

It's not just another auditorium

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Contributing Writer

The Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance would like to express its concern regarding the plans to dismantle Peace Memorial Auditorium.

When the City Commission discussed the matter during the June 4 meeting, missing from the information city staff provided to commissioners was anything about the history and significance of Peace Memorial Auditorium, commonly known as City Auditorium. Those details are important factors that need to be taken into consideration before further action is taken.

Peace Memorial Auditorium was built to be a living memorial to the veterans who served and those who died in World War II. In years past, it was common practice for a community to erect a statue or monument as a memorial to honor those who had served, but following World War I, the trend was to construct a memorial that would have a use and serve the community, i.e. a "living" memorial. It seemed far better to remember those who had served with a park, a stadium or an auditorium than with a traditional monument. Memorial Stadium on the KSU campus, constructed to honor students and alumni who died in World War I, is another local example

of a living memorial.

Following World War II, the citizens of Manhattan set out to build a living memorial to honor the 2,610 veterans who had served and the 101 soldiers who lost their lives in the war. A communitywide effort, which involved many organizations, began in 1946 to develop plans for constructing a memorial auditorium. Voters approved an \$800,000 bond to construct an auditorium that "will long endure as a living memorial to

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our beloved dead."

One of the dangers of constructing a living memorial is that while people are using the memorial and enjoying an athletic event, concert or other recreational activity, they lose sight of the reason the memorial was built. That seems to have happened in Manhattan with Peace Memorial Auditorium. If Manhattan's World War II memorial were a statue or monument and the City Commission was considering knocking it down and destroying the memorial, there would likely be considerably more community

interest, thought and discussion about the plans.

During the June 4 City Commission meeting, one of the reasons provided for why Peace Memorial Auditorium should be dismantled is that it's rented only a few times per year. Perhaps the facility is rarely rented because very little has been done to update the space since its completion in 1955, which includes a lack of air-conditioning. The same was said about the Union Pacific Depot: "Who

would want to use it?" The renovated depot space is now continuously rented and generates considerable cash for the city. A neglected auditorium won't get used, and the decisions made over the years to not invest in improvements should be recognized as huge contributing factors to

the lack of use the facility sees rather than to try to claim there's no community interest in using the space.

The Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance hopes commissioners will inform themselves about Peace Memorial Auditorium, will thoughtfully consider its memorial aspect, and will discuss options that will continue to honor those who served and died in World War II.

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