San Francisco Planning

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December 4, 2023

Ms. Angela Calvillo, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
Honorable Supervisor Ronen
Board of Supervisors
City and County of San Francisco
City Hall
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, Room 244
San Francisco, CA 94102
Via email only

Re: **Transmittal of Planning Department Case Number 2023-008267DES**
Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street) Landmark Designation
BOS File No. 230845

Dear Ms. Calvillo and Supervisor Ronen,

On July 25, 2023, the Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution No. 405-23 initiating landmark designation of Grand Theater.

On November 15, 2023, the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission (hereinafter "HPC") conducted a duly noticed public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to consider a draft ordinance to landmark Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street), Assessor's Parcel Block No. 3637, Lot No. 023. At the hearing, the HPC voted to approve a resolution to recommend landmark designation pursuant to Article 10 of the Planning Code.

The proposed landmark designation is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") as a Class 8 Categorical Exemption.

Please find attached documents related to the HPC's action. Also attached is an electronic copy of the proposed ordinance and Legislative Digest, drafted by Deputy City Attorney Peter Miljanich. If you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Aaron D. Starr
Manager of Legislative Affairs

Cc: Peter Miljanich, City Attorney's Office
Ana Herrera, Legislative Aide
John Carroll, Office of the Clerk of the Board
Rich Sucre, Planning Department, Deputy Director of Current Planning
Pilar LaValley, Planning Department
board.of.supervisors@sfgov.org
bos.legislation@sfgov.org.

Attachments:
Draft Article 10 Landmark Designation Ordinance – Grand Theater (PDF)
Planning Department Recommendation Executive Summary, dated November 8, 2023
Article 10 Landmark Designation Fact Sheet – Grand Theater
CEQA Determination

Included with this electronic transmittal:
Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No. 1359 (PDF)
Draft Article 10 Landmark Designation Ordinance – Grand Theater (Word)
Legislative Digest for Grand Theater (Word)

[Planning Code - Landmark Designation - Grand Theater]

Ordinance amending the Planning Code to designate Grand Theater, located at 2665 Mission Street, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 3637, Lot No. 023, as a Landmark consistent with the standards set forth in Article 10 of the Planning Code; affirming the Planning Department's determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; and making public necessity, convenience, and welfare findings under Planning Code, Section 302, and findings of consistency with the General Plan and the eight priority policies of Planning Code, Section 101.1.

NOTE: **Unchanged Code text and uncodified text** are in plain Arial font.
Additions to Codes are in *single-underline italics Times New Roman font*.
Deletions to Codes are in ~~*strikethrough italics Times New Roman font*~~.
Board amendment additions are in double-underlined Arial font.
Board amendment deletions are in ~~strikethrough Arial font~~.
Asterisks (* * * *) indicate the omission of unchanged Code subsections or parts of tables.

Be it ordained by the People of the City and County of San Francisco:

Section 1. CEQA and Land Use Findings.

(a) The Planning Department has determined that the actions contemplated in this ordinance comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (California Public Resources Code Sections 21000 *et seq*.). Said determination is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in File No. _____ and is incorporated herein by reference. The Board of Supervisors affirms this determination.

(b) Pursuant to Planning Code Section 302, the Board of Supervisors finds that the proposed landmark designation of Grand Theater, located at 2665 Mission Street, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 3637, Lot No. 023, will serve the public necessity, convenience, and welfare

for the reasons set forth in Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No. _____, recommending approval of the proposed designation, which is incorporated herein by reference.

(c) On November 15, 2023, the Historic Preservation Commission, in Resolution No. _____, adopted findings that the actions contemplated in this ordinance are consistent, on balance, with the City's General Plan and with the eight priority policies of Planning Code Section 101.1. The Board adopts these findings as its own.

Section 2. General Findings.

(a) On July 25, 2023, the Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution No. 405-23, initiating landmark designation of Grand Theater as a San Francisco Landmark pursuant to Section 1004.1 of the Planning Code. On July 28, 2023, the Mayor returned the approved resolution unsigned. Said resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in Board File No. 230845.

(b) Pursuant to Charter Section 4.135, the Historic Preservation Commission has authority "to recommend approval, disapproval, or modification of landmark designations and historic district designations under the Planning Code to the Board of Supervisors."

(c) Planning Department Preservation staff prepared a Landmark Designation Fact Sheet for Grand Theater. All preparers meet the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards for historic preservation program staff, as set forth in Code of Federal Regulations Title 36, Part 61, Appendix A. The report was reviewed for accuracy and conformance with the purposes and standards of Article 10 of the Planning Code.

(d) The Historic Preservation Commission, at its regular meeting of November 15, 2023, reviewed Planning Department staff's analysis of the historical significance of Grand Theater set forth in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet dated November 8, 2023.

(e) On November 15, 2023, after holding a public hearing on the proposed designation, and having considered the specialized analyses prepared by Planning Department staff, and the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended designation of Grand Theater as a landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code by Resolution No. _____. Said resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board in Board File No. _____.

(f) The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that Grand Theater has a special character and special historical, architectural, and aesthetic interest and value, and that its designation as a Landmark will further the purposes of and conform to the standards set forth in Article 10 of the Planning Code. In doing so, the Board hereby incorporates by reference the findings of the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet.

Section 3. Designation.

Pursuant to Section 1004.3 of the Planning Code, Grand Theater, located at 2665 Mission Street, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 3637, Lot No. 023, is hereby designated as a San Francisco Landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code. Appendix A to Article 10 of the Planning Code is hereby amended to include this property.

Section 4. Required Data.

(a) The description, location, and boundary of the Landmark site consists of the City parcel located at 2665 Mission Street, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 3637, Lot No. 023, in San Francisco's Mission District.

(b) The characteristics of the Landmark that justify its designation are described and shown in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet and other supporting materials contained in Planning Department Record Docket No. 2023-008267DES. In brief, Grand Theater is eligible

for local designation because it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of San Francisco history (National Register of Historic Places Criterion A) and as an example that embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction (Criterion C). Specifically, designation of Grand Theater, constructed in 1940, the last single-screen neighborhood movie theater constructed in San Francisco prior to World War II, is eligible for local designation for its association with the City's network of 20th century neighborhood theaters, an important element of our heritage. Further, designation of Grand Theater, a rare example of a large-scale Streamline Moderne style building, is also proper given its architectural significance as a building that embodies distinctive characteristics of the Streamline Moderne style, including notable neon sign marquee, and it is also representative of the work of two architects of merit, G. Albert Lansburgh and S. Charles Lee, renowned theater designers.

(c) The particular features that shall be preserved, or replaced in-kind as determined necessary, are those shown in photographs and described in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, which can be found in Planning Department Record Docket No. 2023-008267DES, and which are incorporated in this designation by reference as though fully set forth. Specifically, the following features are character-defining and shall be preserved or replaced in kind:

(1) The character-defining exterior features of Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street), including:

(A) Tall one-story form and massing;

(B) Façade with rounded corners and stacked massing clad in smooth stucco highlighted by ornamental "speed lines";

(C) Recessed entryway with multi-colored terrazzo paving in a geometric pattern (interior and exterior);

(D) Entryway with angled, metal-framed storefront windows, separated by rounded aluminum pilasters, resting on tile-clad bulkhead, flanking a curved storefront wall (transom above has been partially infilled but the aluminum framing is extant);

(E) Entrances at each end of curved storefront, featuring paired doors with round porthole-type windows and vertical speedlines;

(F) Upper portion of primary façade with rounded corners, shaped parapet, and plaster ornamentation consisting of ornamental horizontal "speed lines" and curved elements;

(G) Fenestration at upper portion of façade, consisting of small octagonal steel-sash windows and glass block windows that flank the marquee;

(H) Angled marquee sign with rounded vertical accent piers projecting over the sidewalk above the storefront; and

(I) Vertical tower sign, rising an extra story in height above the main center mass of the structure, with flared or winged sides, curved cap, and neon letters spelling out G-R-A-N-D on both sign faces.

