

MONDAY

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San Francisco Daily



Move to save theater



THE METRO THEATER at 2055 Union St. SF Daily photo.

City looks to declare building a landmark

BY RICHARD COLE
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Anxious about the fate of the Metro Theater on Union Street, the city is moving to declare the building an historic landmark, which could prevent the building from being razed or hollowed out.

The theater at 2055 Union St. closed suddenly a year ago, and neighbors and local merchants fear it will be turned into condos

or some other use out of character with its Cow Hollow neighborhood.

A drive to preserve the Metro as a theater has stalled on the lack of support from the family trust that owns the building.

"There are a few prospective buyers who want to keep it a theater, and one has made an offer, but hasn't got much of a response," said Alfonso Felder, a

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Giants executive who works with the San Francisco Neighborhood Theater Foundation.

The agent for the family trust, Stephanie de Bord of Pine Lodge Capital, has declined to answer calls from the SF Daily.

Landmark legislation

Supervisor Michela Alioto-Pier last week announced legislation to declare the theater an historic landmark, which would protect it in part, said Mark Luellen, preservation coordinator for the city. That process will take about 90 days, and how much of the Metro would be declared protected depends on the designation report by city preservation experts.

The fact that it's designated doesn't

mean the building has to remain as a movie theater, said Luellen.

"The Alhambra Theater is now a gymnasium — there are ways you can preserve these buildings without keeping them as theaters," said Luellen. "But we would love to keep the Metro as a theater."

If substantial parts of the interior are given landmark designation, however, that could virtually guarantee that it continues to function as a theater, as happened with the New Mission Theater, he noted.

No response from owner

Meanwhile Felder's foundation is continuing its efforts to find someone to buy the building or operate the theater. The lack of response from the

owners has undercut the effort

"We think it could be done as a win-win for everybody," said Felder. "But for that to happen the seller has to engage in serious conversations, which to date hasn't happened."

The single-screen Metro opened in April 1924 and in the mid-1960s became the original site of the San Francisco Film Festival, but has been on the auction block for years.

In late September 2006 the Metro ceased operations as a movie theater with no warning to city officials or neighbors. Although the building is owned locally, Regal Entertainment Group of Knoxville, Tenn., held the theater lease. That company is owned by Philip Anschutz, who also owns the San Francisco Examiner and City Star.