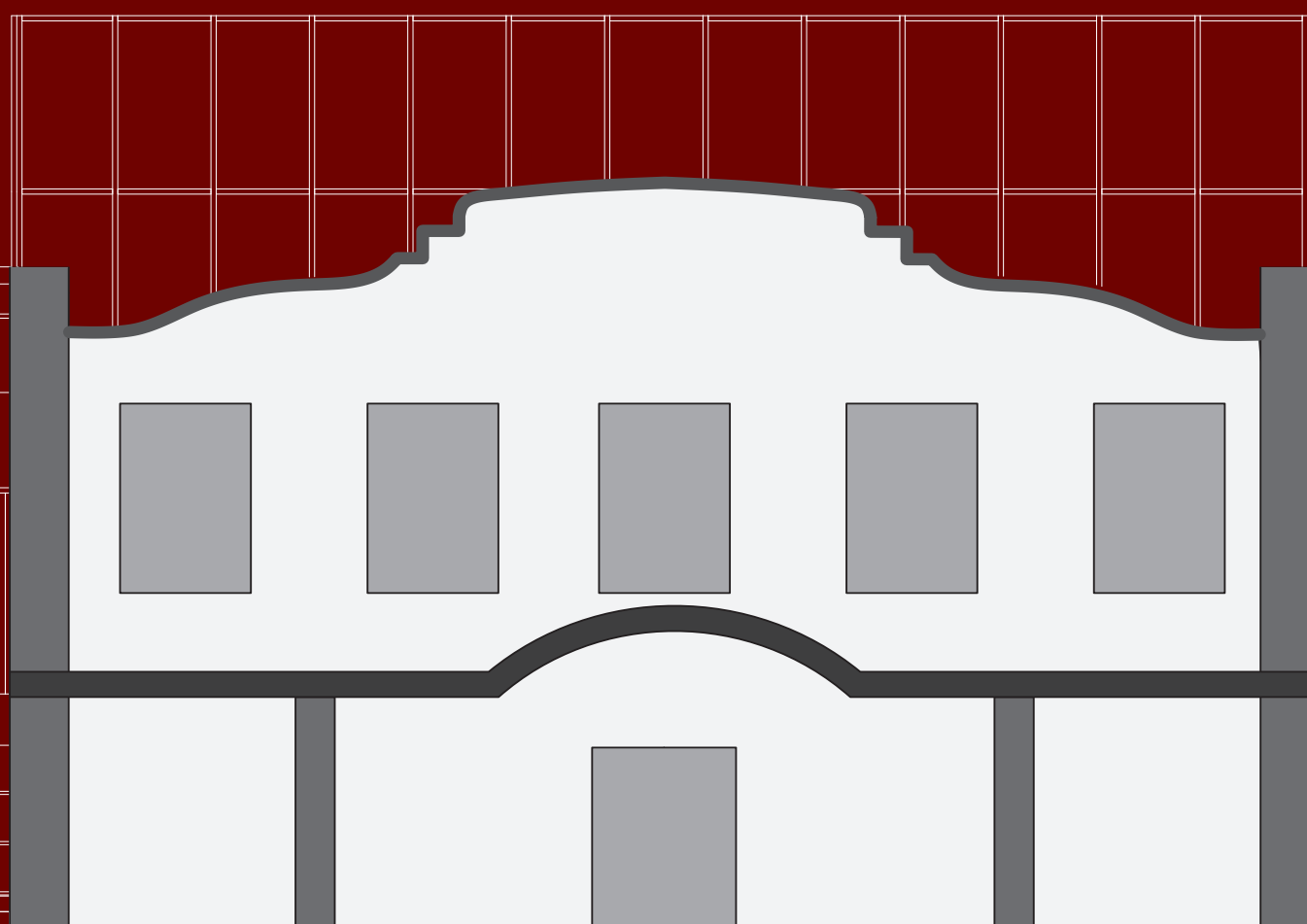
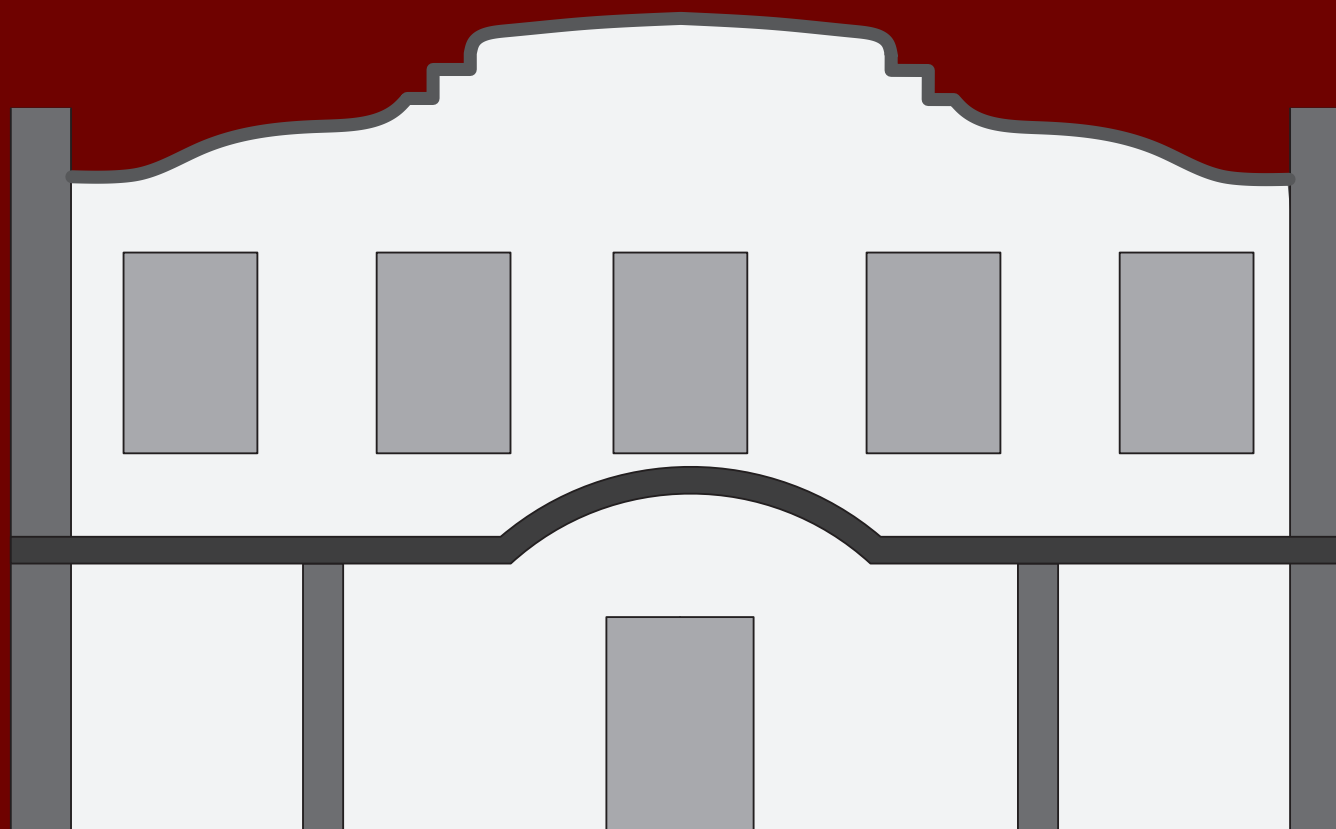


THE HEART OF VICTORIA



THE HEART OF VICTORIA



Transforming an Old Movie Theatre into a
New Hometown Community Venue.



Thesis submitted to the faculty of **Texas A&M University**
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE 2018.

Robert Warden | Chair of Committee

Gabriela Campagnol | Co-Chair of Committee

Tazim Jamal | Committee Member

James Haliburton | Studio Professor



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1956

FREL'S IMPACT



They say that home is where your heart is.

For Rubin Frels, his heart was at the movies.

The Electra Theatre **opened in 1910**



1910

1924



Rubin Frels **bought** the Electra and **renamed** it the **Victoria Theatre**

Photos from 1925 and 1926 show a dramatic **difference in the front facade**



1926

1927



Rubin courted Marjorie Steele after insisting that she play the organ when he fired his drunk organist.