(2) The character-defining interior features of the Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street) are those associated with areas that have historically been accessible to the public including:

(A) Regular rectangular plan with principal spaces of lobby and auditorium;

(B) Proscenium, formed by narrowing of the east end of the auditorium, highlighted with series of radiating bands of fluted plaster decoration at walls and ceiling;

(C) Metal vents with sunrise decorative motif on walls flanking the proscenium;

(D) Decorative plaster moldings affixed to upper edge of walls and down the center of ceiling in auditorim; and

(E) Decorative features in former lobby, including intersecting, curved walls, cove lighting, patterned multi-colored terrazzo floor (extending from interior to exterior), and stairs with metal handrails at north and south end of the lobby.

Section 5. Effective Date. This ordinance shall become effective 30 days after enactment. Enactment occurs when the Mayor signs the ordinance, the Mayor returns the ordinance unsigned or does not sign the ordinance within ten days of receiving it, or the Board of Supervisors overrides the Mayor's veto of the ordinance.

APPROVED AS TO FORM:
DAVID CHIU, City Attorney

By: /s/ Peter R. Miljanich
PETER R. MILJANICH
Deputy City Attorney

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LANDMARK DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HEARING DATE: NOVEMBER 15, 2023

Record No.:	2023-008267DES
Project Address:	Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street)
Zoning:	Mission NCT (Neighborhood Commercial Transit) 65-B Height and Bulk District
Cultural District:	Calle 24 Latino
Block/Lot:	3637/023
Project Sponsor:	SF Planning Department 49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400 San Francisco, CA 94103
Property Owner:	FCW Corporation Trustee 150 Gardenside Dr., Apt. 102 San Francisco, CA 94131
Staff Contact:	Pilar LaValley (628-652-7372) pilar.lavalley@sfgov.org
Environmental Review:	Categorical Exemption

Recommendation: Recommend Landmark Designation to Board of Supervisors

Property Description

Grand Theater is a former single-screen neighborhood movie theater (theater closed in 1988) located on the east side of Mission Street between 22nd and 23rd streets in San Francisco's Mission District. The surrounding Mission Street commercial corridor is characterized by one- to three-story, commercial or residential-over-commercial buildings. Upper floors of the residential-over-commercial buildings are residential in character with bay windows, large operable windows, and decorative projecting cornices. Commercial storefronts are generally built to the sidewalk and consist of raised bulkheads, large metal-framed storefront windows, transoms, and projecting awnings and signs.

The former single-screen motion picture theater is a one-story, steel frame and board-form concrete, commercial building designed in the Streamline Moderne style. The rectangular-plan building, clad in smooth stucco, is capped by a flat roof. The primary façade faces west and includes three storefronts; the wide center storefront is recessed while the flanking narrow storefronts are flush with the sidewalk. The smaller storefronts are framed by incised horizontal and vertical "speed lines" in the plaster façade.

The center storefront is the former theater's entrance vestibule and features multi-colored terrazzo flooring set in a geometric pattern. Projecting above the storefront level is the theater's angled marquee sign with rounded vertical accent piers. The upper story of the façade is fenestrated with glass block windows and octagonal steel-sash casement windows. The upper façade features horizontal speed lines, composed of bands of incised, curved plaster, and terminates in a stepped parapet with curved corners that frames a vertical tower sign. Rising an extra story in height above the main mass of the structure, the tower sign has a narrow profile with segmented elements that flare out to either side like curved wings. The sign terminates with a flat projecting cap that curves downward toward the rear of the building. Metal can letters lit with neon vertically spell out G-R-A-N-D on both sign faces.

Features of the subject building that are common to twentieth century single-screen neighborhood movie theaters include its scale, recessed entry under an oversize projecting marquee, decorative features that emphasize and differentiate the storefront from adjacent commercial buildings, large neon-lit signs, and interior that consists of a foyer and auditorium.

Project Description

The item before the Historic Preservation Commission is consideration of a Resolution to Recommend Article 10 landmark designation of Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street), including interior spaces associated with its former use as a single-screen neighborhood movie theater, to the Board of Supervisors under Article 10 of the Planning Code, Section 1004.2. The pending Landmark designation was initiated by the Board of Supervisors.

On July 18, 2023, Supervisor Ronen introduced a proposed Resolution under Board of Supervisors (hereinafter "Board") File No. 230845 to initiate the Landmark designation of Grand Theater. On July 25, 2023, the Board voted unanimously to approve the Resolution, and on July 28, 2023, without the Mayor's signature, Resolution No. 405-23 initiating landmark designation of Grand Theater became effective.

Compliance With Planning Code

The proposed project is in compliance with all other provisions of the Planning Code.

Article 10 of the Planning Code.

The executive summary and analysis under review was prepared by Department preservation staff, who meet the Secretary of the Interior's professional qualifications. The Department has determined that the subject property meets the requirements for eligibility as an individual landmark pursuant to Article 10 of the Planning Code. The justification for its inclusion is explained in detail in the attached Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, and briefly in this Executive Summary.

Significance: Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street), constructed in 1940, is significant as a former single-screen neighborhood movie theater designed by architects of merit G. Albert Lansburgh and S. Charles Lee in the Streamline Moderne style for prominent theater owners the Levin family. The last movie theater built in San Francisco prior to World War II, the Grand Theater was the "youngest and most southernmost" of the theaters that composed the Mission Miracle Mile theater district, one of the city's most important theater districts. Grand Theater is historically significant for its association with the city's network of neighborhood theaters, particularly the concentration of movie theaters in the Mission District, during the early- to mid-20th century, and is an invaluable part of our cultural heritage. Grand Theater is also architecturally significant as it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a large-scale Streamline Moderne building with notable neon sign marquee, and it is also representative of the work of renowned theater architects G. Albert Lansburgh and S. Charles Lee.

Underrepresented Landmark Types: The proposed landmark designation does not address any of the four previously identified underrepresented landmark types prioritized by the Commission.

Integrity: Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street), which closed as a theater in 1988, has been altered, including removal of fixed seats and installation of flat floor in place of original raked floor, but maintains a sufficient integrity to convey its historical and architectural significance.

Draft Character-Defining Features: Proposed character-defining features are:

(1) The character-defining exterior features of Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street), including:

(A) Tall one-story form and massing;

(B) Façade with rounded corners and stacked massing clad in smooth stucco highlighted by ornamental "speed lines";

(C) Recessed entryway with multi-colored terrazzo paving in a geometric pattern (interior and exterior);

(D) Entryway with angled, metal-framed storefront windows, separated by rounded aluminum pilasters, resting on tile-clad bulkhead, flanking a curved storefront wall (transom above has been partially infilled but the aluminum framing is extant);

(E) Entrances at each end of curved storefront, featuring paired doors with round porthole-type windows and vertical speed lines;

(F) Upper portion of primary façade with rounded corners, shaped parapet, and plaster ornamentation consisting of ornamental horizontal "speed lines" and curved elements;

(G) Fenestration at upper portion of façade, consisting of small octagonal steel-sash windows and glass block windows that flank the marquee;

(H) Angled marquee sign with rounded vertical accent piers projecting over the sidewalk above the storefront; and

(I) Vertical tower sign, rising an extra story in height above the main center mass of the structure, with flared or winged sides, curved cap, and neon letters spelling out G-R-A-N-D on both sign faces.

(2) The character-defining interior features of the Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street) are those associated with areas that have historically been accessible to the public including:

(A) Regular rectangular plan with principal spaces of lobby and auditorium;

(B) Proscenium, formed by narrowing of the east end of the auditorium, highlighted with series of radiating bands of fluted plaster decoration at walls and ceiling;

(C) Metal vents with sunrise decorative motif on walls flanking the proscenium;

(D) Decorative plaster moldings affixed to upper edge of walls and down the center of ceiling in auditorium; and

(E) Decorative features in former lobby, including intersecting, curved walls, cove lighting, patterned multi-colored terrazzo floor (extending from interior to exterior), and stairs with metal handrails at north and south end of the lobby.

Boundaries of the Landmark: The proposed Landmark encompasses Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street), Assessor's Parcel Block No. 3637, Lot No. 023.

