Meeting Date: August 5, 2020
Agenda Item No: 4.8
Staff Contact: Scott Drapkin, Planning Manager
(949) 497-0362 | sdrapkin@lagunabeachcity.net
Project Location: 154, 160 and 162 South Coast Highway | APN: 641-255-22
Case: Concept Review 20-561
Applicant: Marc Navarro, Rivian

Executive Summary: The applicant (Rivian, an electric vehicle manufacture) requests a concept review hearing to consider a proposed restoration of the historic property located at 154, 160 and 162 South Coast Highway (Laguna Theater). Proposed improvements include restoration of the building’s exterior and interior, with no additional floor area or changes to the building footprint. Exterior restoration would match existing and historic conditions. Interior reconfiguration is proposed and to return the theatre to a single auditorium space. Proposed uses would include hosting of private and community events, lectures, film screening, limited food and beverage services and showcasing two of their electric vehicles and their contribution towards sustainability. The following staff report provides an overview of the request with a recommendation to review the conceptual plans, consider public testimony, and provide direction to the applicant.
BACKGROUND: The Theatre was constructed by the Aufdenkamp Family in 1934 and was called the New Lynn Theatre. Fred Aufdenkamp pioneered the business but quickly brought in his son Lynn to assist with operations. Hence the name the New Lynn Theatre. The Theatre opened in 1935 with a ceremonial extravaganza attended by many locals and several movie stars. The first movie shown in the Theatre was “Ginger,” which starred Jane Withers.

The building is influenced by Mediterranean Revival style and incorporates an unusual juxtaposition of brick and stucco interfacing at various angles. The building includes two stories arranged in a “U” pattern around an open entry foyer. Two retail spaces are located on either side of the foyer opening and the remainder of the building is generally dedicated to the movie theatre. A small second floor residential unit is also developed over the northern ground floor retail space.

Brick work is used predominantly along the front facia and is complemented by an open balcony along the inner portion of the foyer. A large tower rises above the marque and is crowned by a pyramidal roof. French door openings and wrought iron balcony balustrades further provide Mediterranean influence. Artist Edgar Payne painted several large pictorial murals that adorned the interior of the theatre and are known to still exist. The Theatre is known as an important cultural focal point and stylistically as one of the landmark Mediterranean Revival buildings in the City. The Theatre is on the City’s local historic inventory and is “E” rated.
The Theatre was the first concrete and steel building constructed in the City and includes a concrete foundation with many pilings driven down to bedrock by a steam pile driver. Distinguished theatre architect James Conway of Beverly Hills designed the building and the Theatre was constructed by local contracting firm Smith Construction.

The Theatre has been operated by several ownerships throughout the years; however, ceased operation in approximately 2015. The adjacent retail suites (dessert store and sandal sales currently) are open and have operated continuously with several business types over the years.

**STAFF ANALYSIS:** The applicant requests a concept review hearing to consider a proposed restoration of the Laguna Theatre property. The property is developed with a mixed-use space that includes a currently vacant 674-seat theatre (two levels with two distinct cinema areas) and two small commercial units that are located along South Coast Highway and flank the courtyard/theatre entrance. Additionally, there is one vacant residential unit that resides on the second floor over the northerly located commercial space.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zone</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Business District Visitor Commercial and CBD-1 Resident Serving (only a very small portion of CBD-1 Zone is located at the rear of the site)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Building Area</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximately 10,164 Square Feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lot Area</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximately 11,500 Square Feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lot Slope</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1% (approx.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental Constraints</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Located in FEMA designated Floodway and Coastal Flood Hazard Areas VE with 1% (or greater) chance of flooding and additional hazards associated with storm waves.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proposed improvements include restoration of the building’s exterior and interior, with no additional floor area or changes to the building footprint. Interior reconfiguration is proposed and to return the theatre to a single auditorium space. Prior to pursuing entitlements for the project, the applicant has requested a concept review hearing to solicit feedback in anticipation of a complete application submittal. The applicant is advised that additional issues and concerns may arise as the project is refined and once a complete application has been submitted.
The Theatre is located within the CBD-V, Visitor Commercial District of the Downtown Specific Plan area. The purpose of the Visitor Commercial District is to provide a diverse range of visitor-serving uses. Movie theatres and playhouse are allowed uses in the CBD-V District with approval of a conditional use permit (CUP). Over the years, there has been many CUPs approved for the retail and food uses on the property; however, the theatre was developed and operated prior to the CUP requirement and has never changed in use. Pursuant to the Downtown Specific Plan (DSP), a change of use (specifically defined by the DSP) requires the approval of a CUP. Based on the proposal, the exiting uses at this site would change per the DSP definition and consequently result in the requirement of a CUP. The Planning Commission would be the reviewing body to consider the CUP.