Mrs. Rubin Frels along with others **founded the Victoria Fine Arts Association**



1946

1958

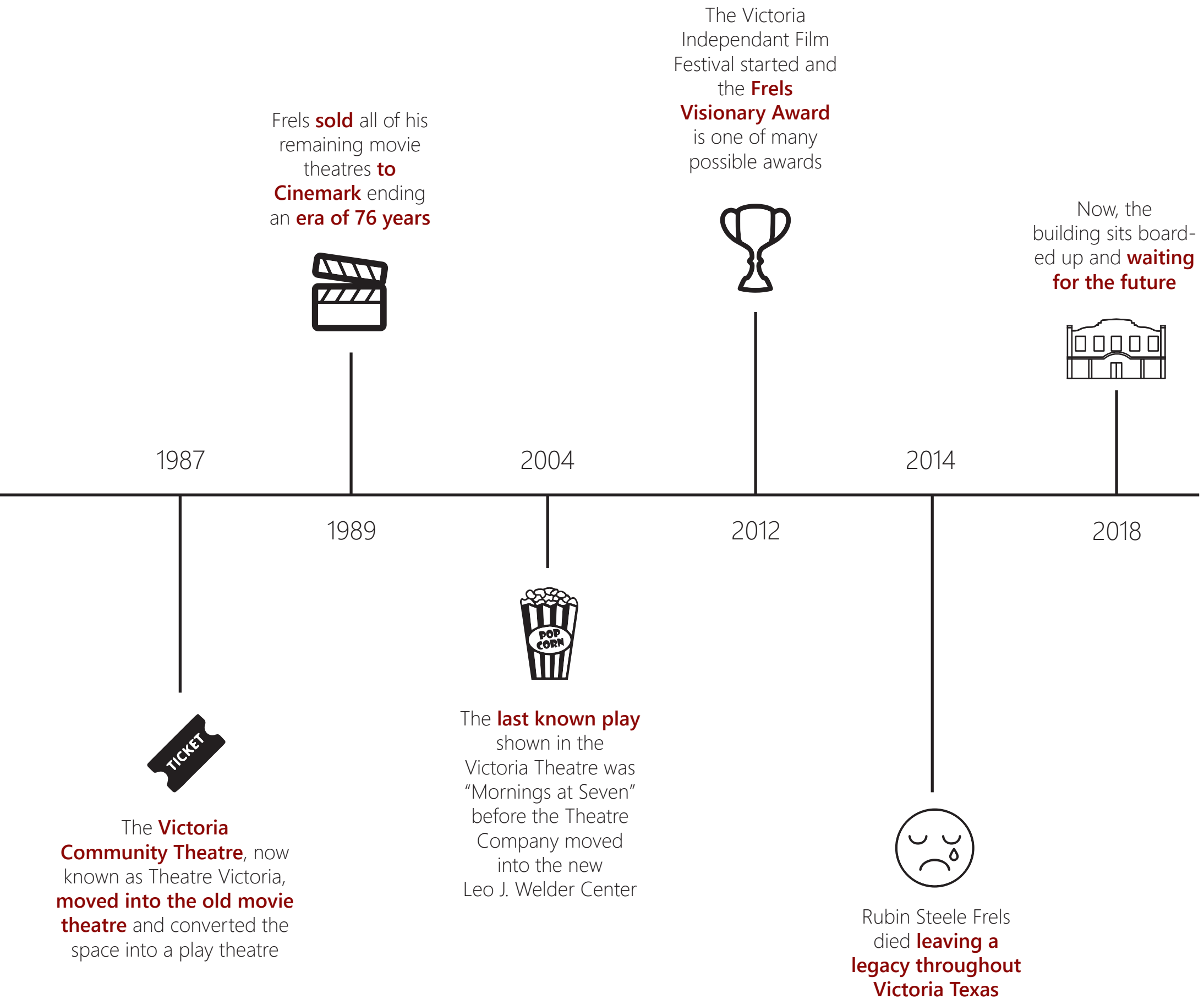


Rubin Frels died and **his son** Rubin Steele Frels **took over his fathers business** and founded Frels Pipe Organs.

Frels Theatres purchased the "Old Federal Building" to house all the Frels enterprises including his pipe organ business which is **next door to the Victoria Theatre**



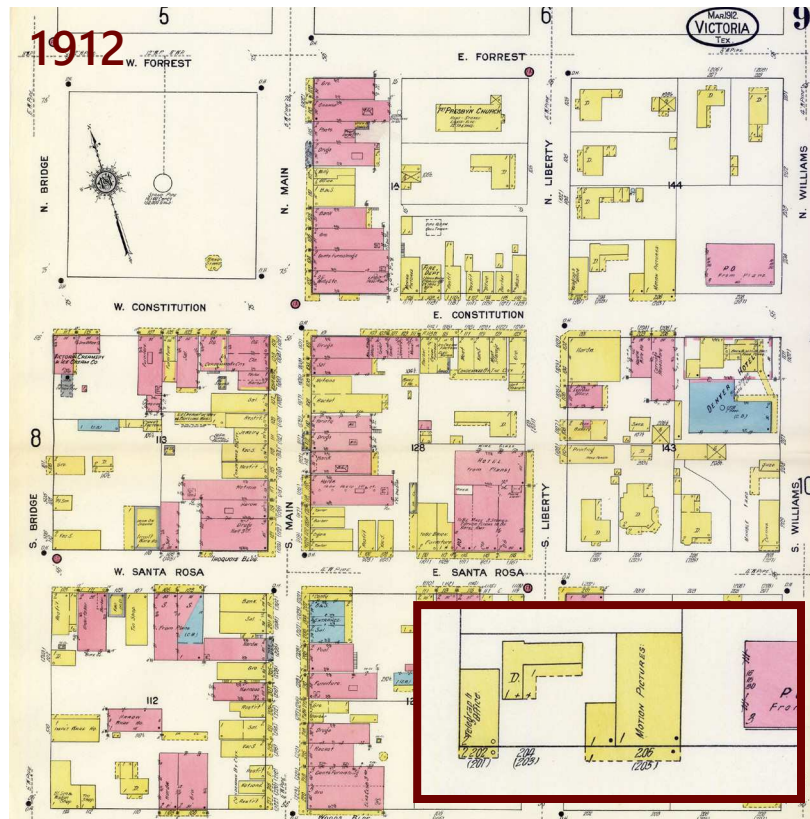
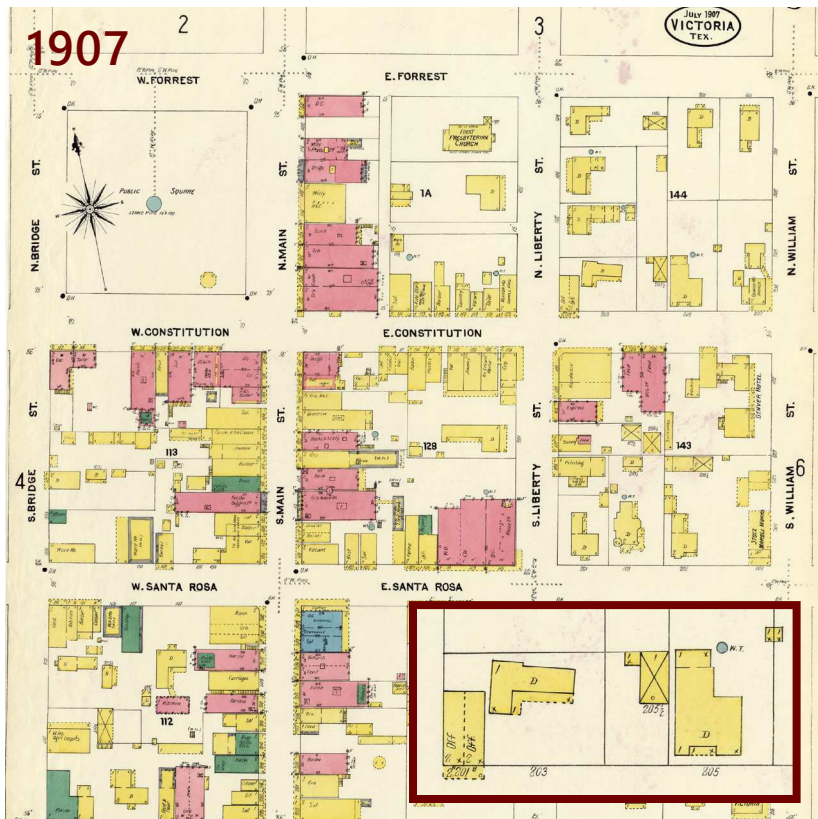
1965



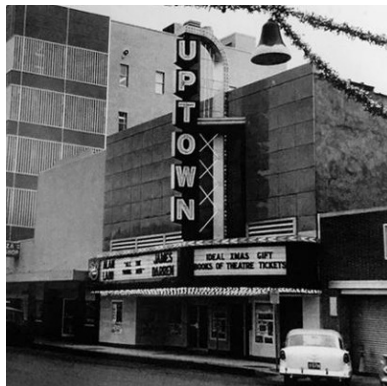
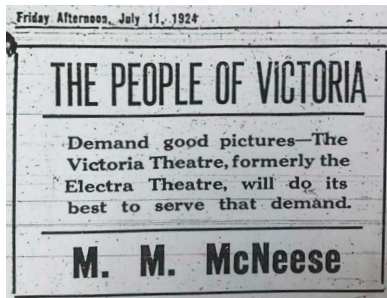
RUBIN FRELS

Motion picture exhibitionist, Ruben Frels, moved to Victoria, Texas in 1924 and bought two theatres including the Theatre Victoria and started his movie empire. In this time, movies at the theatre were silent and came with sheet music to be played on the theatre's current organ. One night, when his organist came to work intoxicated, Frels fired him on the spot and went next door to the telegraph office where a rumored pianist worked to introduce himself. He asked, "do you play the organ?" "No,

I play the piano," she replied. "Well you're going to play the organ tonight!" he responded. Upon agreeing to play, the two soon fell in love and were married. The Frels family grew by three more members including son Ruben Steele Frels who helped his mother with the family business after the passing of his father in 1954.



The Sanborn Maps show the new theatre being built sometime between 1907 and 1912 with the telegraph office next door.



After Rubin Frels bought the Theatre Victoria, he started building his empire by building and opening more theatres in the area including the Uptown Theatre, the Lone Tree Drive-in and the Playhouse.





The Federal Building, pictured above, sits next door to the current Theatre Victoria and is still owned by the Frels Estate.