Racial and Social Equity Analysis

On July 15, 2020, the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission adopted Resolution No. 1127 centering Preservation Planning on racial and social equity. Understanding the benefits, burdens, and opportunities to advance racial and social equity that proposed Preservation Planning documents provide is part of the Department's Racial and Social Equity Initiative. This is also consistent with the Mayor's Citywide Strategic Initiatives for equity and accountability and with the Office of Racial Equity, which required all Departments to conduct this analysis.

The proposed landmark designation of Grand Theater makes no substantive policy changes to the Planning Code or the Planning Department's procedures. The proposed landmark designation produces few, if any, opportunities to advance racial and social equity.

Staff does not foresee any direct or unintended negative consequences from the proposed landmark designation.

Public / Neighborhood Input

To date, staff have received no public comments about the designation.

Issues & Other Considerations

- Interior Character-Defining Features: Inclusion of interior spaces as character-defining is warranted as these spaces, which historically functioned as publicly accessible lobby and auditorium, are representative of the former single-screen neighborhood theater building type.

- Property owner input: On October 26, 2023, the Department sent mailed notice to the property owner regarding the landmark designation recommendation hearing scheduled for November 15, 2023.

- Calle 24 Latino Cultural District: The Grand Theater is located within the Calle 24 Latino Cultural District, established in 2022, to preserve, enhance and advocate for Latino cultural continuity, vitality, and community in San Francisco's touchstone Latino Cultural District and the greater Mission neighborhood. The Calle 24 Latino Cultural District encompasses the area between 22nd Street, Potrero Avenue, Cesar Chavez Street, and Mission Street. The district boasts the largest collection of murals in the city and hosts a multitude of events that enliven the neighborhood with history, spirituality, and community throughout

the year. The Cultural District does not possess land use controls that are specific to the subject property.

Environmental Review Status

The Planning Department has determined that actions by regulatory agencies for protection of the environment (specifically in this case, landmark designation) are exempt from environmental review, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15308 (Class Eight-Categorical).

Basis for Recommendation

The Department recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission recommend to the Board of Supervisors landmark designation of Grand Theater as it meets the provisions of Article 10 of the Planning Code regarding Landmark Designation. Grand Theater, opened in 1940, the last single-screen movie theater to open in San Francisco prior to World War II, is architecturally and historically significant as a former single-screen neighborhood movie theater designed by architects of merit G. Albert Lansburgh and S. Charles Lee in the Streamline Moderne style.

Attachments

Draft Resolution – Recommending Landmark Designation – Grand Theater
Exhibit A – Draft Landmark Designation Ordinance – Grand Theater
Exhibit B – Landmark Designation Fact Sheet for Grand Theater
Exhibit C – Maps and Context Images
Exhibit D – Board of Supervisors Resolution No. 405-23

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ARTICLE 10 LANDMARK DESIGNATION
FACT SHEET

Grand Theater, 2023
Source: SF Planning Department

Historic Name:	Grand Theater
Address:	2665 Mission Street
Block/ Lot(s):	3637/023
Parcel Area:	9,186 square feet
Zoning:	Mission NCT (Neighborhood Commercial Transit) 65-B Height and Bulk District

	Calle 24 Latino Cultural District
Year Built:	1940
Architect:	G. Albert Lansburgh and S. Charles Lee
Prior Historic Studies/Other Designations:	Andrew Murray and Katie Tom, Office of the Legislative Analyst, SF Board of Supervisors, *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theater Non-Contiguous Multiple Property Historic District Context Statement* (Discussion Draft, April 27, 2006)
Prior HPC Actions:	On June 7, 1995, by Resolution No. 477, the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (LPAB) recommended initiation of landmark designation of Grand Theater. At their hearing on October 19, 1995, the Planning Commission adopted Resolution No. 13996 to disapprove landmark designation. This disapproval was subsequently appealed to the Board of Supervisors which upheld the Planning Commission decision on January 2, 1996.

Significance Criteria:	*Events:* Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. (National Register Criterion A) *Architecture/Design:* Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, and/or represents the work of a master. (National Register Criterion C)
Period of Significance:	1940. The period of significance is 1940, when the building was constructed and began operation as a single-screen neighborhood movie theater.
Statement of Significance:	Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street), constructed in 1940, is significant as a former single-screen neighborhood movie theater designed by architects of merit G. Albert Lansburgh and S. Charles Lee in the Streamline Moderne style for prominent theater owners the Levin family. The last movie theater built in San Francisco prior to World War II, the Grand Theater was the "youngest and most southernmost" of the theaters that composed the Mission Miracle Mile theater district, one of the city's most important theater districts. Grand Theater is historically significant for its association with the city's network of neighborhood theaters, particularly the concentration of movie theaters in the Mission District, during the early- to mid-20th century, and is an invaluable part of our cultural heritage. Grand Theater is also architecturally significant as it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a large-scale Streamline Moderne building with notable neon sign marquee, and it is also representative of the work of renowned theater architects G. Albert Lansburgh and S. Charles Lee.
Assessment of Integrity:	There have been several significant alterations to the subject building, including remodel of auditorium that raised raked floor and removed fixed seats, as well as removal of the ticket booth and alterations to the lobby/foyer and storefront. While the alterations to the former auditorium have diminished aspects of the design, materials, and workmanship of the building, the building retains sufficient architectural integrity to convey its significance as an example of a single-screen neighborhood movie theater in Streamline Moderne style. Further, the building retains integrity of location,

	design, feeling, association, and setting to convey its significance as Streamline Moderne design associated with architects of merit S. Charles Lee and G. Albert Lansburgh.
Character-Defining Features:	(1) The character-defining exterior features of Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street), including: (A) Tall one-story form and massing; (B) Façade with rounded corners and stacked massing clad in smooth stucco highlighted by ornamental “speed lines”; (C) Recessed entryway with multi-colored terrazzo paving in a geometric pattern (interior and exterior); (D) Entryway with angled, metal-framed storefront windows, separated by rounded aluminum pilasters, resting on tile-clad bulkhead, flanking a curved storefront wall (transom above has been partially infilled but the aluminum framing is extant); (E) Entrances at each end of curved storefront, featuring paired doors with round porthole-type windows and vertical speed lines; (F) Upper portion of primary façade with rounded corners, shaped parapet, and plaster ornamentation consisting of ornamental horizontal "speed lines” and curved elements; (G) Fenestration at upper portion of façade, consisting of small octagonal steel-sash windows and glass block windows that flank the marquee; (H) Angled marquee sign with rounded vertical accent piers projecting over the sidewalk above the storefront; and (I) Vertical tower sign, rising an extra story in height above the main center mass of the structure, with flared or winged sides, curved cap, and neon letters spelling out G-R-A-N-D on both sign faces. (2) The character-defining interior features of the Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street) are those associated with areas that have historically been accessible to the public including: (A) Regular rectangular plan with principal spaces of lobby and auditorium; (B) Proscenium, formed by narrowing of the east end of the auditorium, highlighted with series of radiating bands of fluted plaster decoration at walls and ceiling; (C) Metal vents with sunrise decorative motif on walls flanking the proscenium; (D) Decorative plaster moldings affixed to upper edge of walls and down the center of ceiling in auditorium; and (E) Decorative features in former lobby, including intersecting, curved walls, cove lighting, patterned multi-colored terrazzo floor (extending from interior to exterior), and stairs with metal handrails at north and south end of the lobby.

Statement of Significance Summary

Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street), constructed in 1940, is significant as a former single-screen neighborhood movie theater designed by architects of merit G. Albert Lansburgh and S. Charles Lee in the Streamline Moderne style for prominent theater owners the Levin family. The last movie theater built in San Francisco prior to World War II, the Grand Theater was the "youngest and most southernmost" of the theaters that composed the Mission Miracle Mile theater district, one of the city's most important theater districts. Grand Theater is historically significant for its association with the city's network of neighborhood theaters, particularly the concentration of movie theaters in the Mission District, during the early- to mid-20th century, and is an invaluable part of our cultural heritage. Grand Theater is also architecturally significant as it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a large-scale Streamline Moderne building with notable neon sign marquee, and it is also representative of the work of renowned theater architects G. Albert Lansburgh and S. Charles Lee.

