

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
PERMITS IN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS
FEBRUARY 28, 2022
HR-2021-207618
SIXTH STREET NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT
320 E. 6TH STREET

PROPOSAL

Exterior work to the storefront and entry vestibule; new signage.

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

- 1) Restore paired multi-light doors at the storefront entrance on the west end of the building. The doors are designed to match a historic photograph but be of code-compliant width, resulting in four rather than five doors within the existing masonry opening. Replace the canopy above the entrance on the existing frame.
- 2) Install a roll-down gate at the entry vestibule. The gate will mount into the concrete columns at either side of the vestibule and will not disturb the historic canopy.
- 3) Remove existing non-historic signage, patch and repaint stucco wall above the entrance. Install new sign to screen the roll-down gate. The sign will be approximately 16' wide by 2'-10" in height. Three options are presented:
 - a. Painted aluminum sign with bulbs to match underside of canopy;
 - b. Painted aluminum sign with flat-cut aluminum letters and indirect lighting; or
 - c. Painted aluminum sign with double-stroke neon to match neon on the canopy perimeter.
- 4) Replace non-original black tile at the recessed theater entrance with new patterned tile.
- 5) Replace one entry door with a Dutch door to match existing.

ARCHITECTURE

Movie theater with three-story brick façade spanning two lots. The section at 320 E. 6th St. contains the theater entrance, recessed beneath a projecting metal canopy with rounded corners, studded on the underside with lights and ringed with neon. Above is a blade sign with lighted letters and neon perimeter. To the west at 318 E. 6th is a storefront entrance flush with the façade, consisting of paired glass doors and stucco infill. At the upper levels, picture windows have replaced the historic multi-light double-hung and casement windows. Window openings are set within recessed brick bands.

RESEARCH

Jay J. Hegman opened the Ritz Theatre in 1929 at 320 E. 6th St. and expanded the theater to its current configuration encompassing 318 E. 6th St. in 1937. Architect Hugo Kuehne designed the 1937 theater. It was the first in Austin planned specifically for talking pictures. The theater originally served only white customers; later, it became the first integrated theater in Austin, though Black patrons were restricted to the balcony.¹ It continued in operation as a movie theater until 1964, after which it went through a period of vacancy and later operated as an adult theater. Beginning in 1974, the building served as a live music venue, and it was once home to Esther's Follies. Between 2007 and 2021, it was the downtown location of the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema.²

J. J. Hegman was born in 1883 in Galveston and arrived in Austin in 1915 after operating a theater in Temple, Texas. He opened the "old" Queen Theater on Congress Avenue in 1916, then persuaded Major George W. Littlefield to build a new, larger theater in 1920, the "new" Queen, also on Congress Avenue. The Queen was the first theater in Austin solely dedicated to showing motion pictures; all the other theaters also featured stage shows. Hegman also opened the Crescent and Star theaters in the 1920s. He ran afoul of local authorities in the early 1920s for showing movies at the Queen on Sundays, in violation of Texas blue laws, which prohibited many businesses from operation on the Sabbath. He was fined for his violations, and in 1924, sold the Queen Theater. His son, Elmo W. Hegman, started off as a projectionist in his parents' theaters, and later became the manager of the family's theater business.³

¹ "Austin's Newest Theatre Enjoys Business," *Austin Statesman*, Nov. 7, 1929, 14; Richard Whittaker, "What Next for the Former Alamo Ritz Location?" *Austin Chronicle*, July 2, 2021, <https://www.austinchronicle.com/screens/2021-07-02/what-next-for-the-former-alamo-ritz-location/>, and Monique Monroe, "Harlem Theater," *EASTside Magazine*, <https://www.eastsideatx.com/harlem-theater/>.

² "Ritz (Austin, Texas)," Wikipedia article, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ritz_\(Austin,_Texas\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ritz_(Austin,_Texas)).

³ Steve Sadowsky, staff report to the Historic Landmark Commission for the demolition of 4714 Rowena Street, October 26, 2020,

DESIGN STANDARDS

The City of Austin’s [Historic Design Standards](#) (March 2021) are based on the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and are used to evaluate projects in National Register districts. The following standards apply to the proposed project:

Repair and alterations

11. Commercial storefronts

Standard 11.3 indicates that, when working on a storefront that has been removed, the new design and materials should be compatible with the scale and style of the building. It is further recommended that an altered storefront should be restored to its design during the period of significance when documentation exists. The proposed work entails restoring the paired entry doors on the western portion of the building. The design will be altered to provide code compliant door widths within the existing masonry opening. The doors otherwise match a historic photograph.