The organ pictured here is one of Frels and currently resides in the home of the late Rubin Frels.



The young Rubin decided to move his office from the second floor of the Uptown Theatre to the town's Old Federal Building located right next door to the Theatre Victoria. This allowed Rubin to house the various Frels enterprises, including Frels Pipe Organ Company, under one roof. Before movie theatres were built with many screens in one location, certain movie theatres only had one screen but were owned by the same person. Rubin, like his father, had a passion for the movie business and entertaining the community. His work with pipe organs made him a local expert on sound. He knew exactly what was needed to make a movie come alive to the viewers. It was known that when Cinemark took over, the movie experience changed and the quality was not nearly as good as it previously was. In 1989, Rubin sold the last of his remaining theatres to Cinemark thus ending the Frels Theatre empire that had lasted 76 years.

The Theatre Victoria was luckily saved from the Cinemark sale when the Victoria Community Theatre group, now known as Theatre Victoria, moved into the building and converted the space into a play theater. This proved to be the perfect location to perform for the community before the Leo J. Welder Center was built and opened in 2004. That was the last known use for this historic gem.

Over a decade later, the Theatre Victoria's stands boarded up and waiting for the future. The Victoria Advocate questions what the future is for this building. Some hope it will be restored or renovated while some might feel it's simply not worth keeping. This building has potential to be rehabilitated for the community of Victoria and can add to the mission of the city as an entertainment venue that brings personal enjoyment.

Rubin Frels is considered by some as the
“godfather of movies in South Texas.”

-Victoria Advocate



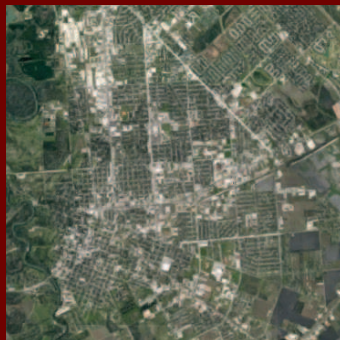


1935

LOCATION



Victoria, TX was founded in 1824 before the Texas Revolution and provided supplies for the pro-revolutionary forces. Victoria is known as “The Crossroads” because of its location within a two-hour drive of Corpus Christi, Houston, San Antonio, and Austin.



Victoria, TX became a major port that brought many European immigrants, particularly Germans, to the area in the mid-19th century. Victoria currently has a population of 66,094 people made up of people from many walks of life.



Downtown Victoria has 5 historic districts including the famous Downtown Business District which is located inside the Original Townsite Historic District. There are 96 historical place markers located all around town. Victoria Theatre is located one block off of the Main Square .



1. The Rosebud Fountain and Grill sits at the corner of Main St. and Constitution St.

2. The Victoria courthouse was built in 1892 in a Romanesque Revival style and stands across the street from the DeLeon Plaza.

3. The DeLeon Plaza is the well known public plaza that has been around since the original survey of Victoria.

4. Across the street from the DeLeon Plaza stands the 12-story tall, O'Connor Building.

5. The Theatre Victoria group moved their shows to the Leo J. Welder Center when it opened in 2004

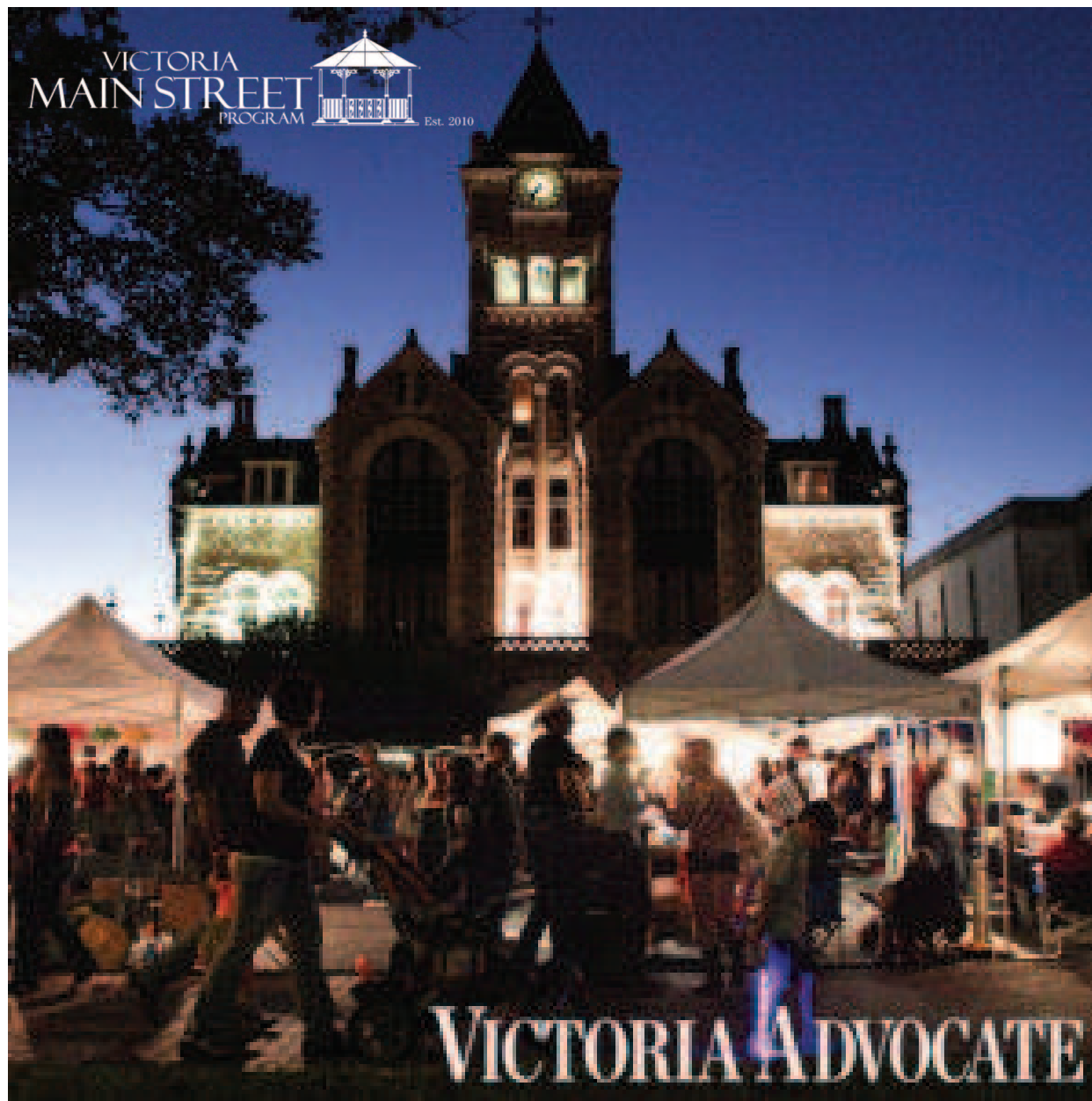
6. These conjoined buildings stand directly across the street from the current Theatre.

7. The Federal Building is located next door to the current Theatre and is still owned by the Frels Estate.

8. This Romanesque Revival church stands around the corner on the same block of the current Theatre.

9. Victoria is rich in culture including the nearby Hausechild Opera house.





This small city started around the DeLeon Plaza located off of Main Street and has since grown out as well as up. Small shops originally lined the perimeter of the DeLeon Plaza including Frels Uptown Theatre. Victoria Bank sat at the corner of Constitution and Main next to other businesses including Frels Uptown Theatre. Since then, the bank has transferred to Prosperity Bank and built a new 7-story building that takes up the whole block facing the Plaza. Within this growing city, we can see progress with these high-rise buildings standing among the historical downtown area. During the week, the downtown is bustling with workers and residents, while the weekends are left quiet and minimal traffic. The Victoria Main Street program is dedicated to bringing the community together through providing opportunities for economic growth as well as for entertainment and personal enjoyment. The Victoria Main Street program is a proud member of the these organizations.



2017



PROBLEM

The Victoria Theatre sits abandoned, just a block from main street, with no defined future in sight. How can this building successfully add to the current Main Street program? With a theatre so small, how can the space be expanded for more activity? Is it just for entertainment, or could it be used for work too? How can this old theatre become a place that locals consider proud to call home?



SOLUTION

Rubin Frels is honored in the community with the Annual Frels Fright Fest in October that shows cult classic horror films as well as there is an award in his name at the Victoria TX Independent Film Festival in April. The memory of Frels is important to the community and therefore is important to this design. A new program developed that incorporates everything the Frels men felt passionate about; entertainment through music and film. The perfect solution is to create a music venue that incorporates a film studio.

VISION



Film Studio

A place where budding artists can **explore their craft**, A sanctuary where artists can **create masterpieces**, an exploration for students to **learn new technology and create a new passion**, A local studio **for the community** to advertise their businesses. **Encourage our youth** to make and display films



Music Venue

A place **where locals can watch** their local bands, **see** a new indie movie, **host** an event, etc. Touring musicians can come to **play in a dedicated venue**. Local bands can play and practice.