Property Description and History

Grand Theater is a former single-screen neighborhood movie theater (theater closed in 1988) located on the east side of Mission Street between 22nd and 23rd streets in San Francisco's Mission District. The surrounding Mission Street commercial corridor is characterized by one- to three-story, commercial or residential-over-commercial buildings. Upper floors of the residential-over-commercial buildings are residential in character with bay windows, large operable windows, and decorative projecting cornices. Commercial storefronts are generally built to the sidewalk and consist of raised bulkheads, large metal-framed storefront windows, transoms, and projecting awnings and signs.

The subject building occupies the entire underlying 75-foot by 122.5-foot parcel, except for narrow alleys along the side elevations that connect to the street via contemporary metal doors at building facade. Side elevations are board-form concrete with no fenestration. At the rear of each alley are one-story ancillary structures that are attached to the side of the main theater building but do not share internal connections.

The building is a tall one-story, former single-screen motion picture theater with a flat roof. The west-facing primary façade is dominated by projecting marquee and vertical signs. The upper portion of the façade is clad in smooth stucco and undecorated except for several "speed lines" – formed by inset horizontal bands of fluted stucco - that extend across the wall or intersect with window openings. Window openings include two glass block windows and four octagonal steel-sash casement windows. The façade terminates with a stepped parapet, composed of curved elements highlighted with incised "speed lines," that comes together at the center of the building to frame a vertical tower sign. Rising an extra story in height above the main mass of the structure, the tower sign has a narrow profile with segmented elements that flare out to either side like curved wings. The sign terminates with a flat projecting cap that curves downward toward the rear of the building. Metal can letters lit with neon vertically spell out G-R-A-N-D on both sign faces. The vertical sign rests on a curb that extends out from the building before curving down toward the street to terminate atop the rounded vertical accent piers of the marquee.

Projecting from the center of the façade, above the storefront level, is the former theater's angled marquee sign with rounded vertical accent piers (neon tubes that originally highlighted the features of the marquee and vertical sign have been removed). Illuminated plastic reader boards to advertise events extend across both faces

of the marquee. The underside of marquee, which extends into the vestibule to the recessed storefront, is clad with tongue-and-groove wood. Originally, the underside the of marquee was lit with neon tubes attached to stucco cladding.

The building contains three commercial storefronts; the wide center storefront is recessed while the flanking narrow storefronts are flush with the sidewalk. The marquee extending across the center of the façade delineates the recessed setback that formed the entrance vestibule for the former theater. Within this opening under the marquee, at the property line abutting the sidewalk, is a bulky structure that encloses the housing for contemporary metal roll-down security gates. The vestibule is paved with multi-colored terrazzo arranged in geometric pattern – the terrazzo abruptly terminates at the sidewalk indicating that it originally extended onto the public right-of-way. Within the recessed vestibule, moveable wood tables and benches are installed against the storefront.

At either end of this recessed space are slightly angled walls with clear-coat aluminum (chrome) storefront windows resting on a tile-glazed bulkhead (within each framed opening are aluminum and glass display windows that could be opened from the exterior to change posters/displays). An engaged, round pilaster clad in clear-coat aluminum marks the corners of the angled storefront walls and the return at the sidewalk where the storefront continues for one bay at each end of the recessed opening (these windows and the associated features have been painted over). At the rear of the vestibule is a wall that curves out toward the street. At either end of this curved wall are entrances consisting of paired doors with porthole windows intersected by vertical speed lines. The existing entry doors may have originally served as interior doors between the lobby and auditorium. Original exterior entrances were consisted of four sets of paired doors – these flanked a free-standing ticket booth that projected out toward the street at the center of the recessed vestibule – with vertical speed lines intersecting with windows (when the doors closed, the window openings were octagonal to match the windows on upper portion of façade). Today, contemporary storefront windows extend between the two entrances. The former transom, which was aluminum multi-light with translucent glazing that could probably be internally illuminated, extended along all sides of the recessed vestibule above the storefronts. This feature has been mostly infilled (2015) but most of the original clear-coat aluminum framing, including stacked aluminum framing that look like large picture frames (probably used to advertise current or coming screenings) above the curved storefront wall, remains extant.

At either end of the façade are small storefronts that are framed by incised horizontal and vertical “speed lines.” Shallow recesses provide space for emergency exit doors from the side passages along the sides of the theater and angled doors to access these two small commercial spaces. Both commercial spaces have fixed and slider-sash metal storefront windows on tile-clad bulkheads and contemporary metal scissor gates. Storefront windows for both commercial spaces have been replaced but the tiled bulkheads appear to be original.

The interior of former theater consists of foyer or lobby, auditorium, and partial second floor with former projection room and offices. The foyer is a shallow space with plaster ceilings and walls and multi-color terrazzo floor. Above the entrance storefront, a curved soffit with cove lighting mirrors the shape of the storefront before extending across the stairways at each end of the lobby/foyer. Narrow hallways adjacent to the stairs extend to contemporary metal exit doors at the north and south walls of the building. The outward-curving, former auditorium wall is unadorned. In the center of this wall, aligned with the entrance storefront, is a wide opening, capped by a projecting curved cornice, leading to the former auditorium. To either side are smaller openings

with rounded returns (the terrazzo flooring extends into these two smaller openings, which are probably the original entrances to the auditorium).

Stairs with metal handrails lead up to landings with curved walls – restrooms are located at each landing – before continuing to the second floor. The second floor consists of small offices flanking the former projection room. None of the projectors or related mechanical equipment are extant although the small openings in the wall to the auditorium through which movies would have been projected have been retained. Beyond the former projection room, in what would have originally been the rear of the auditorium is a long narrow room that extends the width of the building. Within this interior addition (2015) the upper portions of the walls at the rear of the original theater have been retained. Along the side walls are remnants of the original crown molding. Along the top edge of what would have been the original rear wall is a curving soffit (cove lighting) and small openings delineate the location of the former projecting room.

Beyond the foyer is a one-story space that is part of the two-story insertion that was added in 2015 at rear of the former auditorium. This interior addition enclosed the rear wall of the auditorium. To either side of this open space, which leads between foyer and auditorium, are offices and a reception bar/counter and classroom. The remaining volume of the full-height auditorium extends to the rear building wall. It has a flat, carpeted floor, partially furred-out walls, and painted ceiling. The original raked floor is extant underneath the framing that was installed to raise and flatten the floor when the theater was converted to retail use in the early 1990s. Contemporary light fixtures and rigging for sound and lighting hang from ceiling.

At the rear of the auditorium (former theater) is a contemporary screen and low stage framed by a simple proscenium consisting of oversized rounded stucco pilasters and outward-curving soffit. These forms radiate into the auditorium in bands of fluted plaster extending down the walls and curving outward along the ceiling. On each side of the proscenium, between the bands of fluted plaster, mounted high on the wall, are large metal vents in sunburst pattern. These decorative features appear to be original although they were covered by demising walls when the building was converted to retail use in the early 1990s. Other extant decorative features in the former theater are foliate-shaped moldings affixed to the upper edges of side walls and along the center of the ceiling.

The Grand Theater building was constructed as a one-story structure, measuring approximately 75-feet by 122.5-feet, housing a single-screen movie theater and two small commercial spaces in 1940 by Robert A. Lurie Co. (Peoples Theater Company) at construction cost of $44,700.[1] The new theater replaced a previous building, a one-story structure with five commercial storefronts (depicted on the 1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map). On the 1939 Building Permit application for the new theater, the architect is listed as G. Albert Lansburgh and contractor as Cahill Brothers.

A February 1940 article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* about real estate improvements and new construction on this block of Mission Street noted that the theater cost $250,000 to build and outfit and that D.B. Levin had a 99-year lease from the owner, the Lurie Co., to operate the new theater.[2] This article also states that the design was collaboration between architects G. Albert Lansburgh and S. Charles Lee. The Theater's opening was mentioned

[1] San Francisco Building Permit #46089, issued October 13, 1939 (filed under 2671 Mission Street); "Building Contracts," San Francisco Call, March 26, 1913, 19.
[2] *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 25, 1940.

in another *San Francisco Chronicle* article from March 23, 1940, which noted that it was "bringing another new family theater to the Mission district."[3]

The building is depicted on the 1950 Sanborn Map with small stores (at 2663 Mission Street and 2671 Mission Street, respectively) flanking the center storefront with projecting angled marquee at 2665 Mission Street. Notes on the map describe the building as reinforced concrete and steel frame with steel trusses, and as the "Grand Theater" used for "movies." Building Permits from the 1950s indicate that one of the small commercial spaces was occupied by a candy store, which may have also served as the theater's concession stand.