Proposed Use. An application and preliminary concept plans were submitted to staff on July 16, 2020 from the Rivian Team. As indicated by Rivian, the proposal is to:

"Transform the historic theater into a community-focused hub that will include retail space, food and beverage, and a restored theater for public programming. Rivian sees this project as an opportunity to invest into the community of Laguna Beach by restoring the historic façade, modernizing the theater interior and introducing new public programming to make it an activated development year-round."

According to the proposal, the project would reduce the existing two-screen, 674-seat cinema into a single, 130-seat theater, and restore the original proscenium arch and stage. The reduction in seating area would be used to expand the public lobby and would include public seating, a small hospitality component, and additional space for education and community programming. The two retail spaces will be modified internally to have direct access to the Theatre lobby which will transform the ground floor into more of a single space. The second floor will be modified to provide additional seating and workspaces. Two Rivian electric vehicles would be showcased in the lobby area as well as a display of Rivian’s commitment towards sustainability.
The applicant is proposing the following specific site uses:

**Product and Electric Vehicle Education**
During regular business hours, the space will be open and available for the public to enter the space to learn about the Rivian mission to create sustainable products and electric vehicles. The Theatre will also be open to the public to view and interact with Rivian displays on stewardship and sustainability.

Rivian Electric Vehicles (photographs from the Rivian website)
Live Events and Screenings
The applicant is anticipating hosting approximately 48 live events in the Theatre per year. These events will include movie screenings, live speakers, and Rivian Community Activations.

Retail and Cafe
At this time, Rivian has not provided a specific example of a retail sales display. According to Rivian, retail displays will be provided that enable customers, fans and the public to pursue an outdoor lifestyle. Rivian is also contemplating an area devoted to hospitality, such as a coffee bar that also serves food and other beverages.

Art Showings
In conjunction with the monthly art walk, several times per year, Rivian will open the space to local artists to display their works.

Education and Classes
Approximately once per month, Rivian will invite local schools to the space for presentations on design, engineering, innovation, and other relevant topics. Rivian will also partner with local experts and shops to offer small workshops. Examples of topics would include: “How to fix a bike flat while on the road or trail,” “Wildlife in the canyon and how to stay safe,” “Road and trail running, finding the right gear,” “Surfing 101,” “Yoga 101,” “How can I reduce single-use plastics,” “Life hacks to cut down on waste,” and “Photography: The Great Outdoors.”

Theatre Apartment
Rivian concept plans include preservation of the existing apartment. Rivian is also considering using the apartment for visiting speakers, lecturers, Rivian stakeholders and customers.
As previously mentioned and as an ancillary use to the normal operations and events, Rivian proposes that on-site food and beverage service be provided through partnering with local cafes to provide these offerings. Beer and wine service during acceptable business hours and during live events and screenings is also contemplated. At this time, Rivian has not yet defined their hours of operation; however, they anticipate similar operating hours to other businesses in the Downtown Specific Plan area. Exceptions to this would be movie screenings and other events that may extend operating hours into the later evenings.

**Parking.** The following is a rough breakdown of the approximate floor areas and parking requirements for existing and proposed uses (because detailed plans have not been submitted at this time, only approximations are provided below):

### Existing Land Uses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Areas (approximate square feet/seats)</th>
<th>Parking Required (based on current LBMC)</th>
<th>Parking required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two Cinema Spaces</td>
<td>674 seats (combined both floors) — exact floor area is unknown at this time, parking is based on seats.</td>
<td>1 space per three seats</td>
<td>224.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dessert Store Space</td>
<td>650 square feet</td>
<td>1 space for every 100 square feet</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Space</td>
<td>425 square feet</td>
<td>1 space for every 250 square feet</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Unit</td>
<td>650 square feet</td>
<td>2 spaces (covered)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total required spaces:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>235 spaces</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Proposed Land Uses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Areas (approximate square feet/seats)</th>
<th>Parking Required (based on current LBMC)</th>
<th>Parking Spaces required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Cinema Area</td>
<td>130 seats</td>
<td>1 space per three seats</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café and Lobby</td>
<td>1,900 square feet</td>
<td>1 space for every 100 square feet</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>1,000 square feet</td>
<td>1 space for every 250 square feet</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Unit</td>
<td>650 square feet</td>
<td>2 spaces (covered)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office</td>
<td>1,200 square feet</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total required spaces:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>74 spaces</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown above, the Rivian concept proposes a significant reduction in parking demand (from 235 to 74 spaces). This parking demand change is primarily based on the reduction in theatre seating. Since no expansion of floor area is being proposed and the required parking is less than currently required under the current uses, the proposal does not result in an intensification of use.
Planning Commission Design Review. Rivian is proposing a historic restoration of the Theatre property. Although no specific historic plans and historic assessment has been submitted at this time, based on staff discussion with Rivian, the exterior historic restoration is anticipated to match existing historic conditions, and interior modifications will be proposed to reflect their proposed use.

