

1920s Loew's Theater Gets Landmark Billing

By ROBERTA GRATZ

The Loew's Triboro Theater—one of the five "wonder" theaters built here by the Loew's Corp. in the late 1920s—has been designated a city landmark.

In an unusually quick action, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing at City Hall yesterday and voted to designate. It is usually months and often years between public hearings and designation.

The theater at Steinway St. and 28th Av. in Astoria was purchased this spring by a developer who planned to demolish it earlier this month to make way for a commercial building and two family homes.

When the proposed demolition was brought to the attention of the commission, Chairman Beverly Moss Spatt asked the Buildings Dept. to delay issuance of a permit, and then scheduled the public hearing.

'It Is Only Fair'

"We wanted to work quickly on this," Mrs. Spatt said following the commission vote, "because it is only fair, especially when there is a small developer involved, to let people know where they stand."

Of the other four "wonder" theatres, one is a church

(Loew's 175th St.), one is divided into two (Bronx Paradise), and two are in poor repair (the Valencia in Jamaica and the Kings in Brooklyn).

"The Triboro is the only remaining one in its near original state," John Burcher of the Theater Historical Society of New York told the hearing.

"It's the most outstanding structure in the Astoria area," Burcher said. "It was built at a time of great imagination in theater architecture. There is no theater of comparable quality in Queens." It has a neo-Aztec terracotta brick exterior and lavish, Baroque interior.

Want to Convert It

A number of groups, led by the Ad-Hoc Committee to Save the Triboro Theater and the Astoria Heights Homeowners Assn., have been rallying local support in an effort to purchase the theater for conversion into a Queens Cultural Center.

(With designation status, a building may not be demolished or externally altered without commission approval. But if the owner seeks to demolish for economic reasons, the landmarks law provides a year's time for the commission to find a buyer. If no buyer or appropriate way to reuse the

building can be found, the builder can demolish.)

Most of the residents who appeared yesterday spoke of the need for a performing arts center to revitalize the area. They praised the theater's interior, with its simulated sky ceiling of moving clouds and glittering stars. They spoke too of the hand-carved cherubs and other statuary imported from Italy, and the ornate brass and marble trimmings, plush lobbies and crystal chandeliers.

Haven't Raised Money

Community groups have demonstrated, appealed to officialdom and gathered 6000 signatures, but haven't raised the money needed to buy the Loew's. David Coleman of Coleman Homes Corp., who bought the property for \$500,000, has indicated a willingness to sell for \$1 million in order to cover his losses.

Fred Gambino of the Ad-Hoc Committee, who read letters of support from several officials including Rep. Mario Biaggi and Assemblywoman Rosemary Gunning, said \$500,000 was needed to cover downpayment, mortgage and one-year operation costs. Public funds, are being sought, Gambino said, but so far there have been no commitments.