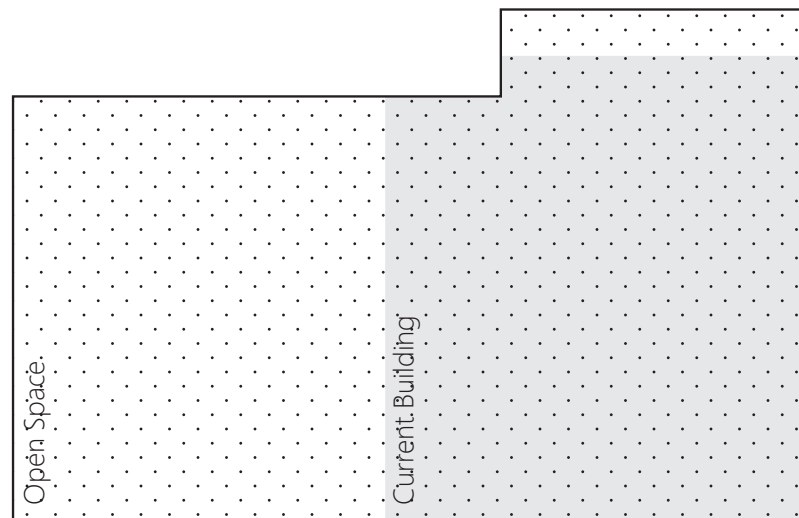
Overall

Keep Frel's memory alive through educating the youth, providing **entertainment opportunities** to learn and enjoy, and providing a social interaction between the community through lasting experiences.

Victoria Theatre

Current Building 5,050 sq ft.
 Available Site 4,900 sq ft.
 Space Behind Building 250 sq ft.

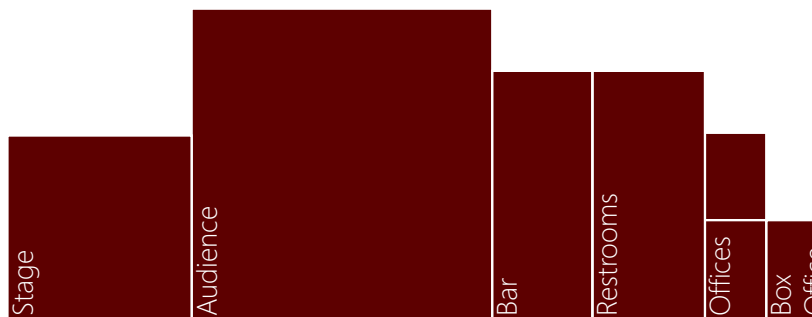
Total = 10,200 sq ft. > 10,000 sq ft.



Music Venue (600 Patrons)

Standing Room 2,500 sq ft.
 Stage 900 sq ft.
 Bar 600 sq ft.
 Bathrooms 600 sq ft.
 Offices (2) 600 sq ft.
 Box Office 300 sq ft.

Total = 5,500 sq ft. > 10,000 sq ft.

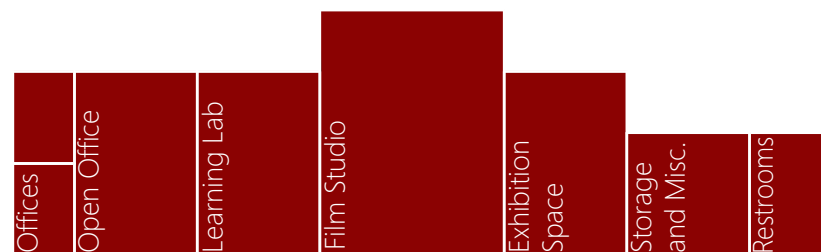


Music Venue

Film Studio (150 Patrons)

Executive Offices 300 sq ft.
 Open Office Space 600 sq ft.
 Conference Rm 600 sq ft.
 Film Studio 1,200 sq ft.
 Exhibition Space 600 sq ft.
 Storage and Misc 400 sq ft.
 Restrooms 300 sq ft.

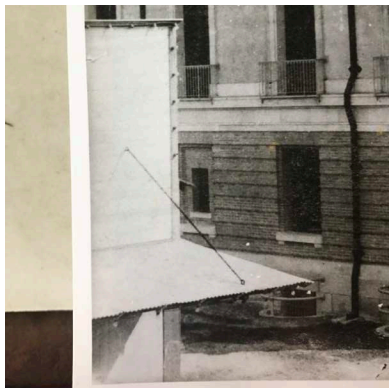
Total = 4,000 sq ft. > 4,500 sq ft.



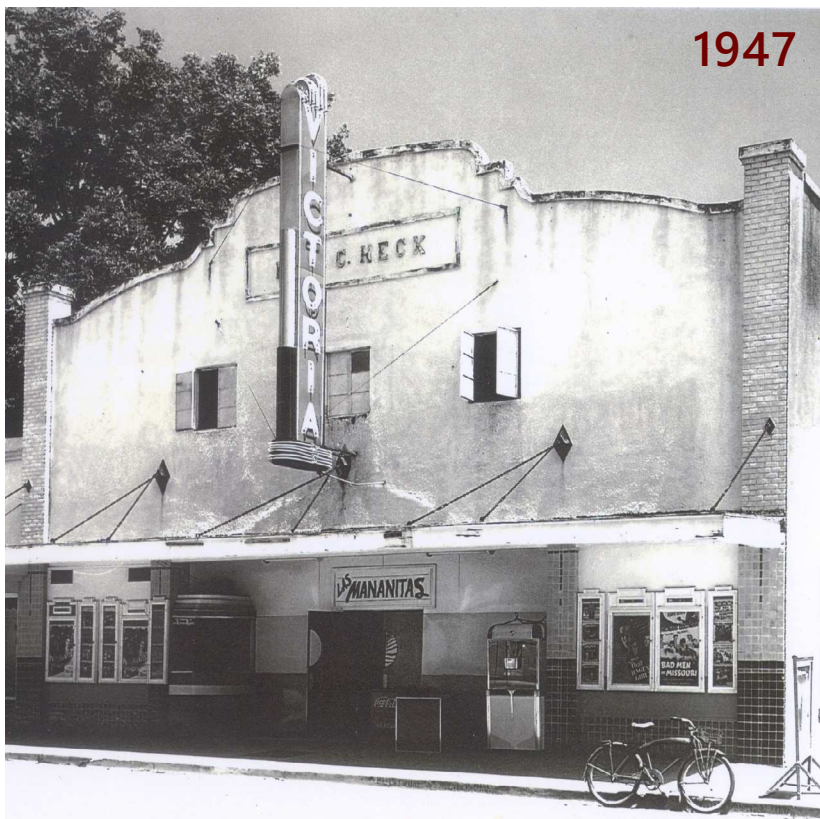
Film Studio

CHALLENGES

Transforming this theatre into a venue and film studio will require more room than the site currently allows. The Theatre Victoria takes up the entirety of its site with no room to expand outward. There is an existing parking lot and small building located directly adjacent that could be highly beneficial space to the theatre's future. The small brick building, 20' x 60' in dimension, was the original telegraph office that Frels met his wife and has been home to many businesses over the years; however, it does not have any significance that adds to city of Victoria historically or architecturally to be worth saving. For this reason, the building's new site could expand to the west resulting in the prospect of inviting locals in from the corner. The site now has 9,600 square feet with the original building taking up 4,000 square feet.



The story of the Theatre Victoria starts over 100 years ago. It was first built around 1910 and the photo to the far left shows it originally as a wooden construction. In 1924, Rubin Frels bought the theatre and started expanding on his theatre empire in Victoria and surrounding towns. Photos reveal the building went under renovations between 1925 and 1926; however, the date of when the theater changed from the wooden construction to the current cinderblock construction is unknown. The theatre underwent renovations before 1926 that led to the current look the building retains today. Additions and alterations to the building have been made since then including colored tiles and new signs, but the iconic shape remains the same.



BUILDING STUDY



Notes from the Secretary of Interior's Standards

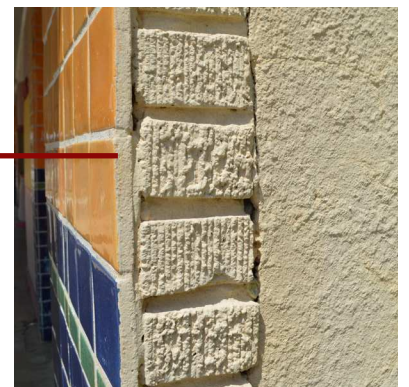
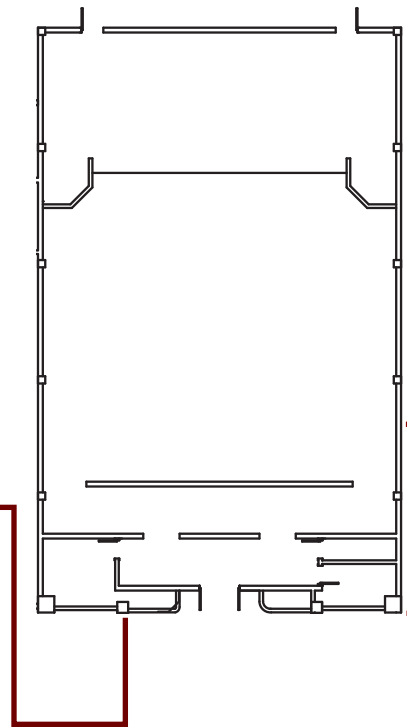
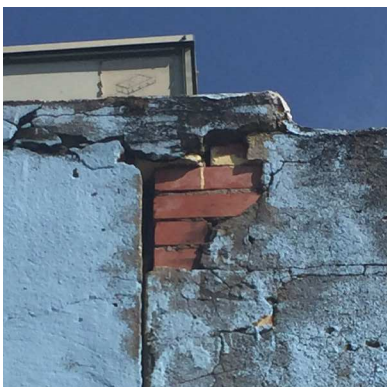
Rehabilitation allows alterations and the construction of a new addition, if necessary for a continuing or new use for the historic building.