Pursuant to the City’s Historic Preservation Ordinance, alterations to a historic structure requires design review. The Theatre is considered a historic resource and is “E” rated as listed on the City’s Historic Inventory. The Planning Commission reviews for Design Review applicable development and building modifications in the Downtown Specific Plan area. Prior to Planning Commission review, the City’s Heritage Committee will review the proposed restoration and make a recommendation to the Planning Commission. A structural and historical assessment is required to be submitted to the Heritage Committee that clearly identifies the Theatre’s character defining features and considers any proposed changes. Both interior and exterior elements will be considered with the historical assessment as well as other cultural factors.

Applicable General Plan and Downtown Specific Plan Policies. Future restoration of the Theatre would require consideration of General Plan policies such as Encourage preservation of historic structures and adaptive reuse of buildings (Land Use Element, Action 1.1.13 and 5.1.3) and Encourage the preservation of historically significant buildings and protect the character-defining components of Laguna Beach’s commercial neighborhoods (Land Use Element Policy 3.3). Additionally, the proposed uses and restoration plans will be reviewed in compliance with the applicable Downtown Specific Plan Policies and development standards.

Coastal Development Permit. The current conceptual proposal does not result in an intensification of use and is not anticipated to meet the threshold of development pursuant to the Coastal Act.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301(a) (Existing Facilities – Interior or Exterior Alterations), and 15331 (Historical Resource Restoration/Rehabilitation), the proposal is anticipated to be categorical exempt from the requirements of CEQA.

CONCLUSION: The proposed Rivian restoration and re-use of the Laguna Theatre is generally limited to an exterior and interior restoration, with an interior floorplan reconfiguration that would respond to modernizing and adapting the space to the applicant’s conceptual proposal to showcase their products, while still preserving the Theatre as a community landmark.
RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review the attached conceptual plans and supplemental information, consider all public testimony, and provide direction to the applicant.

ATTACHMENTS:  
Exhibit A: Application  
Exhibit B: Concept Plans
I. CONCEPT REVIEW PURPOSE:

Concept review provides an applicant an opportunity, early in the development review process and prior to investing in expensive planning and detailed engineering, to get preliminary comments from the Planning Commission as to whether a design plan satisfactorily addresses City requirements as set forth in adopted ordinances, plans and policies. Concept review also provides an opportunity for an applicant and the Planning Commission to obtain early neighbor and community project feedback. A concept review application is not subject to approval or denial and is simply a non-binding opportunity for a dialogue with staff, the community and the Planning Commission about a potential project. A concept review submittal should generally include basic information (as indicated below) that focuses on big ideas and alternatives that set the big picture design direction. Specific details do not need to be worked out at the concept review application stage; this will happen in the subsequent final project submittal to the Planning Commission. Please consult with staff prior to submitting a concept review application for recommended submittal information, which will be based on the below requirements and specific project concept.

II. PROPERTY INFORMATION:

- **Location**: 160 SOUTH COAST HWY, LAGUNA BEACH CA 92651
- **Current/Previous Use**: MOVIE THEATER
- **Current Building/Suite Square Footage**: 10,164
- **Current Lot Area**: 11,500
- **Assessor Parcel Number**: 641-225-22
- **Current Parking Spaces Provided**: 0

III. CONCEPT SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS (to be provided with concept review application):

- A brief narrative explaining the important feedback that the applicant is seeking.
- A brief narrative explaining site conditions, zoning, and the proposed development.
- Neighborhood notification by mail (300-foot radius).
- Concept review fee.

