

Summary – Preserving and Securing the Future of the Brauntex Theatre - Upgrading Marquee to Digital Format While Preserving the Historic Marquee Framework.

As the Brauntex Theatre is poised to celebrate 85 years in this community next January, the organization reflects that the Brauntex is one of the last remaining historic theatres in our community, and preserving its character and securing its future is central to our mission. This proposal is not about replacing history, it is about ensuring the Brauntex remains vibrant, visible, and sustainable for future generations.

We are proposing a sensitive enhancement to the existing marquee, 40”Inches High x 22’ Feet Wide each marquee side, that preserves its historic structure while allowing us to communicate more effectively with today’s audience and provide safety to our employees and pedestrians walking beneath the marquee.

The digital panels will replace the existing plastic panels (which was most recently replaced in 2020 and beginning to degrade) currently housed within the historic marquee framework, which will remain unaltered. The new panels will match the existing size and occupy the same footprint.

Why This Matters to the City

Community benefit

- Enhances the visual presence of a historic anchor asset
- Provides community messaging capability (events, safety, civic messaging)
- Strengthens downtown vitality and tourism
- Supports local businesses through increased foot traffic

Preservation Position

We are committed to preserving the historic character of the Brauntex Theatre. Our intent is a hybrid approach that maintains the architectural integrity of the marquee while introducing modern and safe functionality in a respectful way.

Key talking points:

- Historic structure remains intact

- Design will be context-sensitive and reviewed
- Lighting and motion will be appropriately moderated and within guidelines

Concern: “We’re losing history”

We are preserving the structure and identity of the marquee. This is about sustaining the theatre’s relevance—not replacing its history.

Concern: “Digital signage is too commercial”

This will not be a commercial billboard. It will be a curated, mission-driven communication tool for the theatre and community.

Concern: “It will change the downtown aesthetic”

We are committed to a design that complements the historic district, not competes with it. We will work closely with the City and downtown community for alignment.

Economic Impact

The Brauntex is a driver of downtown activity. Increasing our visibility directly supports restaurants, shops, and local tourism.

Capital Campaign Positioning

This project is part of a broader Phase 3 investment in the Brauntex, ensuring the long-term sustainability of a historic community asset.

Closing

Our goal is to honor the past while responsibly preparing for the future. We look forward to working collaboratively with the City to achieve a solution that reflects both.

Estimated cost total: *\$98,000

**Includes digital panels, installation, permitting, electrical; \$30,000 is already earmarked for towards this expense*

Advantages of a Digital Marquee for a Historic Theatre

Hybrid Marquee (historic structure preserved + digital capability)

- Safety and address risk management (1 reason)
- Preservation credibility
- Community acceptance

There are ~6,000 historic theaters in the United States (including movie palaces, community theatres, and performing arts venues) that have converted to digital marquees.

1. Operational Safety, Efficiency and Cost Savings Over Time

Safety is of the utmost importance. Liability is considerable with manual application. And, while the initial investment is higher, digital marquees reduce ongoing labor and material costs.

- Removes liability and safety exposure; research shows that contact with objects and equipment is a top injury category in performing arts as letters can fall from height and be dropped onto sidewalks. (Recent collision with a truck and large tree limb was the latest near catastrophic incident.)
- Eliminates manual letter changes (over 500 hours annually) and letter replacement costs.
- Reduces staff costs (~\$15,000 annually)

Research Support:

Lifecycle analyses show digital signage reduces long-term operational costs compared to traditional signage due to decreased labor and materials (Ryans & Weinberg, 2015). With the increased liability concerns, digital signage addresses risk management and decreases exposure to legal action against the organization. Cost savings can be reinvested back into the organization.

2. Enhanced Visibility and Community Engagement

Digital marquees have better visibility, more dynamic, and more noticeable, especially in high-traffic areas.

- Can mimic the exact appearance of a 'retro' marquee and strengthen perception of the theatre as active and relevant
- Controlled motion increase attention capture
- Can display community announcements, emergency messaging, or civic partnerships

Research Support:

Digital signage attracts 400% more views than static signage due to motion, color and change options. (Arbitron National In-Car Study, 2009). Visual stimulation significantly improves audience engagement and retention (Wedel & Pieters, 2008).

3. Alignment with Modern Audience Expectations

A digital marquee signals that the organization is current, innovative, and active.

- Aligns with expectations of digital-first audiences
- Reinforces brand as a contemporary cultural venue
- Supports integration with online marketing (QR codes, social media, etc.)

Research Support:

Modern audiences expect multi-channel communication, and digital signage reinforces brand consistency across platforms (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Electronic signage has been shown to increase message recall and adaptability compared to static signage (Dennis et al., 2012). Digital displays enable “dynamic, context-sensitive communication” that improves responsiveness to audience needs.

A digital marquee can serve as a revenue-generating asset to offset maintenance, restoration, and renovations expense, not just operational expense. Digital advertising has higher engagement rates and allows for multiple advertisers in a single display, increasing revenue potential (Out of Home Advertising Association of America, 2022).

Data-informed marketing improves audience engagement and resource allocation in arts organizations (Kolb, 2013).

This aligns with nonprofit best practices of maximizing asset utility.

Important Counterbalance:

For a historic theatre like the Brauntex, this decision is not purely operational; it involves preservation vs. modernization.

Common concerns include:

- Impact on historic integrity
- Community perception
- Local preservation regulations

However, many theatres adopt hybrid solutions, which is what we are requesting:

- Retain historic structure while integrating digital panels
- Use digital inserts integrated within traditional framing

This is not just a facilities decision, it's a signal to the community:

- Are we preserving a building... or advancing a living theatre?
- The hybrid option lets us say: We are doing both.

A digital marquee is not a replacement of history, it is an enhancement of visibility, sustainability, and financial resilience that allows the historic theatre to remain relevant and vibrant in a modern and evolving environment.

References

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