

## Development Activities Meeting Report (Version: 06/24/2020)

This report created by the Neighborhood Planner and included with staff reports to City Boards and/or Commissions.

Logistics	Stakeholders
<b>Project Name/Address:</b> Benedum Center Exterior Renovations / 719 Liberty Ave	<b>Groups Represented (e.g., specific organizations, residents, employees, etc. where this is evident):</b> Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership
<b>Parcel Number(s):</b> 1-D-57	
<b>ZDR Application Number:</b> DCP-ZDR-2021-01197	
<b>Meeting Location:</b> Virtual, via Zoom	
<b>Date:</b> May 13, 2021	
<b>Meeting Start Time:</b> 5:00 PM	
<b>Applicant:</b> Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, MCF Architects	<b>Approx. Number of Attendees:</b> 15
<b>Boards and/or Commissions Request(s):</b> Historic Review Commission (HRC) approval for exterior renovations in the Penn-Liberty City Historic District; Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) approval for new electronic identification marquee signs and electronic poster cases and repair of nonconforming marquee signs; Planning Commission approval for project subject to Project Development Plan review in the Golden Triangle (GT) District	

### How did the meeting inform the community about the development project?

*Ex: Community engagement to-date, location and history of the site, demolition needs, building footprint and overall square footage, uses and activities (particularly on the ground floor), transportation needs and parking proposed, building materials, design, and other aesthetic elements of the project, community uses, amenities and programs.*

- Alex Lacey of Dentons Cohen & Grigsby, Nick Gigante of the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, and Alan Hohlfelder of MCF Architects presented on the proposed exterior improvements to the Benedum Center.
- A. Lacey went over the history of the Benedum Center, which was opened as the Stanley Theater in 1928, and shared a slide summarizing its location downtown. He then showed a photograph of the historic marquee at the Seventh Street entrance.
- N. Gigante showed photographs of the current marquees, located at the Seventh Street entrance and on the Penn Avenue side of the building. He mentioned that the current marquees are rusted out and crumbling and that the patrons of the Benedum Center want the marquees to be saved. He explained that the proposed project would see a historic renovation of the marquees, which would look the same as the current marquees but with updated technology and a restored appearance.
- N. Gigante remarked that restoration of the marquees is critical to the reopening of the Cultural District and Downtown Pittsburgh this fall and that it is a big part of the economic revitalization that Downtown desperately needs. He said that in a normal year, the Benedum Center sees two million visitors a year, generating \$250 million in economic impact.
- N. Gigante mentioned that the marquees would receive energy efficient lighting upgrades, which will be partially paid for from a \$1 million grant from the Benedum Foundation.
- Alan Hohlfelder of MCF Architects mentioned that MCF has a long history of working with the Benedum Center, including the 1987 renovation that reopened the theater as the Benedum. This was the first project that A. Hohlfelder worked on when joining the firm.
- A. Hohlfelder explained that the marquees on both Penn Avenue and 7th Street have endured 93 cycles of weather in the Pittsburgh area. While the marquees had been attended to in the 1987 renovation, they have gone through

37 more years of deterioration. He said that there was a desperate need of replacement to preserve their historic character.

- A. Hohlfelder said that there was interest in replacing all of the chaser lights on the marquees with new LED lighting for better energy efficiency. In addition, the manufacturer of the existing physical letters used to display the names of shows is no longer in business and the stock of letters that the Cultural Trust has on hand keeps diminishing over time as the letters get broken, so the letters are to be replaced by current digital signage technology.
- A. Hohlfelder mentioned that there had been past attempts to fix certain areas of the marquee signs and that there were now so many of the spots that doing a piecemeal approach to the repair will not do the signs justice.
- A. Hohlfelder said that the Cultural Trust wanted to do a comprehensive replacement and repair to give the marquees another 100 years of life. Depending on the feature of the signs, the individual features will be either restored or replaced in kind. Additionally, certain portions of the signs that were new in 1987 and which are in much better shape will simply be touched up and repaired.
- A. Hohlfelder showed a photo of the current marquee and a rendering of the new marquee concept for the 7th Street side. He explained that the digital signage technology replacing the letters and letter board will look very similar to the existing sign, with the same background color and detail/lines. The font of the existing letters will be replicated as best as possible. He mentioned that the marquee would not be an advertising sign, just a sign that displays ongoing shows, similar to the present.
- A. Hohlfelder then showed a photo of the current marquee and a rendering of the new marquee concept for the Penn Avenue side. He explained that it was the same concept as the 7th Street façade, with digital signage technology in the center of the sign. The edges of the existing sign and the “Stanley Photoplays” installation would be restored.
- The physical poster cases for upcoming shows on the side of the building are also to see digital conversions. These posters are to be replaced with digital signs similar to those at Heinz Hall that were completed last year.
- A. Hohlfelder explained that the idea of updating marquees is not exclusive to the Benedum Center and then showed before-and-after photo examples of other marquee restorations, including those of Seattle’s 5th Avenue Theatre, the Fox Theatre in Detroit, and the former Paramount Theatre (Hard Rock Café) in New York City. He remarked that the Benedum’s new digital signage would be more authentic to the historic reproduction than in some of the other examples, meaning that there would be fewer liberties in its modernization. It would be an upgrade of signs, technology, and materials but be true to its historic appearance.
- A. Lacey went over the proposed project schedule, which would see an Historic Review Commission hearing in June, a Zoning Board of Adjustment hearing in June, a Planning Commission hearing in July, and production and installation to take place this fall, from roughly August to November.

### Input and Responses

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
<p>I reside on Liberty at 820 Liberty. I live in a recently renovated five-story building with three other tenants. We chose to live on Liberty because of the opportunity to be entertained in the Cultural District. One of the key assets in the Cultural District is the Benedum. It brings the entire quarter to life. We fully support the Trust’s effort to upgrade the marquee and actively engage with the Trust, and we look forward to getting back to seeing shows in the fall.</p>	

### Other Notes

Planner completing report: Phillip Wu