Recommendations in this section include reconstruction of other missing features where documentation exists. The proposed work entails replacement of existing non-original black tile with patterned tile at the recessed entrance. Staff suggests use of solid tile to avoid distracting from the building’s historic features. Further, staff encourages restoration of the missing striped wainscot flanking the entrance. These recommendations are not requirements, and the proposed work meets the applicable standards.

SIGN GUIDELINES

The City of Austin’s [Guidelines for Signs in National Register Historic Districts or at a City Historic Landmark](#) are used to evaluate signs in National Register Historic Districts. The following guidelines apply to the proposed project:

Number of signs

One sign is allowed per building, or façade module for buildings with multiple tenants. The historic Ritz sign should not be counted within this total as it does not directly advertise the current business. The proposed sign meets this guideline.

Sign size

Flush-mounted signs are allowed a maximum height of 2 feet and a maximum size of 20 square feet. The proposed sign exceeds this size. The sign is designed to span the width of the entry vestibule. This will allow it to screen the roll-down gate from view and mount to the side columns without disturbing the canopy. The height of the sign is proportionate to the width, and the sign is not out of scale with the façade. Staff recommends the commission approve the sign.

Sign design, coloring and materials

The sign is a simple rectangular shape in painted metal. The sign will be three colors: black and white, with green lighting in the second or third options to match the green neon on the canopy. The proposed sign meets these guidelines.

Lighting

Neon signs

The second option with indirect lighting most clearly meets the letter of these guidelines. However, the building has restored pre-1950 neon lighting, making the third option with neon an appropriate alternative. The first option with exposed bulbs also relates to the historic canopy. Any of the options are compatible and would be appropriate for this building.

Sign placement

The proposed sign will be over the main building entrance in compliance with this guideline. It will not impede the view of historic features of the building

Sign mounting

The proposed mounting will mount into the plastered concrete columns, which can be repaired, and will avoid damage to the canopy.

Summary

The proposed work meets the applicable guidelines or otherwise merits approval.

PROPERTY EVALUATION

The property is located within the Sixth Street National Register district.

Designation Criteria—Historic Landmark


- 1) The building is more than 50 years old.
- 2) The building retains moderate integrity. Prior modifications include replacement of the windows, replacement of the bank of doors into the tenant space at 318 E. 6th, removal of a decorative wainscot, and installation of tile in the entry vestibule.
- 3) Properties must meet two criteria for landmark designation (LDC §25-2-352). Staff has evaluated the property and determined that it meets two criteria:
 - a. Architecture. The building is a good example of a Depression-era movie theater, with restrained Art Moderne stylistic influences.
 - b. Historical association. The building is significant as one of relatively few surviving movie theaters of this era.
 - c. Archaeology. The property was not evaluated for its potential to yield significant data concerning the human history or prehistory of the region.
 - d. Community value. The property does not appear to possess a unique location, physical characteristic, or significant feature that contributes to the character, image, or cultural identity of the city, the neighborhood, or a particular demographic group.
 - e. Landscape feature. The property is not a significant natural or designed landscape with artistic, aesthetic, cultural, or historical value to the city.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION


Comment on and release the plans.

LOCATION MAP







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SUBJECT TRACT



PENDING CASE



ZONING BOUNDARY

NOTIFICATIONS
CASE#: HR 21-207618
LOCATION: 320 E 6TH STREET



1" = 208'

This product is for informational purposes and may not have been prepared for or be suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes. It does not represent an on-the-ground survey and represents only the approximate relative location of property boundaries.

This product has been produced by CTM for the sole purpose of geographic reference. No warranty is made by the City of Austin regarding specific accuracy or completeness.

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Photos



Photograph from applicant, 2022.

Occupancy History

City Directory Research, February 2022

1959	318	Ritz Theatre (warehouse)
	320	Ritz Theatre
1952	318	Ritz Theatre (warehouse)
	320	Ritz Theatre
1947	318	Bankston's Shoe Shop (shoe repair)
	320	Ritz Theatre
1941	318	Bankston's Shoe Shop (shoe repair)
	320	Ritz Theatre
1939	318	Bankston's Shoe Shop (shoe repair)
	320	Ritz Theatre
1932	318	A.T. Smith (Cleaner)
		Bankston's Shoe Shop (shoe repair)
	320	Ritz Theatre
1929	318-20	S. N. Key (physician)
		Note: prior to construction of current building

Historical information

Historic photograph of the Ritz Theatre, ca. 1930. Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, accessed via Cinema Treasures website, <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/10194/photos/242114>.