**Formatting Requirements**:

- Concept plan(s) at a scale of 1/8 inch = 1' - 0" or 1/4 inch = 1' - 0"
- North arrow on all plans

**Existing Conditions**:

- Property lines and rough topographic conditions (survey not required).
- Public and private streets appropriately labeled.
- Aerial photo of site and immediate surroundings (this can be obtained from the City’s GIS).
- Street view color photos that shows context of existing site and neighboring properties for a minimum of one hundred lineal feet.
- Trip generation rates (per ITE) for existing uses (provide when proposal includes intensification of more than five required parking spaces).
Existing access conditions (including ingress/egress, parking and pedestrian).

Existing building envelope and setbacks.

Tabulations of lot areas, parking and setback conditions (required and existing). Indicate in table whether in compliance (yes/no). Identify on plan where existing nonconforming conditions exist.

Proposed:

For new construction, or redevelopment that results in significant exterior changes and/or potential view impacts, 3D massing models (physical and/or computer generated) should be provided.

For new development, changes in use, and/or increased parking demand of more than five parking spaces, project trip generation rates shall be provided for proposed intensification.

The concept proposal should consider and include at least one feasible alternative design.

Street view color photos that shows context of new proposal(s) with neighboring properties for a minimum of one hundred lineal feet.

Tabulations of lot areas, parking and setback conditions (proposed). Indicate in table whether in compliance (yes/no). (This tabular information should be combined with existing condition tabular information that is noted above.) Identify/highlight proposed variances on plan.

For new construction, or redevelopment that results in significant exterior changes and/or potential view impacts, limited staking shall be provided a minimum of 14 calendar days before scheduled concept review hearing. Certified staking shall not be required; however, photo of the staking from various locations on-site and off-site shall be provided.

Site plan showing existing and proposed building footprints (survey not required).

Proposed ingress and egress.

Proposed landscaped areas. (Do not show specific landscaping, just where landscaping will be provided.)

Proposed parking areas.

Proposed delivery areas.

Proposed trash Areas.

Proposed rough plan sections if multiple levels proposed.

IV. AFFIDAVIT:

I understand that concept review is a preliminary, non-binding opportunity for a dialogue with staff, the community and the Planning Commission about my potential project. I also understand that concept review does not result in an approval or denial of a project and/or plan. I am aware that no promises or guarantees are made during concept review as to what ultimately will or will not be approved. I further understand that any suggestions or expressions of opinion by members of the Planning Commission do not commit Commissioners to a particular position, and that decisions will only be made at subsequent noticed public meetings after interested and affected persons first have the opportunity to present relevant testimony and evidence. I am aware that the purpose of a concept review is simply to allow members of the Planning Commission to provide input as to issues that the Planning Commission is likely to consider. (For example, Commissioners may anticipate that there will be questions as to the impact a proposed use might have on neighboring property owners such as noise, odors, traffic congestion, hours of operation, etc.)

Leslie Blumberg, President
Principal Theatres, Inc.
The proposed project at 162 South Coast Highway in Downtown Laguna Beach is the restoration and renovation of the historic South Coast Cinema, transforming the neglected theater into a community-focused hub that will include retail space, food and beverage, and a restored theater for public programming.

The theater, built in 1935, sits prominently on the South Coast Highway, in between Broadway Street and Ocean Avenue and directly faces Main Beach Park. Located in the Downtown Specific Plan, the theater is zoned as a Residential and Visitor-Serving Commercial Business (CBD1-CBDV). Vacant since 2015, the theater requires a significant amount of repair and upgrades, both on the interior and exterior, to bring it to contemporary regulatory standards. Rivian sees this project as an opportunity to invest into the community of Laguna Beach by restoring the historic façade, modernizing the theater interior and introducing new public programming to make it an activated development year-round.

The proposed project would reduce the existing two-screen, 634-seat cinema into a single, 130-seat theater, and restore the original proscenium arch and stage. In addition, by maintaining the current use of the property, but removing over 500 seats, we expect to significantly decrease the intensity of use on the site and help address the city-wide demand for visitor parking.

The expanded public lobby will include public seating, a small hospitality component, and additional space for education and community programming. The two retail spaces will have access directly to the lobby which will transform the ground floor of the theater into a single, community-oriented hub. The expanded second floor will provide additional seating and workspaces, in addition to the restoration of the ceiling medallion.

This proposed project strives to maintain the historic character of this theater, which has been an integral part of the Laguna Beach community for over 85 years. While the interior remodel is significant, we believe it is necessary to reimagine how a theater can serve the community for decades to come. Rivian wants to partner with the City of Laguna Beach to make this project a success.
Current Programming Strategy Addendum

Live Events and Screenings
We will plan to host 9-12 live events in the Laguna Beach Theater per quarter. These events will include movie screenings, live speakers, and Rivian Community Activations. We have had preliminary conversations for partnerships with the City of Laguna Beach, the Arts and Design College, and the Coast Film Festival.

