Certified Local Government Grant Program

RAMSDELL THEATRE MASTER PLAN UPDATE

CITY OF MANISTEE | MANISTEE COUNTY

Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1972, Manistee's Ramsdell Theatre had fallen into disrepair by the 1990s. The community rallied, and a $4 million restoration of the facility was completed in 2005. An additional $2 million in upgrades were made following the restoration, driven by master planning efforts in 1990 and 2010, to maintain the building and support high-quality, varied artistic programming, including live shows, art exhibits, and workshops. Today, the Ramsdell is one of the region's premier cultural centers and draws crowds from throughout Michigan.

With more than 15 years having passed since the last major restoration and in recognition of the need to support diverse community interests, the City of Manistee and Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts (RRCA) began exploring how best to utilize the Ramsdell in coming decades. Critical to this exploration was ensuring preservation of the building's character-defining features while concurrently finding ways to enhance and expand the RRC's mission through additional programming.

To support this effort, the City of Manistee secured a CLG grant to prepare a new master plan, which provides a detailed review of condition issues and needed improvements based on the RRCA's strategic direction and community input. Further, the master plan provides a roadmap for strategic capital investments to address space constraints, accessibility, and enhanced programming opportunities, with the goal of promoting informed decision-making that respects the character of this community landmark.

LOCATION

101 Maple St
Manistee, MI

PROJECT TYPE

Planning

FUNDING

$51,050

PROJECT DATES

July 2021 -
June 2023

MICHIGAN
SHPO
STATE HISTORIC
PRESERVATION OFFICE

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MANISTEE, MANISTEE COUNTY, MI

PROJECT SITE

North Facade Analysis

(A) Brick Bulge
(B) Cracked Stone Sill
(C) Rusted Lintel/Brick Repair
(D) Window Water Damage
(E) Replace Window
(F) Cracked Brick
(G) Minimal Water Damage
(H) Hole/Missing Mortar
(I) Repaint Cast Iron Cover
(J) Window Re-Caulk
(K) Clean Cement/Mud from Brick
(L) Sealant at Grade

Front Drop Curtain - "A Grove Near Athens" by Walter Burridge
Photograph courtesy of Visit Manistee

Proposed Seating Modifications

Orchestra
- Keep existing seating layout as-is.
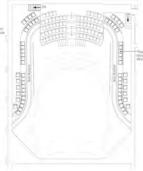- Remove two center rows at the back to make space for a relocated center mix position.

*Although there is additional unused space at the front, additional seats cannot be added without providing improved accessible / wheelchair seating positions to meet current codes.

Balcony
- Replace the existing wooden seats.
- Repurpose the existing unused seating in the corners of the balcony as wheelchair seating and bar area due to limited head height.
- Explore potential for wheelchair seating at the center of the first balcony.
- Remove the existing projection booth at the center back.
- Re-raise the center back to improve row spacing and sightlines.

*The new seating arrangement at the back center should mimic the design of the existing straight wall, but provide a new front wall that is curved as shown in the plan. The stamped appearance of the painted wall should be duplicated with the new design.

**Although the front rows of the Balcony do not currently have leg room up to modern expectations, it is not able to be modified without substantial restructuring of the Balcony. Therefore, we are proposing not to structurally modify this section.

Upper Balcony
- Provide two new rows of seating on the second balcony 'legs' as follows: convert the first row into a technical position, widen the second row and modify the railing to provide either individual seats or bench seating, and provide loose seating on the third row of the balcony.
- Improve legroom of the new front row by building out the stepping at the new technical position row.

*The sightlines in the straight portion are not very good, but sightlines from the eastern (stage side) of the 2nd balcony are actually very good. Overall our proposed renovation brings the Upper Balcony back to life so that the room can be fully occupied by an audience once again. The seats with the poor sightlines can be sold last (if ever), but being able to seat people throughout the full room brings a benefit in 'feeling' to everyone in the theatre, not just those few seats in the 2nd balcony.