Texas Historical Commission, Historic Property, Photograph THC_06-0987, date unknown, accessed via University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht674745/>.

The New RITZ THEATRE Opens on East Sixth Street



Congratulations

On the Opening of the

New Ritz Theatre

One Block From
The Big East Sixth Street
Department Store

—of—

Values—Daily—Values



We Congratulate The New Ritz Theatre

After the Show
See the Big 25c Values
All This Week at

HAGE'S

Just Across the Street

CONGRATULATIONS
On the Opening of the
Ritz Theatre
Just Across the Street
You Get the Best Barbecue
in Austin

CHARLIE'S
"That Famous Barbecue"

Announcing formal opening of the New RITZ THEATRE

Sunday Afternoon, Oct. 12th at 2 P. M.

A Short Description of "THE RITZ" and Its Policy.

THE RITZ THEATRE is located at 302 East 6th St. in the heart of Austin's Bargain District.
THE RITZ THEATRE is one of Austin's beautiful Theatres. As pretty as any—bar none. Come—take a look
and be convinced.

THE RITZ is the first fine show for white people on East 6th St.
THE RITZ will show nothing but big pictures, BOTH TALKING PICTURES and SYNCHRONIZED about
Sixty Days after Congress Avenue Theatres at an admission Price of 20 Cents for Adults and 10 Cents for
Children, both Matinee and Night. On Sundays Prices will be 25 Cents for Adults and 10 Cents for Children.
These prices will rarely be deviated from.

OUR OPENING PICTURE WILL BE—

"The Lone Wolf's Daughter"

With

Bert Lytell

Gertrude Olmstead and Lilyan Tashman
This is a Talking Picture.

ADDED ATTRACTIONS
Singing and Talking Novelty

"THE GAY CABALLERO"

Also
Paramount Sound News

MONDAY & TUESDAY

JACK HOLT and a great cast in
"FATHER AND SON"

Also
MAMIE SMITH in
"JAILHOUSE BLUES"



WEDNESDAY & THURSDAY

"A SPORTING CHANCE"

Adapted from the great stage play "In Old Kentucky"
Also Singing and Talking Acts and Comedies

Coming Friday and Saturday "DR. FU MANCHU," Also Talking Comedy.

CONGRATULATIONS

To HEGMAN

On the Opening of the

New Ritz Theatre

East 6th St.

Materials From
Calcasieu Lumber Co.
Austin, Texas

CONGRATULATIONS

On the Opening of the

New Ritz Theatre

East Sixth Street

The ceiling and all roofing done by

THE CO-OP TIN SHOP

Tinners and Roofers
511 East Avenue Phone 8358

Congratulations

On the Opening of the

New Ritz Theatre

East 6th Street

Built By

WM. KUTALEK

General Contractor Phone 9063
61 East Ave.

Our Hats Off to the
New Ritz Theatre
We Did the Decorating

Baldwin & Wilt

Decorators

Congratulations

On the Opening of the

Ritz Theatre

Opposite the

NEW YORK STORE

Sells for Less
321 East 6th St.

Our Congratulations

Entrance and Floor
of the New Ritz of Our
RANDOM TILES

E. M. DEZENDORF

205 Congress Phone 4107

WE CONGRATULATE THE NEW RITZ THEATRE
AUSTIN'S NEWEST, FINE THEATRE

Karotkin Bros. Furniture Co.

306 East 6th St.

Austin's Fastest Growing Furniture Store
"Just Pay the Way You Say"

Phone 3495

Advertisement for Ritz Theatre, Austin American, Oct. 13, 1929, A6.

AUSTIN'S NEWEST THEATRE ENJOYS BUSINESS

Declaring that Austin is now ready and willing to support a first-class business located east of Congress avenue, J. J. Hegman, Austin theatre owner, is operating the Ritz theatre on East Sixth street under a new policy of presenting second-run talking pictures within 30 to 60 days of the time they originally appear here. The theatre is to be operated for white customers only, Mr. Hegman has announced.