A new addition **must preserve the building's historic character, form, significant materials, and features.** It must be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and design of the historic building while differentiated from the historic building.



Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved

New additions should be designed and constructed so that the character-defining features of the historic building, its site, and setting are not negatively impacted. Generally, a new addition should be subordinate to the historic building. A new addition should be compatible, but differentiated enough so that it is not confused as historic or original to the building.



Current Building Construction

The **Building is 50'x80'** with a 16'x70' attachment

There are **NO floor plans in existence**. Even the Building Inspection Department of Victoria has nothing on file.

These floor plans and information are based on information provided by the Owner, base measurements and photos.

The large building is a **cinderblock construction** with engaged columns that are spaced at 16' on center.

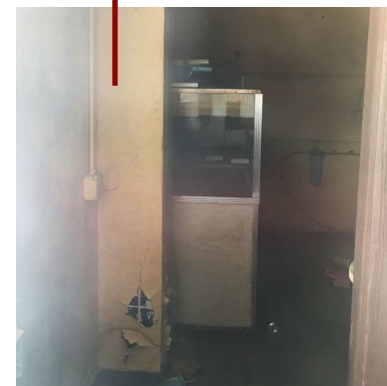
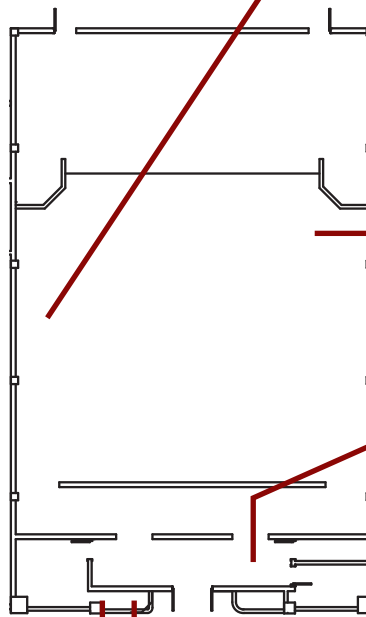
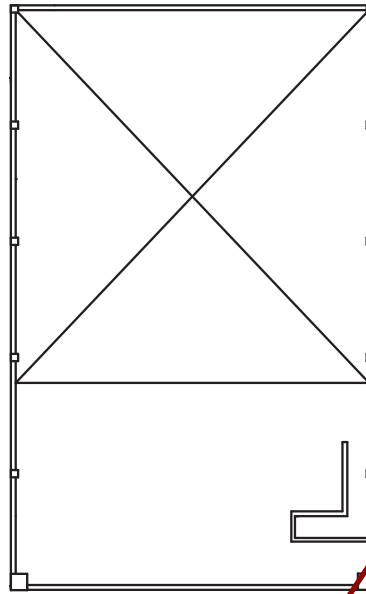
The small building is a brick construction, assuming triple wythe.

Both buildings are covered in stucco.

The front facade is a mix of additions. Pictures show different looks over the years. The **current facade has tile shown over brick and hardiplanking for additional interior spaces**. The side building shows a brick facade that is actually attached to a tile facade.

What holds up the 50' span theater roof? It is unknown exactly but we can assume it is a heavy timber truss structure since it is gabled and not flat.

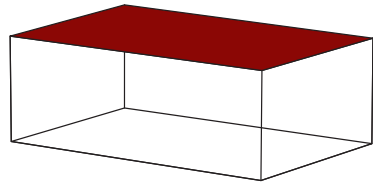
The side building has a flat roof which could be wood or steel construction.



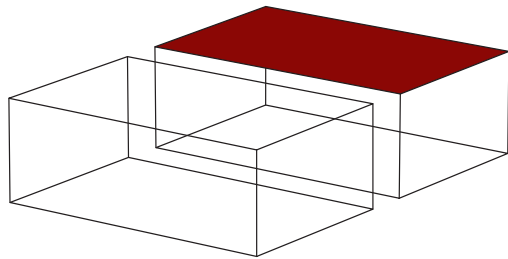
CONCEPT

Designing an addition to an original building can be very difficult, especially when there is only one direction for expansion- west. The new design focuses on movement as an opportunity for legacy and experience. To achieve the addition formed from duplicating the mass of the original building and rotating it ninety degrees to fit the site. Then, dividing the mass to separate the program. Finally, pushing and expanding the top mass into overhanging box was done to highlight and react to the main building façade.

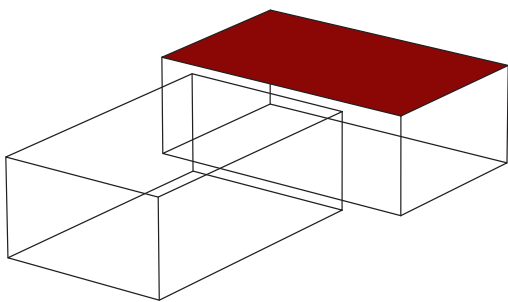




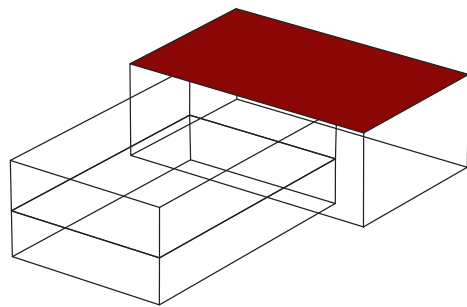
..... Victoria Theatre



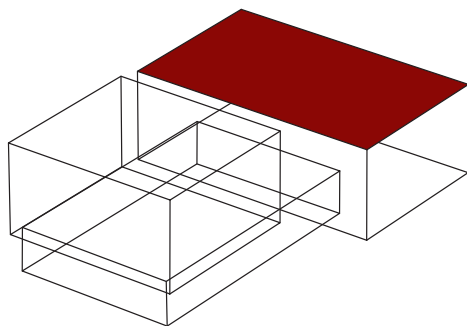
..... Duplicate



..... Rotate



..... Divide and Intersect



..... Push and Expand







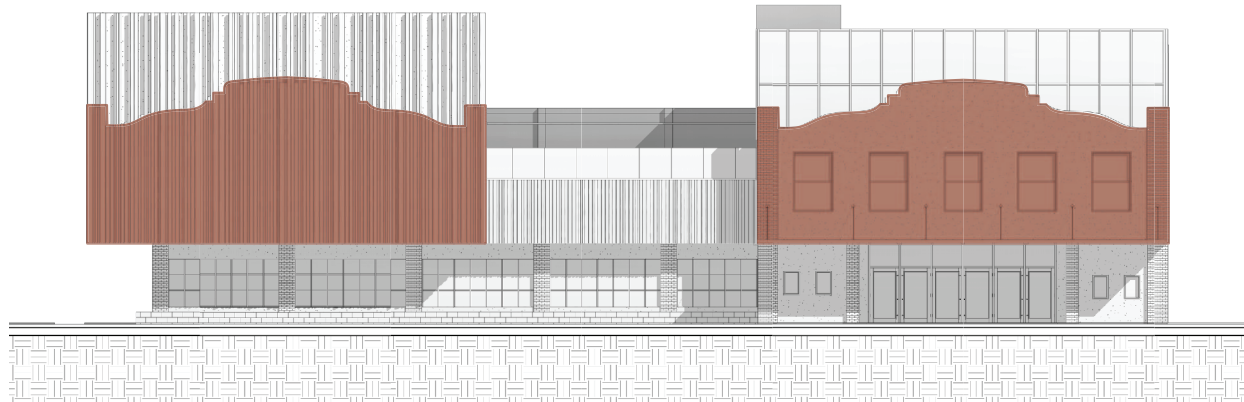
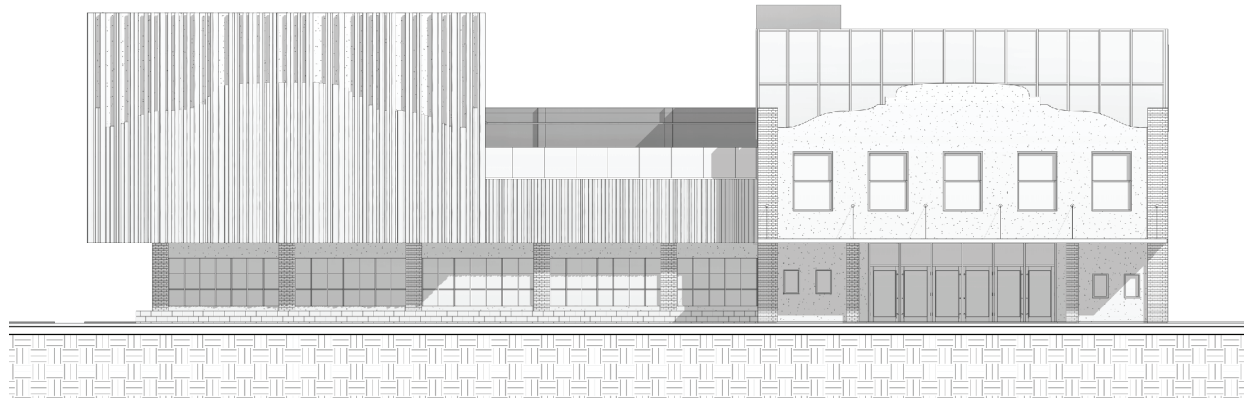
DESIGN

It was important to be able to relate the addition back to the original so the first level uses the same principles of stucco and brick design of the original façade while the overhanging box is highlighted using aluminum pipes. The pipe system refers to Frels passion for pipe organs while reflecting the original façade.

