Subject: Adding or Modifying Fly Lofts on Historic Theaters

Applicable Standards:  
1. Compatible Use  
2. Retention of Historic Character  
9. Compatible New Additions/Alterations  
10. Reversibility of New Additions/Alterations

**Issue:** If a theater is to be reused as a theater, physical changes may be required to meet the demands of modern performances. This may necessitate adding or modifying a fly loft—the space that houses rigging for raising and lowering stage sets, lighting and curtains. Fly lofts typically project from the roof of a theater above the stage and, depending on the site conditions and the building plan, may be visible from a number of vantage points.

Unlike a rooftop addition that is constructed to gain square footage, a fly loft is integral to the operation of a theater. Therefore, constructing a new fly loft or changing an existing fly loft may be necessary in order to keep the building in use as a theater.

Whether an existing fly loft is modified or a new fly loft is added, in order to meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, care must be taken to ensure this new feature is as unobtrusive as possible. Its overall massing and height should be kept to a minimum so as not to compete with the historic building. And, to lessen its impact, the design of a fly loft must be as simple as possible with minimal architectural detailing. It must also have a horizontal rather than a vertical emphasis. No unnecessary embellishment should be added to the surface of a fly loft and attaching signs or advertisements should be avoided. Construction materials must also be compatible with the original structure.

**Application 1** *(Incompatible treatment revised to meet the Standards)*: This red brick, early twentieth century high school houses an auditorium with superior acoustics. The building was no longer used as a school and was to be converted into a performing arts center. Although a small fly loft already existed on the roof above the stage, a new design proposal called for an addition that projected several stories above the height of the original fly loft. This would have a negative impact on the building’s historic character and would not meet the Standards. To bring the design into compliance, its height was significantly reduced and the material changed from cream-colored synthetic stucco to a brick compatible with the existing. Simple horizontal banding, similar to that found elsewhere on the building, was added to the design to break down its massing and further de-emphasize its height. A large logo dedicated to a local...
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