The Ritz, Austin's newest theatre, was opened for business three weeks ago. Since its opening it has been equipped with talkie apparatus and improved accoustics in order to follow out the management's new policy. It is now the only popular priced theatre in Austin running talking pictures, Mr. Hegman declared.

Mr. Hegman is a well-known Texas theatre man and has been located in Austin for the past 10 or 12 years. Coming here from Temple, he took over the old Queen theatre and later built the present

Queen. Until recently he was owner and manager of the Crescent theatre, and he has also been connected with show houses in Galveston and other Texas cities.

Elmo Hegman, former university student, is advertising manager for the new theatre.

Among pictures booked are Universal's singing-talking production, "College Love," now playing; Clara Bow in "Dangerous Curves," scheduled for Sunday and Monday; and "The Dance of Life," featuring Nancy Carroll and Hal Skelly, which will appear here soon.

"Special efforts to draw matinee crowds of women and children will be made by the management," Mr. Hegman announced.

"Austin's Newest Theatre Enjoys Business," Austin Statesman, Nov. 7, 1929, 14.

Ritz Is Among Newer Theaters

Has Seating Capacity Of 800 Persons

Among Austin's newest amusement houses is the Ritz theater at 320 East Sixth street which was completed July 25, 1937 on the site of the old Ritz theater and embracing the adjoining property.

This new theater, designed by Hugo F. Kuehne, Austin architect, has a seating capacity of 800 and is equipped with the latest American Seating company chairs. The building employs washed air equipment manufactured by the Buffalo Engineering company and comprises three complete air washing units and four blowers with a total air-moving capacity of 85,000 cubic feet per minute. The Western Electric Microphonic sound system is used in projection and the auditorium has been acoustically treated under the supervision of electrical research engineers who check the theater sound system.

The policy of the theater is to exhibit subsequent runs of outstanding pictures of current and past seasons as well as first runs of the better action and Western pictures. Five changes of program a week make possible a wide variety of programs.

The Ritz theater is operated by J. J. Hegman, veteran Austin showman, and is managed by his son.

E. W. Hegman. Mr. Hegman, the owner, was the builder and first operator of the Queen theater in Austin and of theaters in Temple and Galveston as well as the old Crescent theater and other Austin houses. Mr. Hegman has been in the show business since 1912, and in Austin since 1917.

"Ritz Is Among Newer Theaters: Has Seating Capacity Of 800 Persons," Austin American, June 5, 1938, A6.

Permits

SANITARY SEWER SERVICE PERMIT

No. 13473A

Austin, Texas

Received of Warringer Date June 3, 1937
 Address 318-320 E. 6th.
 Amount Twelve Dollars \$ 12.00
 Builder or Owner J. J. Hegman Theater Plumber _____
 Lot 5 Block 86 Subdivision _____ Plat No. 9

Date of Connection June 28, 1932
 By City _____
 By Plumber _____
 Checked By _____
 Size Main 6" Depth _____
 Main Assign. _____
 Stub Depth _____ Prop. Line _____
 Stub Location _____
 Book No. B-1203
 Paving Cut _____ No. _____

No. Fittings

Pipe

Size

Price

Pipe

Wyes

Bends

Reducers

Plugs

Sand

Gravel

Remix

Stoppers

Castings

Other

Labor: 3 days 3.00

Sewer service permit, 1937

SANITARY SEWER SERVICE PERMIT

No. 34393

Austin, Texas

Received of Bradshaw Date 2/9/1955
 Address 320 W. 6th.
 Amount _____ \$ _____
 Builder or Owner E.L. Wire Plumber _____
 Lot 1 Block 72 Subdivision _____ Plat No. 7

Date of Connection 2/15/1955
 By City 24' W/ELL
 By Plumber _____
 Checked By Swisher
 Size Main 6" Depth 2'
 Main Assign. in N. swk. area in W. 6th.
 Stub Depth _____ Prop. Line 18"
 Stub Location _____
 Book No. B-555
 Paving Cut _____ No. _____

No. Fittings

9" Pipe 6" con 1.98

Pipe

Wyes

1 Bends 1.10

Reducers

Plugs

Sand

Gravel

Remix

Stoppers

Castings

1 Other tap .75

1 hr. truck .50

Labor: 12 hrs. 12.00

1 hr. 1.90

Total 18.23

Sewer service permit, 1955