Minor alterations were made to the original front including bringing back the windows that were covered years ago and replacing the awning. From previous pictures, there were many changes to how the entrance looked and worked. This design adds box office windows to the sides while adding 3 sets of double doors to the already inset entrance wall.

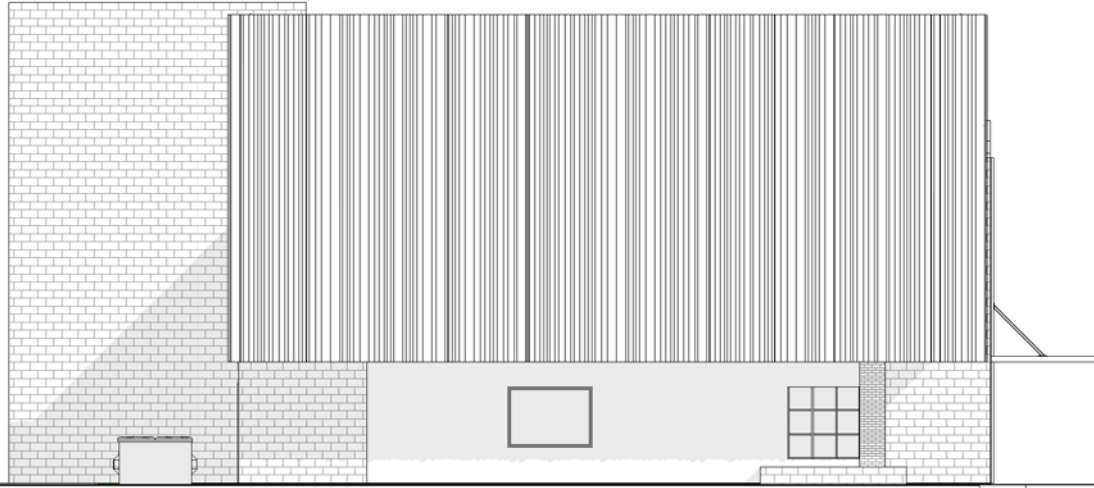


FACADE EVOLUTION

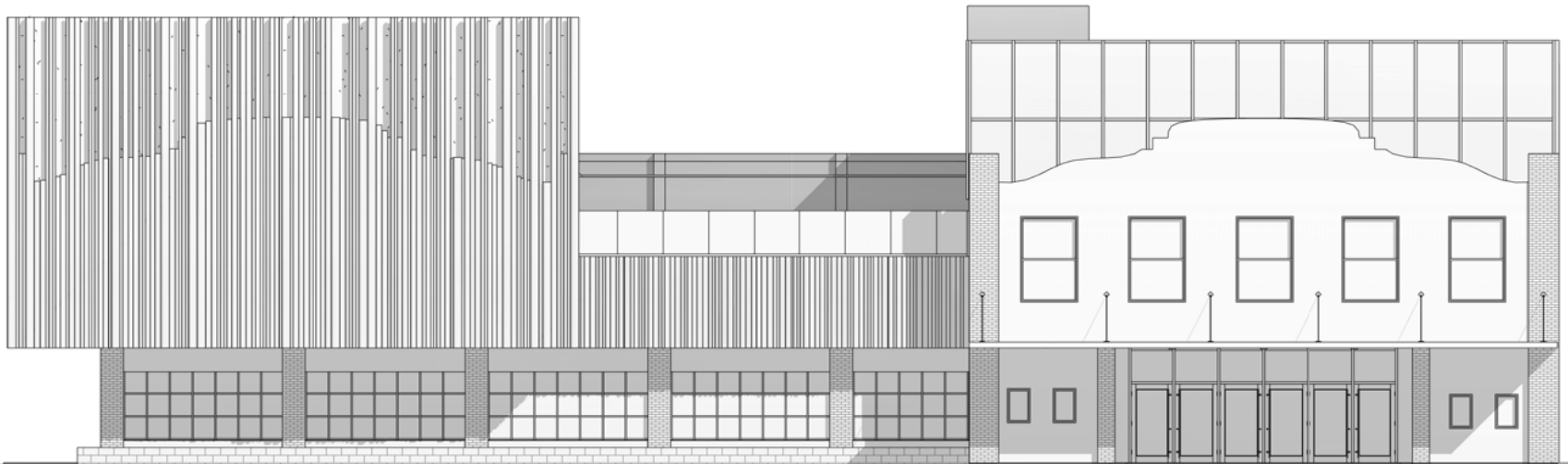




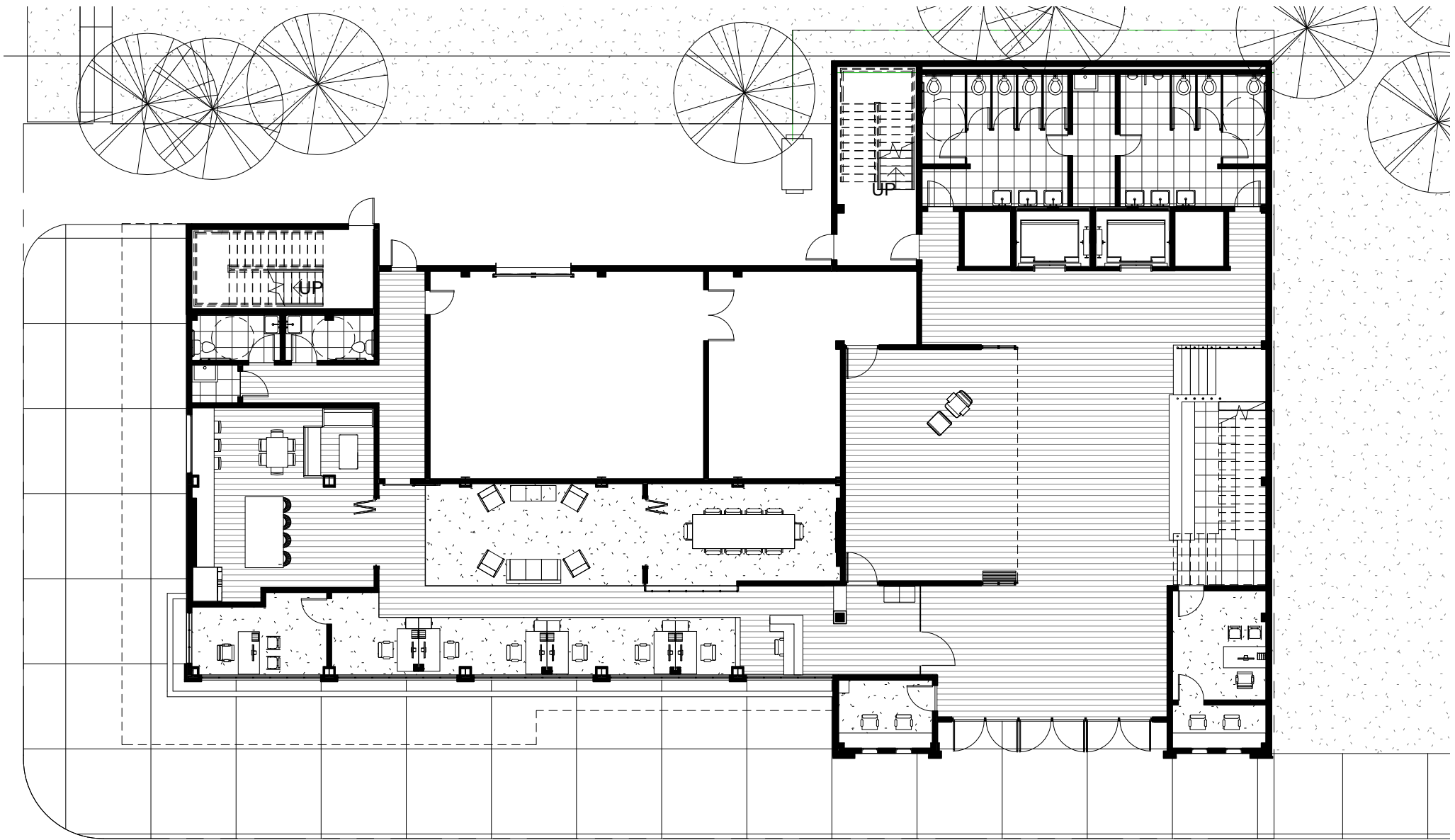
SITE PLAN - SCALE: 1" = 60' 0"