The former single-screen movie theater originally seated approximately 870 people on one level. An undated interior floor plan (provided by current tenant as circa 1940) depicts the configuration of the original auditorium with three sections of seating bisected by two aisles extending from the entrance foyer to the proscenium and screen at east end of the building. Narrow aisles also extended along both sides of the auditorium. The floor was originally raked, angling downward from the west to east, so that those seated at rear could view the screen (the raked floor is extant, underneath the framing installed in the early 1990s when the floor was flattened for insertion of retail space). Extending out toward the street, a ticket booth (not extant) sat at the center of the recessed entrance storefront.

An undated photograph of the foyer shows that opposite the original main entrances, the auditorium wall was originally solid and decorated with a large mirror surrounded by a scene of large birds – like Herons or Storks – in a streamside setting. The image had a painted background with figures of the birds and foliage in slight relief. The floor was carpeted, and other surfaces appear to have been painted plaster.

Undated photographs of the auditorium show the three sections of seats with two main aisles leading to sets of stairs at either end of a shallow, U-shaped low stage with a curtain covering the movie screen. The curtained screen was framed by a simple proscenium formed by oversized rounded pilasters and outward-curving soffit. These forms radiate into the auditorium in bands of fluted plaster extending down the walls and curving outward along the ceiling. A striped band of plaster, flanked by moldings in vaguely foliate shapes, ran along the center of the ceiling, intersecting with the first band of fluted plaster. On each side of the proscenium, between the bands of fluted plaster, mounted high on the wall, were sunburst pattern large metal vents. Side walls had stepped chair rail that wrapped up and around emergency exits and a cornice. Between the cornice and chair rail, the walls had a dark finish with painted images, suggestive of mythological gods and goddesses. These images were probably painted with paint that would illuminate in blacklight, which were common features of S. Charles Lee's interior theater decoration. Along the top edge of the wall were painted decals in foliate shapes interspersed with tridents. At the rear wall of the auditorium, paired doors with porthole-shaped windows aligned with the main aisles (these appear to match the doors in use at the current exterior entrances). Above these doorways, high on the wall, were octagonal windows (matching those on the façade). Between these windows were multiple openings for the movie projectors (the projectors are not extant although the holes in the wall remain). At least one of these interior octagonal windows and the openings for the projectors are extent.

The Grand Theater closed in the late 1980s. In 1990, a Building Permit was issued to convert the former theater into two retail spaces. Plans associated with the 1990 Building Permit indicate that exterior alterations for this new use were limited to installation of roll-down security gates behind (inside) the existing entrances with existing

[3] San Francisco Theatres: The Grand Theatre

doors, storefronts, and ticket booth retained. At the foyer, a new opening was cut into the former auditorium wall and paired doors in the original openings to the theater aisles were removed. In the former theater, the floor was raised and flattened, the movie screen was removed, walls were built around the proscenium, and a demising wall was added along the center of the former theater, dividing it into two long, narrow retail spaces.

In 2009, another Building Permit was issued to remove the interior demising wall to create a single large retail space. At some point between 1990 and 2009, the former theater ticket booth may have been removed as it is not depicted in the 2009 Building Permit plans.

The current tenant, Grey Area, a digital arts nonprofit organization, renovated the building prior to their occupancy in 2015. This work included a two-story interior addition to create additional studio spaces at rear of the former theater, as well as removing demising walls within former theater, which exposed the former proscenium and associated decorative details which were restored. In early 2023, Grey Area unveiled the partially restored neon on the vertical sign, marking the first time in over 30 years that the letters spelling out G-R-A-N-D had been lit up.[4]

Events: Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history (National Register Criterion A).

Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street), constructed in 1940 by the Lurie Company/Peoples Theater Company as a single-screen neighborhood movie theater, was operated for many years by D.B. Levin. The last movie theater built in San Francisco prior to World War II, the Grand Theater was the "youngest and most southernmost" of the theaters that composed the Mission Miracle Mile theater district, one of the city's most important theater districts, rivaled only by the Downtown Market Street theater district. The theater, which ceased operation in 1988, was one of the last of the neighborhood's movie theaters to close. Grand Theater is historically significant for its association with the city's network of neighborhood theaters, particularly the concentration of movie theaters in the Mission District, during the early- to mid-20th century, and is an invaluable part of our cultural heritage.

Developed initially has a middle-class streetcar suburb, the Mission District has traditionally been San Francisco's largest and most self-contained working-class neighborhood. The neighborhoods origins

> … trace back to the founding of Mission Dolores in 1776. Under Spanish, Mexican and the early years of American rule, the Mission remained a rural district dominated by several important California families. Between 1870 and 1900, the Mission District developed as a middle-class residential neighborhood attracting thousands of native-born American and some German immigrants. After the 1906 Earthquake and Fire destroyed the South of Market district, the Mission District, which remained relatively untouched south of 20th Street, attracted many of the predominantly Irish, working-class refugees. Within a few years, the Mission had been transformed by this migration into San Francisco's largest and most populous working-class neighborhood. "The Mission," as it became known, developed as a city within a city, with its own industrial base and workers' housing districts. The Mission also developed its own "downtown" along

[4] Mission Moves: After 30 years, Grand Theater sign shines anew (missionlocal.org)

> Mission Street, between 16th and 24th Streets, where "downtown" department stores and banks opened neighborhood branches.[5]

This burgeoning commercial corridor, formerly known as the "Mission Miracle Mile," was comprised roughly of eight blocks of Mission Street between 16th and 24th Streets. In addition to a selection of downtown department stores, it included at least a dozen nickelodeons, Vaudeville houses and movie palaces.

> The large-scale development of theaters in San Francisco's Mission District began after the 1906 Catastrophe leveled San Francisco's Market Street district, including all of the early Vaudeville houses. Responding to the destruction downtown, some entrepreneurs moved their businesses to the relatively undamaged sections of the Mission and Fillmore Districts, where business could resume quickly. Initially nickelodeon operators and Vaudeville directors converted existing commercial buildings into venues but by 1910 they were construction theater buildings built specifically for the purpose. … Theater construction in the Mission District accelerated during the early 1920s, mirroring national trends. By 1925, at least a dozen motion picture theaters were operating on or adjacent to Mission Street. … Even after the Market Street theater district was reconstructed, the Mission Miracle Mile continued to thrive and prosper with the working-class neighborhood trade.[6]

By 1940, when the Grand Theater opened as the "most modern looking theater in the Mission District,"[7] the Mission Miracle Mile, as it was known at that time, had become one of the "…city's most important theater districts, with at least a dozen nickelodeons, Vaudeville houses, and movie palaces."[8]

In the 1960s, the Mission District began a gradual demographic and socio-economic transformation, as the predominantly Irish-American residents moved out and were replaced by immigrants from Mexico and Central America, transforming the area into San Francisco's largest Latino neighborhood. Along with many of the other Mission District theaters, the Grand Theater shifted programming to Spanish language movies in the 1970s and 1980s.

The following historical context on Mission's Latino commercial life is excerpted from the *Nuestra Historia: San Francisco Pan-Latino Historic Context Statement* (Draft, April 2023):[9]

> The heart of the Mission's Latino commercial life could be found along two main corridors: the "Mission Miracle Mile" along Mission Street, and lower 24th Street. A smaller concentration was located along 16th street, roughly from South Van Ness to Guerrero Street. The "Miracle Mile" was a marketing concept promoted by neighborhood business owners from the 1930s through the 1960s. It covered the stretch of Mission Street from 16th Street to César Chávez Street and served as a major shopping destination, second only to Union Square. Many restaurants and large retail chains, including Hale's and

[5] New Mission Theater National Register Nomination, Section 8, Page 1. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/123861222
[6] New Mission Theater National Register Nomination, Section 8, Page 1.
[7] New Mission Theater NR Nomination, Section 8, Page 5.
[8] New Mission Theater NR Nomination https://catalog.archives.gov/id/123861222 Section 7, Page 1
[9] Jonathan Lammers with Carlos Cordova, *Nuestra Historia: San Francisco Pan-Latino Historic Context Statement* (Draft: April 2023), prepared on behalf of SF Latino Historical Society, SF Heritage, and SF Historic Preservation Fund Committee.

