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Children's National to take over historic Takoma Theatre

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The owner of the historic Takoma Theatre is proposing to repurpose the Northwest D.C. building as satellite clinic space for Children's National Medical Center.

The theater, bounded by Butternut Street NW to the north and Fourth Street NW to the west, was designed by architect John Zink in the Classical Revival style. It opened in 1923. The property, vacant for more than a decade, includes a 15-space parking lot.



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The Takoma Theatre will be repurposed as medical office space by Children's National Medical Center.

The theater owner, Rock Creek Property Group, has restored

and expanded it under a plan approved by the Historic Preservation Review Board in 2016. The renovation includes a new second story, bringing the total size of the theater building to more than 23,000 square feet.

According to an application filed by Rock Creek with the D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment, the owner marketed the project to 150 commercial tenants over two years, including retail and service users and roughly 70 performance arts-type tenants.

"Despite extended and wide-ranging marketing efforts the Applicant has conducted, it has been unable to identify and secure tenants that meet the neighborhood commercial designated use requirement due to the confluence of the unusual size of the Property, its location, and the historic nature of the building," the application reads.

In the end, Rock Creek identified an anchor tenant in Children's National, which proposes to install offices and 40 exams rooms to provide services in behavioral medicine, autism, hearing and speech, and developmental medicine. The proposal requires a special exception from the BZA because medical office is not a designated use under the Takoma Theatre zoning. The theater will also offer 863 square feet of ground-floor retail.

The theater had previously been eyed for 20 residential units under a plan approved by the HPRB in 2013. But Rock Creek decided against residential when it acquired the property for \$2.2 million in May 2015.

"There is a lot of housing going in in Takoma," Gary Schlager, Rock Creek principal, told the Washington Business Journal in June. "This works better as commercial."

Children's National has big plans for Northwest Washington. In November 2016, it accepted the transfer of nearly 12 acres of the former Walter Reed Army Medical Center, which it plans to convert into a research hub with room for 400 scientists, pediatricians and support staff.



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