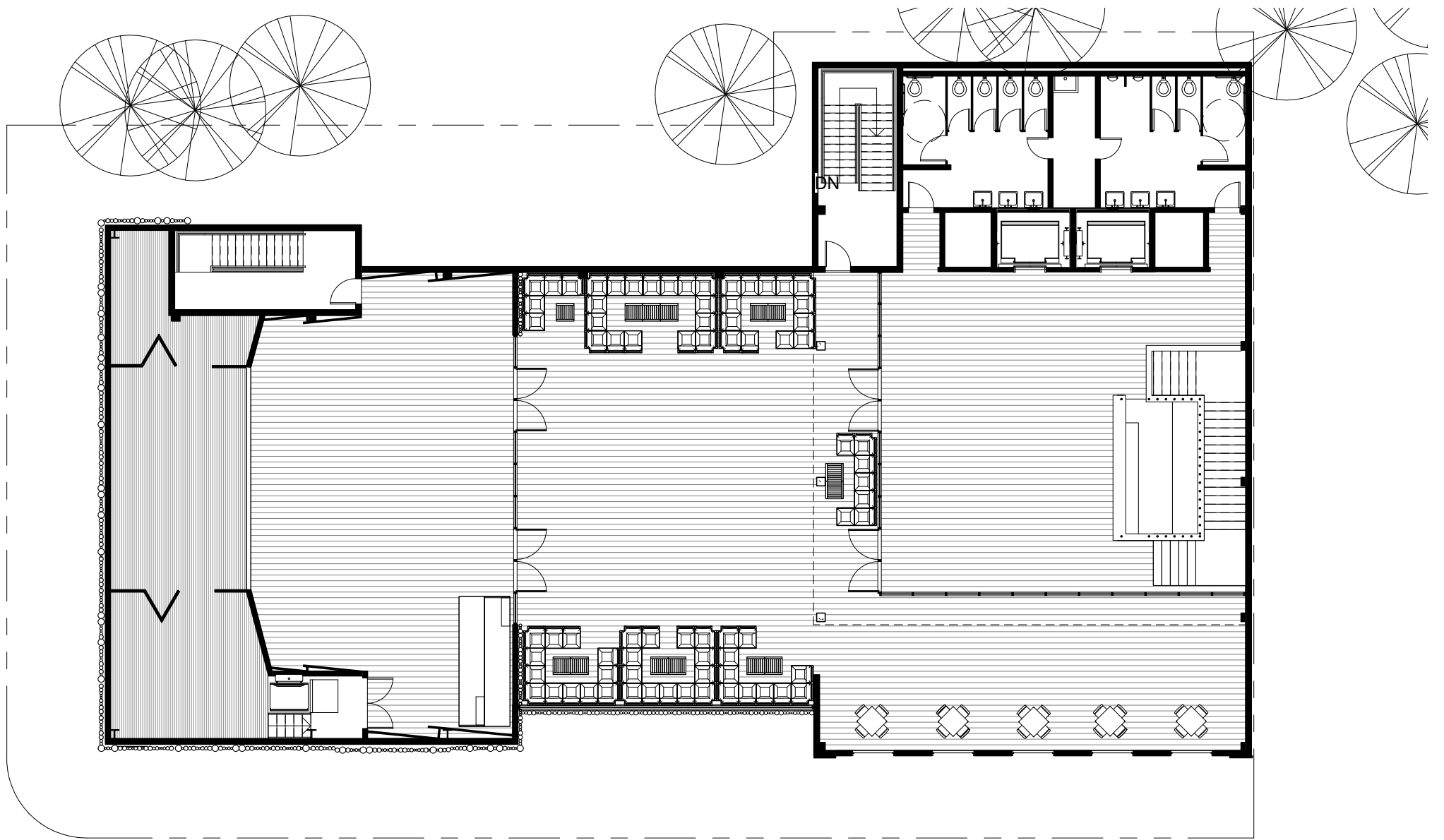
WEST ELEVATION - SCALE: 1/16" = 1' 0"



SOUTH ELEVATION - SCALE: 1/16" = 1' 0"



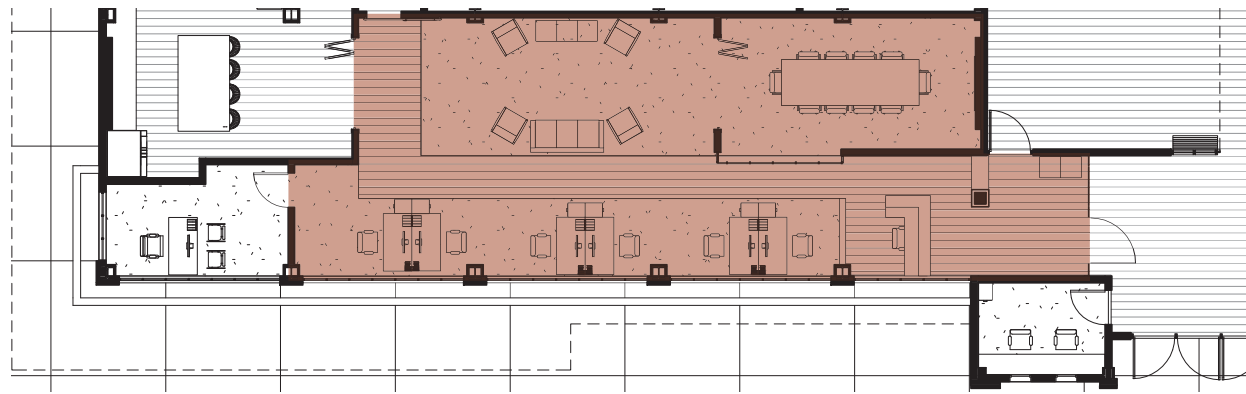
LEVEL ONE - SCALE: 1/16" = 1' 0" 



LEVEL TWO - SCALE: 1/16" = 1' 0" 

FILM STUDIO

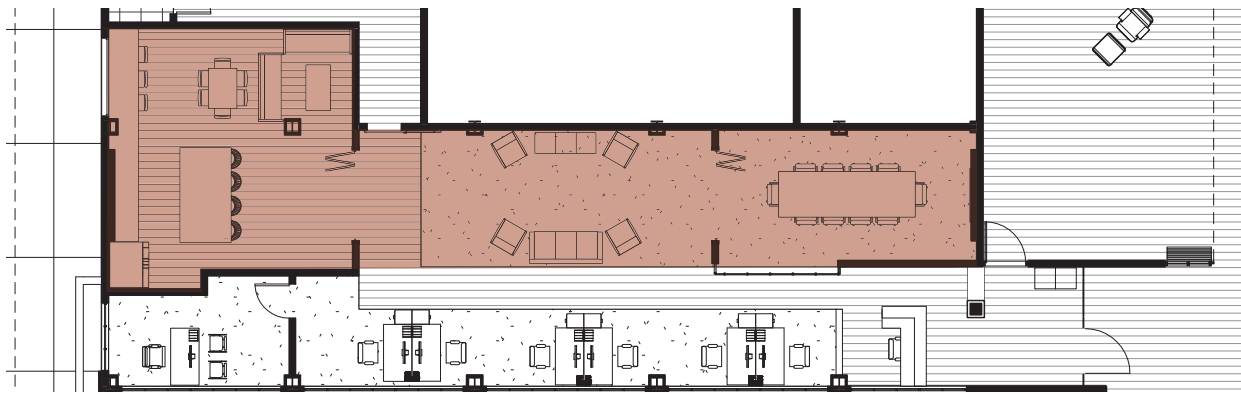




Once inside, the patron has two main options to experience the space. Regulars coming primarily to work or visit can go left to the film studio. An employee or client is greeted by a receptionist before entering the work space. The workers desks are located along the glass to help encourage creativity. The conference room is adjacent to the work desks and allows natural light through this glass wall that discreetly interrupts the main walking path. When the film studio is closed the glass door to the space can be locked preventing Venue patrons from entering.







The front wall and ceiling in the conference room create a direct overhead connection with the seating area and high-end break room that encourages clients and workers to feel comfortable exploring the space. There is a 25' x 32' rentable studio located in the back with access to the back driveway for easy accessible loading and unloading if necessary.







VENUE ENTRANCE





Venue guests are invited to the center of the first level with the bar and exhibit space that face each other. The exhibit space is located between the Film Studio and the Venue Foyer to allow shared use. This space can be opened up or closed off depending on the needs. Artists can show off or display their work for patrons to enjoy before the main event on the 3 fully digital walls.