> Woolworth's, were found in the heart of the Mission and were patronized by Latinos. Latino businesses also stretched south along Mission Street from César Chávez Street to 30th Street.
>
> During its heyday, Miracle Mile retailers attracted crowds of shoppers with special sales on Friday nights, keeping the stores open until 9pm. Mission Street was also the spine of a thriving theater district, lined by movie palaces. By the late 1950s, Spanish language movies were shown in several neighborhood theaters, including the Cine Latino, formerly known as the New Rialto and Crown theaters, at 2555 Mission Street (extant), as well as the Tower Theater at 2465 Mission Street (extant). During this same period, the Victoria Theater at 2932 16th Street (extant) changed its name to Teatro Victoria.[10]

When it closed in the late 1980s, Grand Theater was one of the last of the movie theaters still in operation along Mission Street.

Architecture/Design: Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values (National Register Criterion C).

Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street), constructed in 1940 by the People Theater Company as a single-screen neighborhood movie theater, was the last theater constructed in San Francisco prior to World War II. The theater remained in operation from 1940 to 1988, one of the last movie theaters in operation along the former Mission Miracle Mile when it closed. Along with the adjacent commercial storefronts, the building was constructed as a single-screen theater, strictly for showing moving pictures, based on the Streamline Moderne design of renowned theater architects G. Albert Lansburgh and S. Charles Lee. Although it has changed use and undergone alterations, the former Grand Theater, is architecturally significant as a building that embodies the distinctive characteristics of a single-screen neighborhood movie theater, an increasingly rare building type that is a vibrant feature of the San Francisco's built environment. Further, the building is architecturally significant as it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a large-scale Streamline Moderne building with notable neon sign marquee, and it is also representative of the work of architects of merit G. Albert Lansburgh and S. Charles Lee.

The following historical context on District (Neighborhood) Theaters is excerpted from the *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theater Non-Contiguous Multiple Property Historic District Context Statement (Draft, April 27, 2006)*, which relies on background information from *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk* by architectural and film historian, Maggie Valentine:

> After World War I motion picture houses took root not only in city centers, but also in the neighborhood commercial districts. In addition to neighborhood movie palaces, smaller neighborhood district theaters (sometimes called "pictureplay theatres") were built. Crude in comparison to luxury theaters, they nonetheless made up the majority of the nation's movie houses. Promoters did attempt to make them

[10] Victoria Theater, "About Us," accessed January 8, 2017 from: http://www.victoriatheatre.org/index.php/about-us. Quoted in *Nuestra Historia*, 136.

more competitive by dressing the area immediately in front of the screen and using better materials for the screen itself.

Even in their simplicity, district theaters tended to upstage their retail neighbors. By the 1920s, the force of the movie house had become so powerful in the public mind that the brightly-lit marquee was necessary to indicate that a main street or neighborhood shopping area had made it. Most patrons during that time did not see their first run at a movie palace, but rather waited until they were showing at the neighborhood second-run theaters. In an era when going downtown to a movie was time-consuming and more expensive, a large percentage of the population would catch films within walking distance of where they lived.

Although not as complex as movie palaces, district theaters and combination houses were more complex than their predecessor, the nickelodeon. They often maintained some physical resemblance, stone, brick, or concrete structures with flat or vaulted roofs sitting along prominent commercial avenues abutting other commercial structures. However, they were larger, more comfortable, and more elaborate, including somewhat more fanciful treatment, fixed seating, and spaces to house heating and ventilation systems and management offices. Combination houses had stages, whereas district theaters just had aprons surrounding the screens.

District theaters are significant as they expanded accessibility of motion pictures by providing a convenient and less expensive alternative to movie palaces. Practically every substantial neighborhood shopping area housed a district theater at one point, and therefore almost every neighborhood has an important social and economic tie to such a theater.[11]

The *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theaters Historic Context Statement (Draft)* identifies the following list of features as characteristic of district (or neighborhood) theaters:

- Stone, brick, or concrete one to two-and-a-half story structure with flat or vaulted roof,
- Recessed entryway with projecting ticket booth;
- Projecting marquee;
- Façade that rises above the structure, frequently with brick, stone, or terra cotta sheathing, and with embellishments including stained glass, cast iron, statuary, and lighting;
- Location along prominent commercial avenue, frequently abutting other commercial structures;
- Interior rectangular plan divided into the principal spaces of lobby, projection booth, and auditorium;
- Sloped auditorium floors with fixed seating;
- Frequently, one or two balconies with a stage in combination houses, absence of balconies in district theaters;
- Decorative embellishments throughout the interior including penciling, plasterwork, carved beams, draperies, shaped wooden seats with ornamental cast iron standards, carpet runners in the aisles, and ornate lighting fixtures;
- A projection booth with fireproofing that accommodated additional equipment for sequencing films, lighting, and sound accompaniment;

[11] *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theater Non-Contiguous Multiple Property Historic District Context Statement* (Discussion Draft, April 27, 2006), 16-17.

- Spaces within the theater that housed heating and ventilation systems and management offices; and
- Seating capacity of 300 or more.[12]

Although it has been altered, the former Grand Theater still exhibits distinctive characteristics of the single-screen neighborhood theater building type. With features such as its relatively small scale, prominent façade with embellishments typical of a theater, including prominent marquee and vertical neon sign, and location in commercial area abutting adjacent structures, the building reflects its origins and former use. Along with features such as its recessed entryway and interior rectangular plan divided into the principal spaces of lobby and auditorium, the building continues to reflect its former use as a neighborhood movie theater.

Grand Theatre is also significant for its Streamline Moderne design, an architectural style that is rare in San Francisco, particularly on large-scale commercial buildings. The application of Streamline Moderne design aesthetic to movie theaters was fairly common in the 1930s and 1940s. In *The Show Starts at the Sidewalk*, architectural and film historian Maggie Valentine notes that in the case of theater design,

> streamlining was applied liberally to every conceivable building type. Its swopping lines, horizontal emphasis, and smooth veneer projected an image of modernism… … Gone were the hard edges and corners. Rounded surfaces let the wind and the eye slide effortlessly around the façade. "Speed lines," the horizontal bands of thin parallel lines…added to the illusion of movement. Porthole windows made reference to sleek ocean liners.[13]

One of the Grand Theater's architects, S. Charles Lee, was well known for use of the Streamline Moderne aesthetic in his movie theater designs. While many of his early projects were done in the Beaux-Arts styles, Lee was a leading proponent of Art Deco and Streamline Moderne design and one of the most prolific designers in these styles.

S. Charles Lee

S. Charles Lee (1899-1990) is recognized as one of the most prolific and distinguished motion picture theater designers on the West Coast. Lee studied at Chicago Technical College and the Armour Institute of Technology. While a young man working for Rapp and Rapp, a highly regarded Chicago architectural firm, Lee became interested in theater design. Throughout his long career, Lee built or reconstructed over four hundred theaters throughout the world.

In 1922, Lee settled in Los Angeles. His first major cinema building was the Tower Theatre (1927) in Los Angeles, a Spanish-Romanesque-Moorish design that launched a career that would make Lee the principal designer of motion picture theaters in Los Angeles during the 1930s and 1940s. He is credited with designing over 400 theaters throughout California and Mexico. His palatial Baroque Los Angeles Theatre (193 1) is regarded by many architectural historians as the finest theater building in Los Angeles. In 1934, Lee was honored for architectural excellence by the Royal Institute of British Architects at the International Exhibition of Contemporary Architecture in London, for his 1931 " Spanish American Mission style" design for the Fox Florence Theatre (193 1) in Los Angeles.

