

## Architect unveils new Von Lee Commission signs off on plan for theater to become retail and office space

by Sarah Morin

331-4363 | [smorin@heraldt.com](mailto:smorin@heraldt.com)

January 13, 2006

For the first time in years, lights shined at the Von Lee Theater in Bloomington.

Watching the white lights sparkle around the historic canopy, people jumped out of their seats to get a closer look at its new look.

"Oh, my word," said Marjorie Hudgins.

"Neat," someone else exclaimed.

It was a sneak peek of what's to come at the theater that has sat vacant for more than five years.

Architect Doug Bruce unveiled a miniature model of the future Von Lee Thursday at a meeting of the Bloomington Historic Preservation Commission.

The future of the 1929-built theater is a three-story building with retail space on the first level and office space for Indiana University on the upper levels.

The theater is at 517 E. Kirkwood Ave, across the street from another iconic Bloomington spot - the Sample Gates of Indiana University. The

Redevelopment of the Von Lee will blend the new with the old. The theater lights and sign will return, and the historic canopy and entryway will be preserved as will the first 12 feet of the walls of the entire building.

After much design discussion, the commission awarded a "certificate of appropriateness" for the locally designated historic building. Physical changes to such a building require a certificate from the nine-member city commission.

But before granting approval for what has been called the commission's most important case, the members wanted to know that the real thing would look like it does on paper and in the model.



Doug Bruce, an architect at Tabor/Bruce Architecture & Design, displays a three-dimensional model of a proposed redevelopment of the former Von Lee Theater. The stackable model converts the existing building to the proposed design. David Snodgrass | Herald-Times

[» buy this photo](#)

"It's an assurance - what we see is what we get," said commission member Chris Sturbaum.

So the developers, Tartan Realty, must submit final blueprints along with the building materials to the commission's staff person and advisory members for review. Another request is that the developers restore the old Von Lee sign if it's deemed possible. If it can't be done, a replica will go up instead.

The commission also specified that it wants a natural wood entryway at the theater, not an aluminum storefront, so as to better match the architecture of the theater's time period.

© 1997 - 2005 Hoosiertimes Inc. No commercial reproduction without prior written consent.