Product and EV Education
Most days of the week, during regular business hours, the space will be open and available for the public to enter the space to learn about our mission to create sustainable products and electric vehicles.

Stewardship and Sustainability
The space will also be open to the public to view and interact with our displays on stewardship, sustainability.

Retail
Our Retail footprint in Laguna Beach is defined by three pillars – Adventure, Innovation and Stewardship. We are planning to offer retail services onsite to compliment the local businesses of the Downtown District and support these pillars. This service will be offered during regular business hours. Our intent with this offering is to enable our customers, fans and the public in their pursuit of and outdoor lifestyle. Our intent is not to take business away from local businesses who currently offer these types of products but to embrace and support these businesses by working with them and using their established businesses to create a unique, energetic, activated Downtown retail offering.

Art Showings
In conjunction with the monthly art walk, several times per year, we will open the space to local artists to display their works.

Education and Classes
3-4 times per quarter, we will invite local schools to the space for presentations on design, engineering, innovation, and other relevant topics. We will also partner with local experts and shops to offer small workshops. Examples of topics would include: “How to fix a bike flat while on the road or trail,” “Wildlife in the canyon and how to stay safe,” “Road and trail running, finding the right gear,” “Surfing 101”, “Yoga 101”, “How can I reduce single-use plastics,” “Life hacks to cut down on waste,” and “Photography: The Great Outdoors.”
Food and Beverage
We are in the very early planning stages of a Food and Beverage program, ancillary to the Theatre and retail operations. We would look to offer local, simple fare daily and during our programmed events above.

- **Daily Offerings**: Breakfast and Lunch to be served daily. Menu includes coffee, smoothies, breakfast pastries and sandwiches. We will look to partner with local delis and cafes to provide some or all of these offerings.

- **Beer and Wine**: Our preliminary plan is to offer beer and wine for sale during acceptable business hours and during our Live Events and Screenings

**Hours of Operation**
We have not yet defined our hours of operation, but we can safely say that they would align to normal business hours for other Laguna Beach businesses. Exceptions to this would be some screenings and other events may extend our operating hours into the evening beyond normal business hours.

**Theater Apartment**
Our current planning for the apartment is to continue to operate the space consistent with its current use. We are considering it as an updated and modern temporary stay apartment. This amenity would help complete the proposed programming for the Laguna Theater- for use by visiting speakers, lecturers, Rivian stakeholders and customers.

**Partnerships**
We’ve began initial discussions with the LCAD and Coast Film Festival. Both represent the types of partnerships we would like to explore to help activate the space for the community.
Rivian + Laguna Theater

concept review
07/15/20

zhughes@rivian.com
ihowell@rivian.com
The Rivian Theater in Laguna is a historic renovation and restoration of the historic South Coast Cinemas at 162 South Coast Highway in Laguna Beach.

The project intends to restore the exterior of the Theater, unused since 2015, to its period of significance. In addition, the interior will be reconfigured to create 1000 sq ft of retail space, a 750 sq ft lobby, a 2300 sq ft, 130-seat theater, and 1900 sq ft of community education and public cafe. The second floor includes a 1200 sq ft mezzanine, patio, and office space.

The intent of this theater is to be made available to the community and local schools for events, talks, and screenings, which will make this a space for all to learn and be further engaged with the world around us.

This project, if approved, will bring back to life Laguna’s only theater and activate it as a forward-thinking community hub.
Rivian will be an active member of the diverse Laguna community by transforming the theater back into an active hub for screenings, speakers, and local partnerships.

Through engagement with LCAD and other nearby schools, the refurbished theater can be a hub for lectures, presentations, and educational events.

By offering resources to local partnerships, Rivian would like to facilitate activities to promote health and wellness in the active lifestyle of Laguna.

Rivian is committed to preserving our world and ecosystems, and wants to work with Laguna to protect the natural beauty of the coast and canyons.
No significant change to the existing envelope of the theater is proposed. Rivian will work with experienced historic preservationists to refurbish and restore the exterior of the theater, including the brickwork, marquee sign, and other significant details. This will preserve the theater as a landmark building for the city on the Coast Highway.
proposed concept plan

level 01

- property line
- main entry path
- egress path
- trash area
- delivery path / area

ocean ave
proposed concept plan

level 02

- property line
- main entry path
- egress path
proposed concept section