[12] Ibid.
[13] Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts at the Sidewalk*, 114-118.

Lee's ultimate legacy, however, is as an early proponent of Art Deco and Moderne style theaters, including Fresno's Tower Theatre (1939). The Bruin Theatre (1937) and Academy Theatre (1939) are among his most characteristic. The latter, located in Inglewood, is a prime example of Lee's successful response to the automobile. He is widely credited as one of the first architects to respond to the impact of the automobile in theater design, by incorporating adjacent parking facilities and pioneering the drive-in theater.

Through the 1930s, Lee

> …refined his philosophy concerning the psychology of motion picture theatre architecture as entertainment, eventually creating an architectural signature. … His theatres, now refined and the formula perfected, embodied visibility, seduction, and comfort … fulfilling [Lee's] promise that 'the show begins on the sidewalk.'" For pedestrians, this meant a "…terrazzo sidewalk of colorful marble swirls that encircled the box office and set the building apart from surrounding structures. Overhead, one was protected by the canopy of the marquee, the soffit of which echoed the terrazzo pattern in neon.[14]

The Grand Theater is evocative the S. Charles Lee's design aesthetic and of the Streamline Moderne style.

The theater is also associated with renowned theater architect G. Albert Lansburgh.

G. Albert Lansburgh

G. (Gustave) Albert Lansburgh (1876 - 1969) immigrated to this country from Panama in 1882. After attending the University of California, Berkeley for two years, he left to enroll in the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris on the encouragement of architect Bernard Maybeck, for whom he worked during summers. He graduated from Ecole in 1906 with highest honors and was awarded a medal for his design of the proposed new Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco, which was never built due to a post-earthquake relocation of the congregation.

Although he established his own practice upon returning to San Francisco in 1906, he continued to study under Maybeck for a period of time. Lansburgh is remembered for his numerous theater designs, which often displayed his Beaux Arts training and made copious use of polychrome terra cotta. He completed a number of projects nationwide for the Orpheum chain, where his brother was a corporate officer. His Wiltem Theater in Los Angeles is a landmark. Locally, his best-known theater works are the adjacent Golden Gate and Fox Warfield theaters, as well as the Orpheum and El Capitan. Lansburgh's theater work included sophisticated understanding of acoustics as well. His design for the interior of the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House was highly praised for its acoustical qualities and innovative arrangements. Through these designs the architect attempted to develop a strictly American form of architecture, one that was both modem and classical.

Lansburgh also designed a number of public auditoriums in various locations, including Sacramento and Salt Lake City, and other public buildings, such as four landmarked Carnegie Libraries in San Francisco (Mission, North Beach, Sunset, and Presidio branches). He was one of the finalists in the competition for San Francisco's Main Library.

Lansburgh did not have many commissions in the 1930s (typical of Depression-era economy). He worked for the military during WWII but then became ill and retired.

[14] Ibid, 95.

Photos

Grand Theater, façade, view north, 2023.
Source: SF Planning Department

Grand Theater, façade, view east, 2023.
Source: SF Planning Department

Grand Theater, marquee and entrance vestibule, view east, 2023.
Source: SF Planning Department

Grand Theater, façade details, 2023.
Source: SF Planning Department

Grand Theater, entry vestibule, view east, 2023.
Source: SF Planning Department

Grand Theater, entry vestibule and storefront details, 2023.
Source: SF Planning Department

Grand Theater, lobby/foyer, view north, 2023.
Source: SF Planning Department

Grand Theater, lobby/foyer, view south, 2023.
Source: SF Planning Department

Grand Theater, auditorium with proscenium details, view south, 2023.
Source: SF Planning Department

Grand Theater, auditorium, view west, 2023.
Source: SF Planning Department

Grand Theater, detail of foliate decals on former auditorium ceiling, 2023.
Source: SF Planning Department

Grand Theater, second floor interior addition with original rear wall of auditorium and holes in wall for projection booth, 2023.
Source: SF Planning Department

Grand Theater, newly reilluminated neon sign, February 2023.

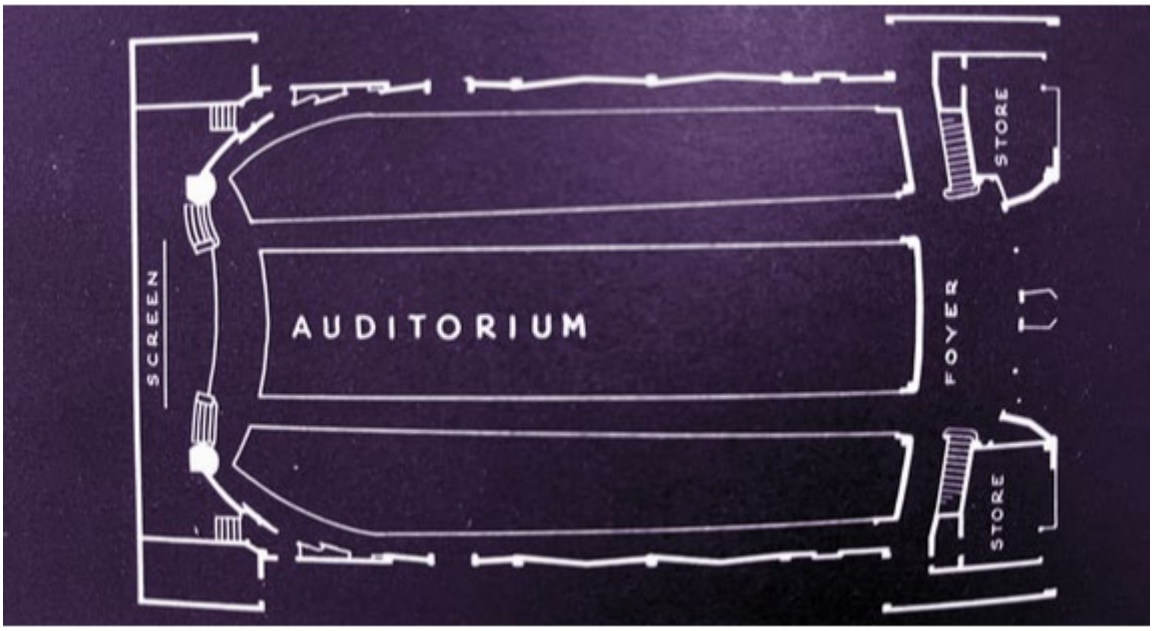
Source: Mission Moves: After 30 years, Grand Theater sign shines anew (missionlocal.org)

