently the **Ridge Theatre** (1949). We are now at risk of losing **The Hollywood**. Dubbed by the entertainment industry magazine *Variety* as "*the Nabes*", our neighbourhood theatres were the backbone of the massive North American movie distribution network. They were an essential part of our community cultural life for many decades. Many are now lost, and the few that we have left are at risk of destruction.

We are losing the places where communities can gather and experience the creative culture of our city. Our local theatres, including **The Hollywood** and until recently, **The Ridge**, are unique facilities that help to define Vancouver, as envisioned in the City's Cultural Plan, as "a city of vibrant, creative neighbourhoods". Finding innovative ways to reimagine these cultural spaces as local amenities will help to sustain urban vitality and a unique sense of place. If our historic theatres are lost, we are unlikely to see this kind of neighbourhood community space constructed again. With the destruction of **The Ridge**, there are very few such spaces left, and the cultural life of Vancouver is severely diminished by these continuing losses.

We have seen similar situations where theatre space has been retained successfully for public use, including **The Orpheum**, the crown jewel of our Civic Theatres, that was almost lost in the 1970s, the **Stanley Theatre**, almost gutted for use as a retail complex and saved at the last minute, and the soon to be opened **York Theatre**. These are vibrant community assets that will continue well into the future as neighbourhood anchors and cultural icons.

The Hollywood was built in 1935-36, and architect Harold Cullerne designed an elegant Art Deco theatre with neon signs reflective of the streamlined Jazz Age of the 1930s. The historic neon sign, "Pick O' the

Best Plays” still refers to the time when movies were known as “Photoplays.” Run by the Fairleigh family for three generations, it has survived in very intact condition and is now referred to as an old-style neighbourhood theatre, a local icon, a living heritage site and a great public space. The Art Deco splendour of **The Hollywood** evokes the glamour and elegance of the 1930s, a time when Vancouver was growing rapidly, building landmark structures such as Vancouver City Hall, the Lions Gate Bridge and the Burrard Bridge, Art Deco icons that still define our city.

Heritage Vancouver has initiated public conversations about the ‘Future of Theatres’, to explore how we can start thinking about the future of the few remaining theatres in Vancouver. We urge the City of Vancouver to look at new and innovative ways that **The Hollywood** and other surviving community theatres can enhance the livability of our neighbourhoods as theatres, performance spaces and community gathering places.

Our position on Vancouver’s historic theatres is that we support the retention of these unique cultural and social community-gathering spaces that contribute to the identity, character and vitality of our city’s neighbourhoods.

Given that historic movie theatres are neighbourhood landmarks and vital cultural spaces, Heritage Vancouver recommends that the City of Vancouver implement the City of Vancouver Cultural Plan through the following actions:

- Explore the potential use of historic cinemas as multi-purpose cultural space in support of the Vancouver Cultural Plan objective of ensuring that festivals, special events and exhibits can take place in accessible non-traditional neighbourhood venues;
- Work with private and public partners to secure conservation of historic cinemas as a community amenity in rezoning and development applications for each relevant site;
- Consider tax exemptions for owners and other incentives to enable the retention and reuse of heritage theatres;
- Consider special funding to historic cinemas from the Coal Harbour Arts Complex Reserve Fund, and examine the most appropriate use of the Fund to provide cultural amenity space; and
- Encourage the owners of historic cinemas to apply to the City’s Cultural Infrastructure Grant Program.

We look forward to working with you to ensure the continuing viability of our community theatres.

Sincerely,



George Challies
Board of Directors
Heritage Vancouver Society

cc.

Penny Ballem, City Manager
Marco D’Agostini, Senior Planner, Heritage Group
Brian Jackson, Director of Planning
Members of the Heritage Commission