Date: April 18, 2003
TO: Stephen Callcott, Historic Preservation Office
FROM: Keith Alan Baker, Managing Director, The Studio Theatre
RE: Display Windows

The Studio Theatre has given considerable attention to the design of its frontage along Fourteenth Street as part of the entire project design. In fact, the design reorients the Theatre to Fourteenth Street after more than a decade when that side was relegated to emergency exits. Now, the main entrance to The Studio Theatre will be from Fourteenth Street itself, and the additional properties at 1507 and 1509 Fourteenth Street are being integrated into a single building (for building and zoning code purposes) while retaining, restoring, and enhancing the contributions each make to the Greater Fourteenth Street Historic District. The existing entrance at 1333 P Street will be retained, but it will be secondary.

As part of this, The Studio Theatre is proposing changes to the existing frontage of each of the three original contributing buildings. The changes proposed for the buildings have been considered by and approved by the Historic Preservation Review Board and, as to zoning issues, further considered by the Office of Planning and its Historic Preservation staff (to which the Board delegated approval of final design details).

The building that presently houses The Studio Theatre has metal panels at ground level on both street frontages (Fourteenth Street and P Street), panels depicting "faces" of actors. These panels are installed in slightly recessed areas this building originally had at that level for its display windows (the original use of that floor having been automobile sales). While these openings were bricked off decades earlier, the panels and their "faces" have become a signature element both for The Studio Theatre and the neighborhood.

The Studio Theatre initially proposed to replace these panels with comparable ones to be made of opaque glass, adding luster to the ground level. The Studio Theatre had initially proposed changing the existing display window within 1509 Fourteenth Street to the same thing, which would not have had clear glass but would have "matched" the character of the replacement panels being installed along 1501/1333's respective frontages.

The Studio Theatre seeks to create an appropriate design and execution of changes for all street frontages that result in a unified theater facility while restoring and leveraging the underlying historic assets of the original individual buildings.

Following discussions with staff of the Office of Planning and its Historic Preservation staff, The Studio Theatre evaluated its original proposal relative to four themes that OP and HPD expressed during these discussions:

- Pedestrian Interest
- Changeability
- Relevancy of Display to Occupancy
- Animation

Case No. 17005
Exhibit No. 35

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17005
EXHIBIT NO. 35

1509 Fourteenth Street:

Now, The Studio Theatre has modified its proposal for the display window at 1509 Fourteenth Street, specifically substituting clear glass for the opaque glass originally proposed, the result now satisfying in the Arts Overlay's zoning rules, rules that permit "decorative [and] architectural accents". The Studio Theatre's modified proposal retains that window's existing base that will extend to the depth of existing, abutting structural columns, about two feet. Moreover, transom windows located above each doorway and above the display window that have been covered over for years by a combination of signs and retractable metal security grill housing will restored to their original form and function.

1) **Pedestrian Interest:**
   - The existing window opening will be glazed in clear plate glass set into a frame, allowing visibility to it and the area behind it from the sidewalk. Similar to 1501, the clear glass will be decorated, using a "frosting" technique, with a large image of a face of a person associated with the theater. The glass and its decoration will allow pedestrians to look into the display area set behind the glass.
   - The glass panels to be installed in the original ground floor window openings at 1501 14th Street and along its P Street frontage may be illuminated as well if practical and affordable.

2) **Changeability:**
   - The display area will be accessible, allowing changes to be made.

- 3) **Relevancy of Display to Occupancy**

   - While The Studio Theatre cannot suggest specific content or a means to measure "relevancy," it can agree that it will not rent the display window in 1509 out to others for their commercial use.

Similarly, while details remain to be explored and determined, The Studio Theatre will seek appropriate means to "animate" this display window in an appropriate and affordable manner. The Studio Theatre believes "animation" is an issue falling outside of the criteria the Board of Zoning Adjustment needs to review, to specifically approve, or to require. The Studio Theatre will take these next steps in consultation with staff of the Historic Preservation Division of the Office of Planning, consistent with the HPRB's delegated approval of design details.

1507 14th Street (formerly commercial repair garage):

This building will serve as the new entry for The Studio Theatre. The main doors to the theater are set into original opening, enlarging areas that have been infilled in earlier years.

Immediately north of the glass entrance doors, a large clear glass window will be installed that allows viewing of theater posters advertising the theater's shows.

The result is a frontage that is nearly all composed of windows or doorways, all transparent glass, with a significant increase in the amount of total area so treated.

1501 14th Street (The Studio Theatre's Present Building):

Presently metal panels, painted with large faces of famous actors, are affixed over the original window and door openings. This proposal calls for the use of plate glass set into a frame placed into the now covered shallow, infilled openings that mark the original window and door openings on this building. The glass will be decorated with large faces (similar to the current imagery) using a "frosting" technique. However, owing to the small amount of space between the plane of the building and the plane of the infill – all of which must fit within a recess that itself is approximately four inches (4") deep – rather than exposing a display area, the glass will be slightly separated from a thin, opaque surface that will cover the non-original infill.

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