

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
PERMITS IN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS
MARCH 27, 2017
NRD-2017-0012
721 Congress Avenue
Congress Avenue Historic District

PROPOSAL

Construct a high-rise multi-family apartment building.

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

The applicant proposes the demolition of a non-contributing building and new construction of a high-rise multi-family residential building on the corner of 8th Street and Congress Avenue in the Congress Avenue Historic District. The proposed building will be 31 stories tall (436') with a four-story (140') street façade of perforated metal, butt-jointed structural glazing, and printed glazing.

Above the Congress street façade of the building will have glass cladding interspersed with unitized metal panels of varying widths. At the street-level entrance, the 8th St. façade will also feature a 1.5-story swath of perforated metal and glass with awning above. The upper stories of the north and south elevations will be comprised of butt-jointed glazing installed in a regular vertical pattern.

The building will front the street to the 8th floor, then have a 40' setback for stories 9-31 of multi-family residential above that. The 8th floor will feature a deck with steel guardrail overlooking Congress Avenue.

STANDARDS FOR REVIEW

The Congress Avenue National Register Historic District has no design guidelines for new construction. General design principles for historic districts emphasize compatibility with the contributing structures within the district in terms of materials, size, scale, and fenestration patterns. There are no design guidelines for new high-rise construction within the Congress Avenue district, but the Commission should evaluate this building from its street-level design and materials for compatibility. Other non-contributing high-rise structures directly on Congress include the existing 16-floor 515 Congress, 16-floor 823 and 15-floor 909 Congress, as well as the proposed 32 and 26 story structures at 619 and 419 Congress.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Recommend postponement to April 10, 2017 so that the applicant may attend the Certificate of Appropriateness Review Committee meeting on April 10, 2017.

Other recommendations include:

- Minimize the use of reflective materials on the street-level section of the building and on the lower full-depth floors of the 8th Street façade, so that it is not in stark contrast to the historic theaters, hotels, and masonry storefronts that characterize the block face. Every effort should be made to soften the blow of the impact of this building on the character of the historic district by blending the street-level facades into the surrounding historic streetscape to the greatest extent possible.
- Recess the printed glass entranceway or otherwise add a shade structure to reduce the visual impact to the streetscape and to create a deeper shaded walkway for passersby. While the current orientation takes account of the architectural elements

of the adjoining theater, the graphic elements and unbroken reflectivity of the printed glass diminish the effect of the existing setback.

- Restrict visible plantings to the ground level, upper set-back deck levels, or 8th Street elevation. Avoid upper-story plantings which abut the existing State Theater party wall.
- The horizontal datums used in the building's design are sensitive to the anchoring visual elements of the surrounding historic structures; nonetheless, a proposed high rise of this scale will have a significant effect on the streetscape character of the "Main Street of Texas," particularly as the proposed structure has twice as many floors as the 15-story Stephen F. Austin Hotel on the opposite end of the block. A building of this scale cannot help but affect the rhythm of the streetscape; the applicant should consider further horizontal articulation or setbacks that make the proposed building less of an intrusion on the historic character of the block and the district, at least at the ground level and lower stories that relate to the street.

LOCATION PHOTOS



View from the west side of Congress showing the proposed demo and construction site on the right (corner of 8th Street next to the State Theater).



View down Congress



N side of 7th and Congress, across from the proposed high-rise/existing vacant building.



Block face of Congress. Construction in background shows 619 Congress construction in progress.