Grand Theater, 1974.
Source: San Francisco Assessor's Office

Grand Theater, 1941:
Source: San Francisco Theatres: The Grand Theatre

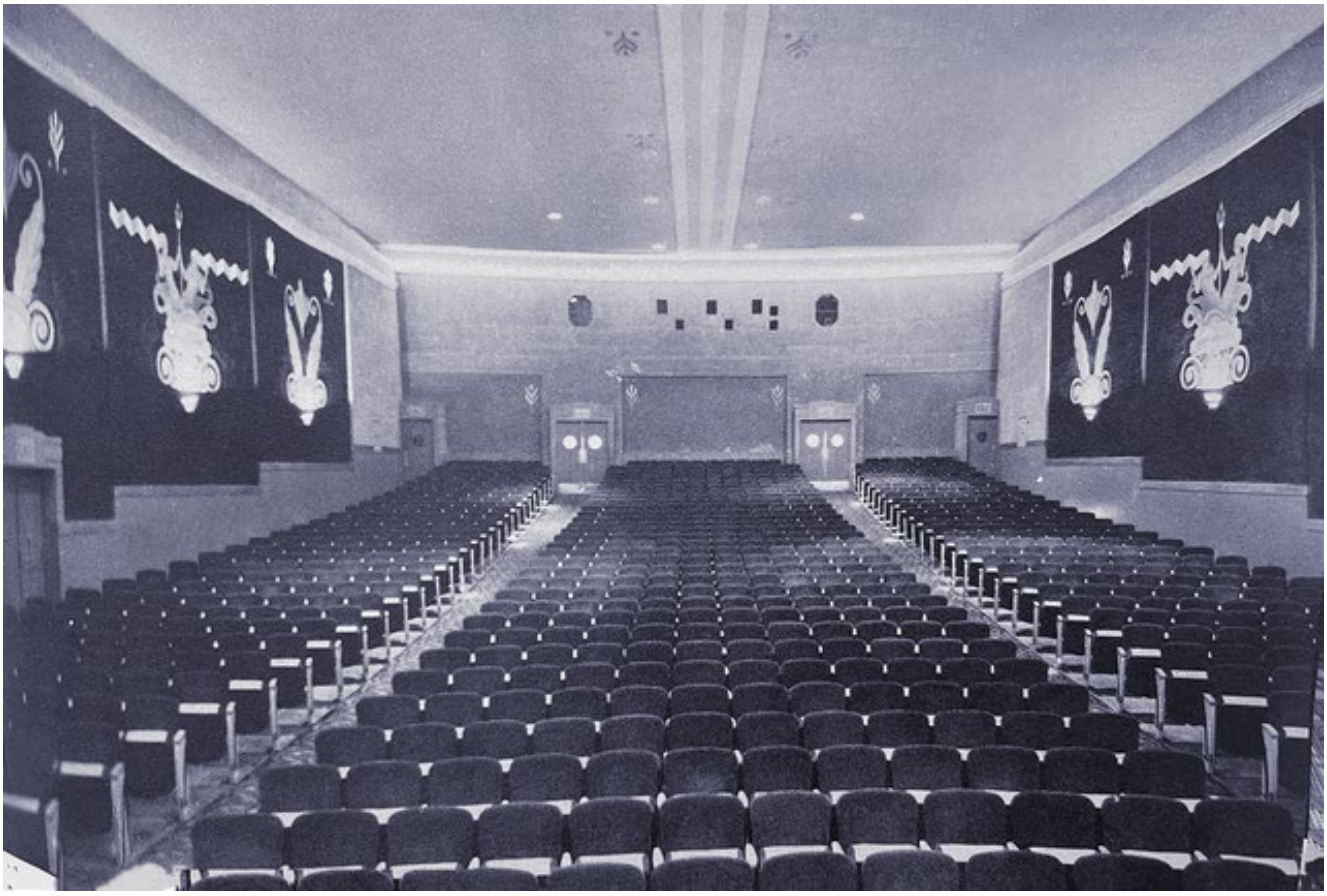
Grand Theater, 1963.
Source: San Francisco Theatres: The Grand Theatre

Grand Theater, circa 1980.
Source: San Francisco Theatres: The Grand Theatre



Grand Theater, original ground floor plan, 1940.
Source: Grey Area

Grand Theater, foyer, circa 1940.
Source: Grey Area



Grand Theater, auditorium, circa 1940.
Source: Grey Area

Grand Theater, auditorium, circa 1940.
Source: Grey Area

San Francisco Planning

49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400
San Francisco, CA 94103
628.652.7600
www.sfplanning.org

CEQA Exemption Determination

PROPERTY INFORMATION/PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project Address		Block/Lot(s)
Grand Theater (2665 Mission Street)		3637023
Case No.		**Permit No.**
2023-008267PRJ		
☐ **Addition/ Alteration**	☐ **Demolition (requires HRE for Category B Building)**	☐ **New Construction**

Project description for Planning Department approval.
Historical Landmark Designation (DES)

EXEMPTION TYPE

The project has been determined to be exempt under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

☐	**Class 1 - Existing Facilities.** **(CEQA Guidelines section 15301)** Interior and exterior alterations; additions under 10,000 sq. ft.
☐	**Class 3 - New Construction.** **(CEQA Guidelines section 15303)** Up to three new single-family residences or six dwelling units in one building; commercial/office structures; utility extensions; change of use under 10,000 sq. ft. if principally permitted or with a CU.
☐	**Class 32 - In-Fill Development.** **(CEQA Guidelines section 15332)** New Construction of seven or more units or additions greater than 10,000 sq. ft. and meets the conditions described below: (a) The project is consistent with the applicable general plan designation and all applicable general plan policies as well as with applicable zoning designation and regulations. (b) The proposed development occurs within city limits on a project site of no more than 5 acres substantially surrounded by urban uses. (c) The project site has no value as habitat for endangered rare or threatened species. (d) Approval of the project would not result in any significant effects relating to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality. (e) The site can be adequately served by all required utilities and public services.
■	**Other ____** Class 8 - Actions by regulatory agencies for the protection of the environment (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15308).
☐	**Common Sense Exemption (CEQA Guidelines section 15061(b)(3)).** It can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility of a significant effect on the environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCREENING ASSESSMENT

Comments:
Planner Signature: Don Lewis

PROPERTY STATUS - HISTORIC RESOURCE

PROPERTY IS ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:	
■	**Category A:** Known Historical Resource.
☐	**Category B:** Potential Historical Resource (over 45 years of age).
☐	**Category C:** Not a Historical Resource or Not Age Eligible (under 45 years of age).

PROPOSED WORK CHECKLIST

Check all that apply to the project.	
☐	**Change of use and new construction.** Tenant improvements not included.
☐	**Regular maintenance or repair** to correct or repair deterioration, decay, or damage to building.
☐	**Window replacement** that meets the Department's *Window Replacement Standards*.
☐	**Garage work.** A new opening that meets the *Guidelines for Adding Garages and Curb Cuts*, or replacement of a garage door in an existing opening that meets the Residential Design Guidelines.
☐	**Deck, terrace construction, or fences** not visible from any immediately adjacent public right-of-way.
☐	**Mechanical equipment installation** that is not visible from any immediately adjacent public right-of-way.
☐	**Dormer installation** that meets the requirements for exemption from public notification under *Zoning Administrator Bulletin No. 3: Dormer Windows*.
☐	**Addition(s)** not visible from any immediately adjacent public right-of-way for 150 feet in each direction; or does not extend vertically beyond the floor level of the top story of the structure, or does not cause the removal of architectural significant roofing features.
☐	**Façade or storefront alterations** that do not remove, alter, or obscure character -defining features.
☐	**Restoration** based upon documented evidence of a building's historic condition, such as historic photographs, plans, physical evidence, or similar buildings.
Note: Project Planner must check box below before proceeding.	
■	Project is not listed.
☐	Project involves scope of work listed above.

ADVANCED HISTORICAL REVIEW

Check all that apply to the project.

☐ **Reclassification of property status**. *(Attach HRER Part I relevant analysis; requires Principal Preservation Planner approval)*

- ☐ Reclassify to Category A
- ☐ Reclassify to Category C
- ☐ Lacks Historic Integrity
- ☐ Lacks Historic Significance

☐ Project involves a **known historical resource (CEQA Category A)**

☐ Project does not substantially impact character-defining features of a historic resource (see Comments)

☐ Project is compatible, yet differentiated, with a historic resource.

☐ Project consistent with the Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties

Note: If ANY box above is checked, a Preservation Planner MUST sign below.

■ **Project can proceed with EXEMPTION REVIEW**. The project has been reviewed by the Preservation Planner and can proceed with exemption review.

Comments by Preservation Planner:
Project is landmark designation - no physical work.

Preservation Planner Signature: Pilar Lavalley

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

■ **No further environmental review is required. The project is exempt under CEQA. There are no unusual circumstances that would result in a reasonable possibility of a significant effect.**

Project Approval Action:	**Signature:**
Board of Supervisor approval of landmark designation	Pilar Lavalley 11/01/2023

Supporting documents are available for review on the San Francisco Property Information Map, which can be accessed at https://sfplanninggis.org/pim/. Individual files can be viewed by clicking on the Planning Applications link, clicking the "More Details" link under the project's environmental record number (ENV) and then clicking on the "Related Documents" link.

Once signed and dated, this document constitutes an exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines and Chapter 31 of the SF Admin Code. Per Chapter 31, an appeal of an exemption determination to the Board of Supervisors shall be filed within 30 days after the Approval Action occurs at a noticed public hearing, or within 30 days after posting on the Planning Department's website a written decision or written notice of the Approval Action, if the approval is not made at a noticed public hearing.