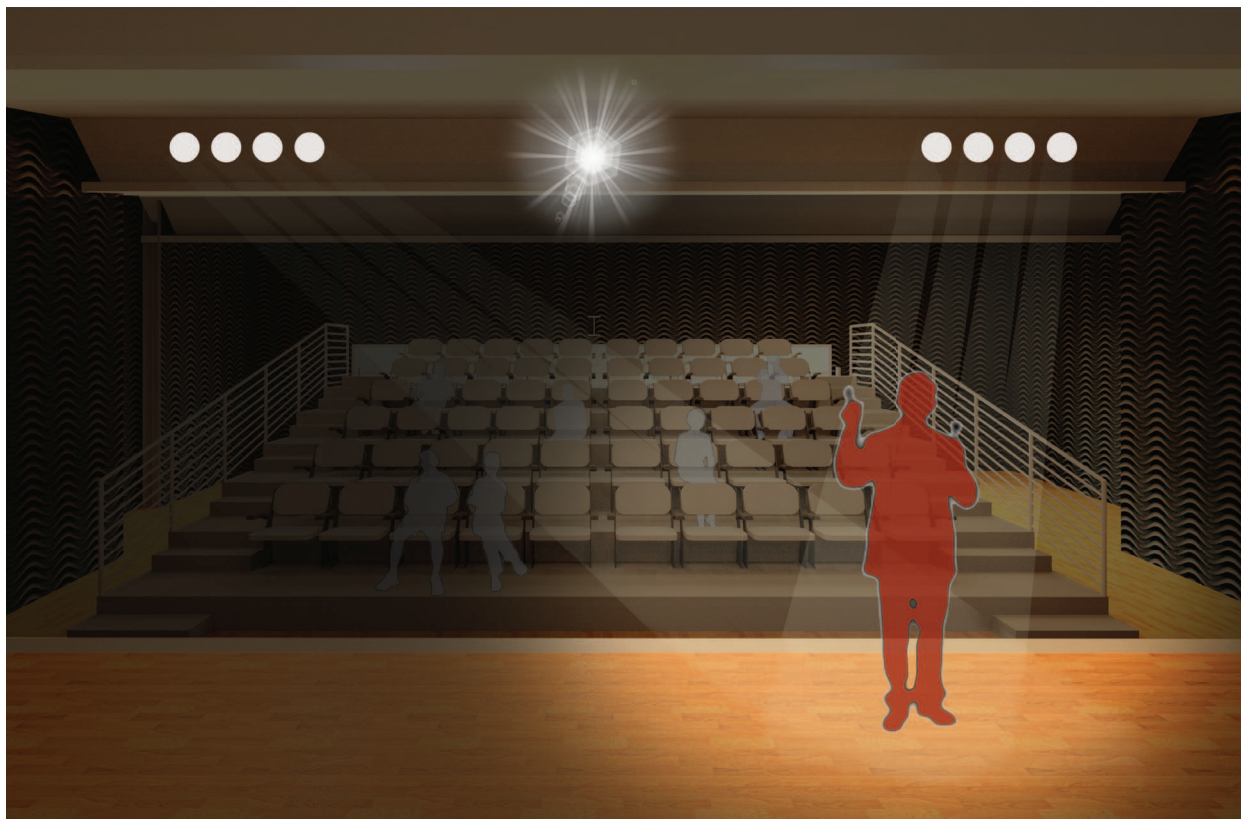


An aluminum pipe system extends from the exhibit space entrance over the bar before turning and heading upstairs. The concrete u-shaped stairs carve out the bar with wood treads that wrap the front and work as the shelving unit behind the bar. The wood detailing as well as the pipes are continued on the second level bar. The pipes continue through the space and extend to the venue's façade creating a connection from the downstairs exhibit space to the main venue.



MAIN VENUE





As you come off the stairs on the second level, you are already facing the main venue located just past the outdoor seating area and inside the piped box. This venue is setup primarily for concerts, however, it can also be used to host a presenter or watch a movie with removeable seating.



OUTDOOR SPACE

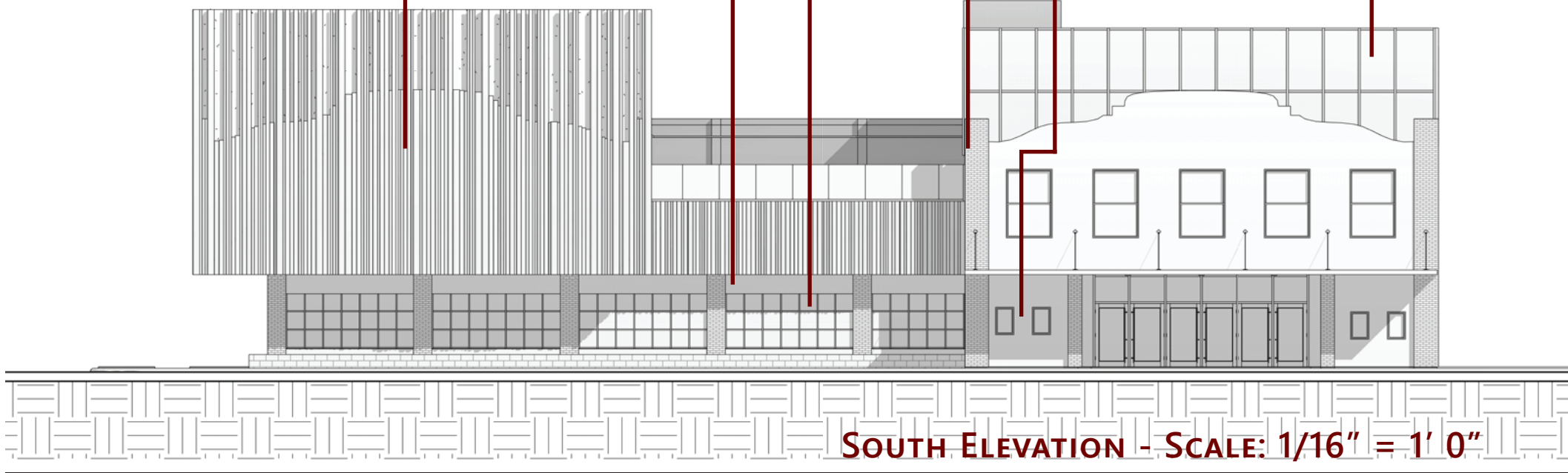
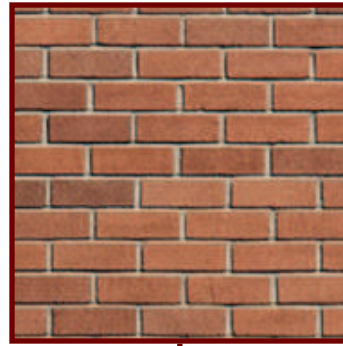


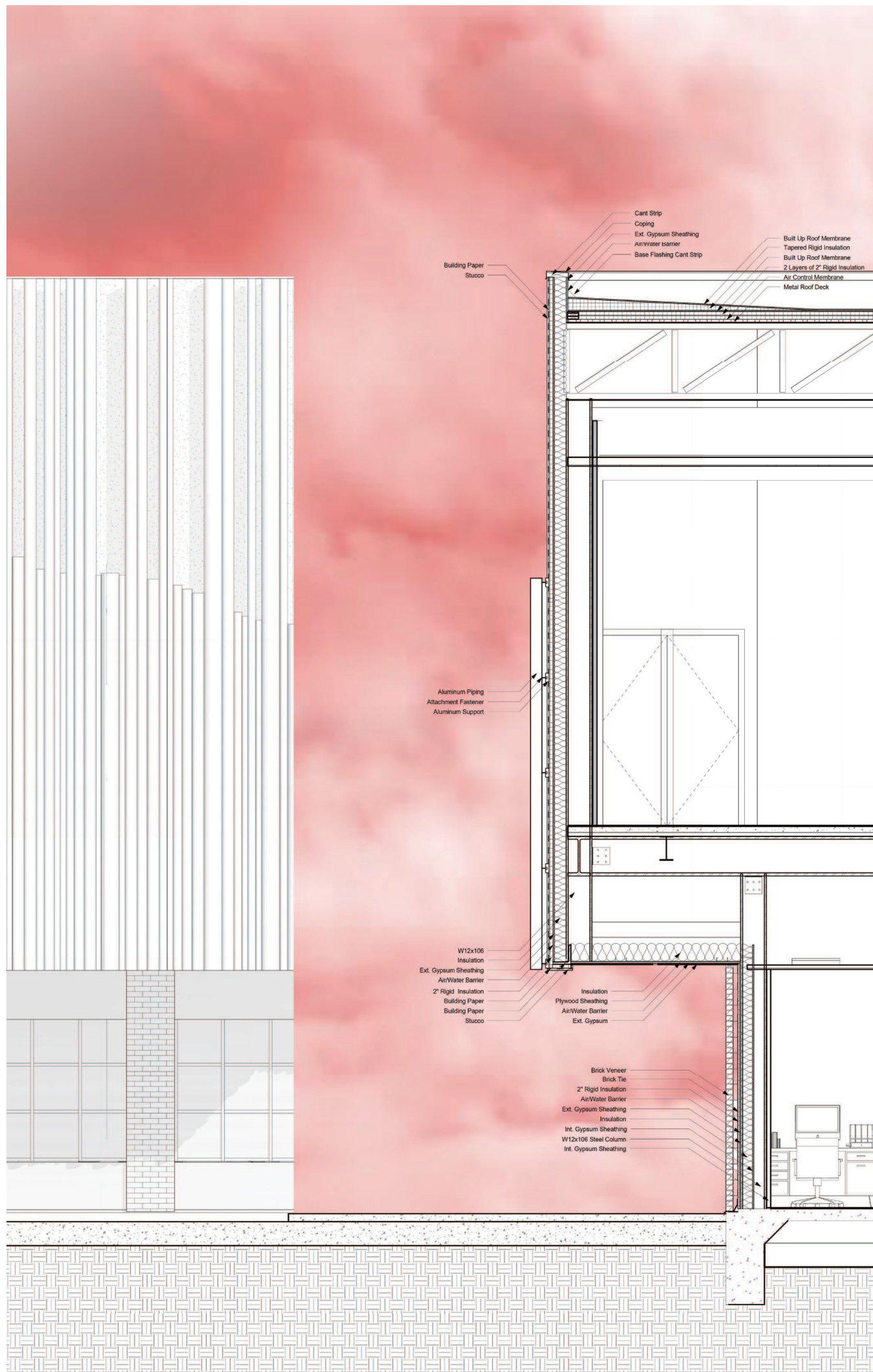






TECHNICAL DETAILS







CONCLUSION

This theatre is a landmark to the community of Victoria. With this new design, this venue holds many opportunities for the community to use it for local or even private events. Frels fright fest and the film festival can make this their new home. This venue is prepared to become the heart of Victoria.

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