

West Newton Cinema building as a Historic Resource

Attachment 1: Analysis of Historic Significance

The West Newton Cinema (WNC, 1296 Washington Street) is a contributing building to the West Newton Village Historic District. The National Register of Historic Places nomination describes the overall significance of the district this way:

The West Newton Village Center Historic District possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. West Newton is the most intact and second largest of Newton's village centers preserving an extensive collection of late 19th and early 20th century commercial and institutional buildings. As such it is a significant illustration of both the city's rapid growth and the expanded services offered in the village by the turn-of-the-century. Significance is also derived from the diverse architectural character of the district which ranges from multi-story 19th-century commercial buildings to the streamlined one-story blocks popularized in the 20th Century...

The architectural significance of the district included in the nomination that is relevant to the West Newton Cinema is referenced below:

Excepting Newton Centre, the village of West Newton is the city's largest village center. Further, it is by far the most intact, preserving an extensive collection of late 19th and early 20th-century commercial and institutional buildings. The commercial blocks often retain their original storefronts.

The WNC and the buildings that flank it to the east and west and across Washington Street are called out in the nomination in this way:

1286-1294 Washington Street, is a well detailed cast stone faced block designed by Krokyn and Brown in 1927. It is distinguished by rope moldings around storefronts with handsome marbled transoms, and a parapet with egg and dart moldings. Like the adjacent block, this one is quite intact, with some of the stores even retaining original wood paneled doors.

In 1937, a permit was granted to Kenmore Realty for the construction of six stores and a brick theater at **1296-1308 Washington Street**. These stores were designed by Krokyn and Brown of Boston. The theater, with its entrance on Washington Street, was set back on the site of the old Unitarian church building, then known as the Players Hall.

1296-1308 Washington Street, was designed as an identical extension of the above block by the same architect, but ten years later. This block incorporates the aluminum-faced West Newton Theater.

Attachment 2: Description of Historically Significant Features

Although more evaluation will have to be done, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties suggests opportunities for both rehabilitation and restoration of the West Newton Cinema.

A key feature of the exterior has been removed: the original marquee shown in the enclosed photographs. In addition, the status of the Art Deco parapet shown in the straight-on photo was also removed. It is possible that there may be enough documentation to restore these features per the Secretary's Standards.

The building has served as a cinema from its opening, set back from the street (except for the marquee and the entry) and entirely enclosed by brick walls. There have been major alterations to the interior, the most important being the use of the original balcony and space above the orchestra seats to create four smaller theaters on the second floor, and the division of the ground floor theater into two theaters. However, the entry and the lobby remain intact and display the Art Deco interior treatments that were a hallmark of the design of theatrical spaces when the theater was built in 1937.

Although interior historic features are not typically governed by historic preservation policy, in this case, rehabilitation and, potentially, restoration of the key remaining interior features may be warranted. Original interior features visible in the attached current condition photos include tiled entry foyer with box office; lobby with wood paneling, tall square fluted columns (originally gilded), interior doors and hardware; at the mezzanine level, scalloped plasterwork adorns the upper portion of the walls, with three medallions, the center medallion still retaining the original gilding, positioned opposite the three rose-tinted tall mirrors which run the height of the lobby on the left side. The interior treatments are not usually as durable as exterior features which are more often the focus of historic preservation, so careful examination of what can be preserved and what might need to be restored will be required.

Preliminary determination and recommendations for treatment of both the exterior and interior historically significant features of the West Newton Cinema would be an outcome of the plan that is the subject of this application. The available public documentation associated with the demolition delay review of this building, including the determination that the cinema building is preferably to be preserved and the demolition delay restriction put in place by the Newton Historical Commission in April 2023, do not contain any details about what historic features of the building were deemed significant enough to warrant this action. Consultation with the Commission will be part of the planning process.