



June 3, 2009

Michael Stern  
Chairman  
Historic Review Commission  
200 Ross Street, Third Floor  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Dear Chairman Stern:

The Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh is pleased to have nominated the Paramount Pictures Film Exchange building at 1727 Boulevard of the Allies to be a historic landmark. If approved, it would become only the second city-designated historic structure in Uptown (the other is the former Fifth Avenue High School). Designed by R.E. Hall Co. Architects of New York City in 1926, the Paramount Pictures Film Exchange building meets the Historic Review Commission's criteria for its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States.

### **Historic Significance**

The Paramount Pictures Film Exchange Building is the last remnant of Pittsburgh's "Film Row." From the 1920s until the 1970s and 80s, film exchanges were operated by movie studios that contained a film library of reels, offices, and private screening rooms. Theater owners could view a picture before booking them into their theaters. Pittsburgh's film exchanges were all within a couple blocks of each other forming a "film row," because it was very much a 'one-stop shopping' deal, where theater owners could go out of one exchange and immediately into the next—possibly to negotiate or book films from several studios. Now, Pittsburgh's last one remains, the Paramount Pictures Film Exchange building.

### **History Captured in Film**

This history came to light just this spring, when YPA held a historic preservation video contest for students under the age of 25. This year's first-place winner was a student at Pittsburgh Filmmakers, Drew Edward Levinson, who profiled the history—and possible threat—to the Paramount building.

Judges for the contest included a number of experienced preservationists who had never heard of this building, never knew of Film Row, and were fascinated by the video. You can see it here on YouTube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jomyGMIiHTM&feature=channel\\_pagef\\_mt](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jomyGMIiHTM&feature=channel_pagef_mt)

YPA held an awards ceremony on March 28th to honor Mr. Levinson and the video was shown before an audience of about 100 people at Carnegie Museum of Art. State Senator Ferlo encouraged Mr. Levinson to nominate the building for historic status, and YPA offered to assist. YPA's board unanimously supports this nomination.



## Unique Architectural Distinction

The Paramount Pictures Film Exchange is located at the corner of Miltenberger Street, overlooking spectacular views of the Monongahela River, the South Side and Mt. Washington. It is part of the Uptown neighborhood of Pittsburgh, also known as the “Bluff,” a neighborhood that includes Duquesne University and Mercy Hospital.

The Paramount Pictures building is the last remaining of its kind, in terms of its original exterior appearance, which has remained completely unaltered since it was built in 1926. The 83-year-old building is currently vacant.

The building's style can be classified as 1920s Classical with fascinating and unaltered details. It is a two-story building, built primarily of red brick, terra cotta and stone trim. Viewed from the front, the building has 3 bays ornamented by egg and dart moulding, pinecone finials and half shells under the cornice line. The entranceway on the south façade is delicate blue, white and peach terra cotta with scrolls, urns, diaper work and winged heads. A semi-circular arch with “Paramount Pictures” is engraved above a cornice. The entranceway is plastered (swags, heads, etc.) sidelighted and transomed. There is a single wooden door with a mail slot. The foundation is clad in terra cotta also. The side facing Miltenberger Street has 5 bays on the second floor and shields of keystone on the first.

Pittsburgh was a very important city for the film industry, in both the distribution and exhibition of films. The Nickelodeon and exchanges in this city were the model and base for the current system of exhibition and distribution we have today. The Paramount building needs to be preserved because it is the last of its kind.

## New Uses for Old Spaces

YPA nominated the building to be a historic landmark to both honor Pittsburgh's film history, as well as protect the building for future use. Close to Mercy Hospital and Duquesne University with sweeping views of the South Side, the Paramount building is ideally suited for multi-purpose use in the rapidly improving Uptown neighborhood. Possible new uses include a mixed-use live-work space, commercial space, student housing, or other possible options. The building is currently empty but appears structurally sound, and its terra cotta details are remarkably intact.

Other cities across the country are aware of the value of preserving these significant historical structures. These cities are utilizing their classic, lofty spaces, and in most cases, gorgeous views. In Oklahoma City, film exchange lofts are a success and this website details the cities impressive preservation of almost all of their major Hollywood studio film exchanges after they went out in the 1970s – and they have remained mostly unaltered: <http://www.filmrowokc.com/FilmExchange.swf>. Chicago has also gone the way of loft apartments and condominiums, as demonstrated on their website: <http://filmexchangelofts.com/>. Detroit has another amazing film exchange story: [http://brnation.d2sector.net/uc/detroit\\_michigan\\_film\\_exchange\\_building.html](http://brnation.d2sector.net/uc/detroit_michigan_film_exchange_building.html).



While loft apartments are but one option for reuse of the Paramount Pictures Film Exchange Building, a preservation effort must be made before this great city loses another piece of its important but little-known history. In fact this building has a lot more weight than just “a piece of history”; this building represents all that was Pittsburgh’s film history and it even represents the progress of the film industry on a national level. This building is in good shape and it has many possibilities for future uses.

### **New Interactive Panorama of Film Row**

YPA has created a unique, interactive panoramic photograph of Film Row using new GigaPan technology developed at Carnegie Mellon University. The panorama allows the user to zoom in to details of the photograph. A link to the YouTube video and Google Earth are included in the panorama as well. You can view the panorama at <http://www.gigapan.org/viewGigapan.php?id=23905>.

A preserved and restored Paramount Film Exchange Building will provide the neighborhood with a unique asset on which to build future plans. Historic structures are excellent ways to market communities, as the success of the South Side has shown. YPA is also hopeful that this nomination offers an opportunity for a constructive dialogue with UPMC, the building’s owner.

Thank you for helping to give life to history.

Sincerely,

Dan Holland  
Chief Executive Officer