

H1

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION

The real story on the renovation of the Grove Playhouse



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The Feb. 13, 2018 letter to the editor "Playhouse Project," is filled with misinformation. Here are the specific facts regarding the Coconut Grove Playhouse:

The Department of Cultural Affairs was not involved in the playhouse "Give It Back" campaign and cannot speak to the motives of the private citizens who were part of this effort. It is completely inaccurate to characterize the county's plans for the property as a "mixed-use mega project" requiring "oversized pilings and footings."

Here is an accurate description of the project:

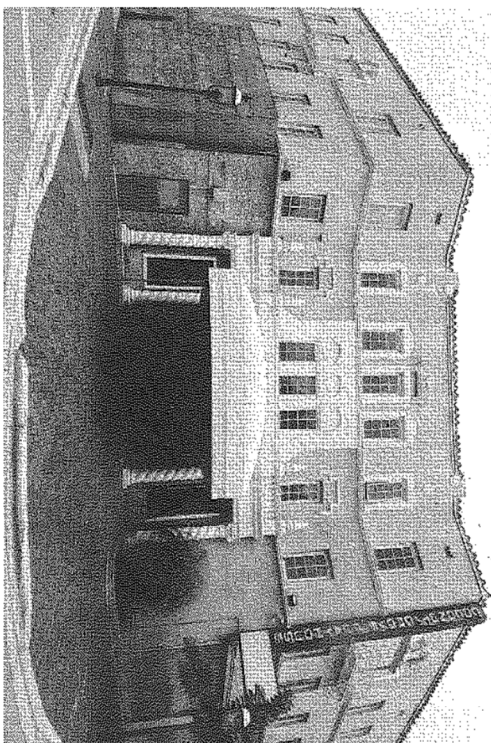
- The 1927 historic front building designed by architects Kiehnel and Elliott will be completely restored, and the use of this building will return to those activities that generally occurred there in the 1920s (i.e. retail in the ground floor spaces and offices on the second and third levels).
- A smaller, 300-seat theater will be built in place of the existing auditorium.
- A 300-car parking garage is

planned for the area that currently serves as a surface parking lot. The garage will have offices lining its front and rear facades in order to present a friendlier face to Main Highway and the residential neighborhood.

- The site plan features plazas, lush landscaping, a *paseo* that connects the West Grove to downtown Coconut Grove and a pocket park facing the residential neighborhood.

The entire site is not going to be demolished. The existing historic front building will be completely restored to its 1927 splendor. The existing auditorium chamber will be demolished as it has lost its architectural integrity because of years of insensitive architectural adaptations. Those remaining historic elements in the auditorium chamber will be rescued and incorporated in the new theater (e.g., the double proscenium arch, parts of the spiral columns, the side wall grilles, the fish fountain).

The county has never made the case that the demolition of the auditorium chamber is because of structural issues. Instead, after three years of research, we have demonstrated that successive architectural "adaptations" have erased all but fragments of the original interior features of the auditorium. Furthermore, the size of new theater will support a sustainable business model, will incorporate 21st century theater sound, lighting



Miami Herald

The future of the historic Coconut Grove Playhouse has long been in dispute.

and stagecraft systems, and meet all current building-code requirements, including life safety and accessibility conditions.

In 2004, the Building Better Communities bond program included a \$15 million allocation for the playhouse that explicitly was designated for "reconstruction of the Coconut Grove Playhouse" and the plans developed by the county are consistent with this general description for the use of these funds.

We supported and helped the state to develop the nomination that resulted in the listing of the playhouse on the National Register. It is important to underscore

that the National Register listing is honorary and not regulatory; the National Register guidelines are neither intended nor required to be used for the design of a project.

The city of Miami's 2005 designation of the Playhouse as historic is the standard by which the project's historic preservation objectives are evaluated. The city's approved, 2005 Designation Report unequivocally and correctly concluded, "Only the south and east facades retain architectural significance."

In addition, the December 2018 ruling in the county's favor issued by the Appellate Division of the Circuit Court stated:

"The 2005 Designation Report did not include the interior of the building. The city previously acknowledged that the preservation of the interior of the building was thus not within the purview of the Historical Board.

A motion to deny the plans in order to revisit excluding the building's interior from the Designation Report was rejected by the Historical Board. The certificate was thus issued with the express acknowledgment by all parties that exclusion of the building's interior precluded consideration of the interior as a basis for issuing a Certificate of Appropriateness. The appeal was clearly governed by the existing designations. The city exceeded the scope of the hearing by including the interior of the building in its decision to grant the appeal thereby violating the county's procedural due process."

The source for accurate and up-to-date information about the Coconut Grove Playhouse, is the web site <https://miami-dade.arts.org/coconut-grove-playhouse-updates>.

The facts continue to be important to me and to the many supporters of this beautiful project that is designed to honor the architecture of the playhouse and revive the legacy of great theater at this site.

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