STATEMENT ON THE BOYD THEATRE’S DEMOLITION APPROVAL

April 7, 2014

The Philadelphia Historical Commission’s approval of the demolition of the Boyd Theatre has troubled and saddened preservationists throughout the city and across the country. The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia feels strongly that demolition could have been avoided and are deeply disappointed in the Historical Commission’s vote. The fight to save the Boyd was long and hard-fought on all sides, and we are immensely appreciative of the countless Boyd supporters who spoke out in favor of a creative, forward-thinking plan to preserve one of Philadelphia’s most spectacular Art Deco treasures. We were proud to have the support of Friends of the Boyd, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the League of Historic American Theatres, the Theatre Historical Society of America, and thousands of Philadelphians whose memories of the Boyd will live on.

In past instances where the Alliance has taken issue with the decisions of the Historical Commission, we have exercised our right to appeal those decisions to the Board of Licenses and Inspections Review. The Alliance does not exercise this right frivolously, and takes appeals only when doing so is necessary to protect the integrity of historic resources and the process designed to safeguard them. Because the Boyd’s interiors were not under Historical Commission jurisdiction, an appeal would have done nothing to prevent their destruction. Sadly, interior demolition indeed commenced shortly after the project was approved by the Historical Commission. Recognizing that an appeal, even if successful, would still leave the Boyd’s priceless interior nothing but an empty shell, the Preservation Alliance has decided against taking such an action.

Instead, we and the Friends of the Boyd have aggressively negotiated an agreement with Live Nation Worldwide, R Investment Nine, and iPic Gold Entertainment to ensure the proper documentation, protection and appropriate reuse of as many of the Boyd’s interior decorative features as possible. One-of-a-kind fixtures, two-story mirrors, and other ornament that might have been sold off, scrapped, or destroyed in haste will now be cataloged by a qualified conservation professional, conserved and incorporated into the new development or donated for reuse in appropriate settings. Portions of the building will be photographed for Historic American Building Survey (HABS) level documentation. A preservation easement will be placed on the restored Chestnut Street façade. On-site interpretive displays will celebrate the legacy of the Boyd and the splendor of what was lost.
Of course, none of these measures will ever adequately compensate for the loss of Center City Philadelphia’s last motion picture palace, and the Alliance cannot condone the theater’s demolition. We remain deeply troubled by the implications of the Historical Commission’s vote, which we believe runs counter to both the letter and the spirit of the Historic Preservation Ordinance. But aggressively negotiating and securing this agreement instead of pursuing a symbolic and ultimately futile appeal was, in the Alliance’s best judgment, the most constructive path available to us and to Friends of the Boyd. The fight to save the Boyd drew the attention of the preservation community, civic leaders and politicians, media outlets, and everyday Philadelphians. As an advocacy organization, we are committed to confronting the implications of this loss head-on, and in the coming weeks and months will be reaching out to city officials and preservation allies in order to fix what can be fixed, change what can be changed, and strengthen what can be strengthened for the overall health and effectiveness of the preservation movement in Philadelphia.

Sincerely,

Caroline E. Boyce
Executive Director