



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**

GOVERNOR MICHAEL J. DUNLEAVY

Department of Natural Resources

ALASKA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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August 2, 2022

Mayor Dave Bronson
Municipality of Anchorage
632 West 6th Avenue
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Re: 4th Avenue Theatre, Alaska Historical Commission recommendation

Mayor Bronson:

The Alaska Historical Commission (Commission) met on June 7, 2022 and addressed public concerns regarding Anchorage's iconic 4th Avenue Theater. The property owner's current demolition plan will adversely affect the character of Anchorage's historic downtown area—a destination visited annually by thousands of people worldwide. The Commission strongly opposes demolishing a building so emblematic of Alaska's past and recommends that the Governor of Alaska, under the authority AS 41.35.030, declare the 4th Avenue Theatre an Alaska State Monument and Historic Site by public order and seek written consent from the property owner for this designation.

The federal government listed the 4th Avenue Theatre in the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. Adorned with world-class murals depicting Alaska's natural beauty, industrial progress, and the promise of the future, the theater represents one of the best examples of Art Deco architectural style in Alaska. Significance also derives from its association with an outstanding Alaskan businessman, entrepreneur, and visionary, Austin "Cap" Lathrop. While visiting Alaska in 1947—the year the building was completed— General Dwight D. Eisenhower remarked on how the theatre embodied the "faith Lathrop had in an idea and in a place." The future U.S. President suggested that the rest of the Nation would benefit from a similar "can-do" optimism advocated by Lathrop and his Anchorage theatre.¹ "The [Fourth Avenue] theatre," the Anchorage Daily Times proclaimed, "is a landmark in the transition of Anchorage from a frontier community to a city of permanence."²

The planned demolition will do what the great Alaska Earthquake could not—destroy the 4th Avenue Theater and the 75 years of Anchorage history it represents. The Commission fully

¹ Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, August 5, 1947. *Alaska's First Homegrown Millionaire: Life and Times of Cap Lathrop*. (Anchorage: Publication Consultants, 2006, 94)

² Anchorage Daily Times, 1947.

appreciates the challenges of development within the downtown area and believes a solution is possible. Rehabilitation funds for the 4th Avenue Theatre are available from private funds, tax incentive programs, and state and federal grants. Rehabilitation of the theatre would promote heritage tourism and enhance visitor facilities in downtown Anchorage.

An Alaska State Monument and Historic Site is a special property selected for its invaluable contribution to Alaska state history. The 4th Avenue Theater clearly meets this standard and, per policies and procedures of the Alaska Historic Preservation Act, can officially be declared an Alaska Monument and Historic Site. This designation would ensure by law that the historic character and value of the building would be permanently protected and preserved for future generations, regardless of ownership.

On behalf of the Commission, I thank you for your consideration. Please contact me for more information at 907-269-8715 or judy.bittner@alaska.gov.

Sincerely,



Judith E. Bittner
State Historic Preservation Officer

cc: Lieutenant Governor Kevin Meyer, Chair, Alaska Historical Commission, Lt.Governor@alaska.gov