

State Register Number: 170156

Property Name: Fallon Theater

NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS  
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE  
901 S. STEWART STREET  
CARSON CITY, NEVADA 89701

Rev. 7/2015



NEVADA  
STATE HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION OFFICE

### NEVADA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES Nomination Form

#### 1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic name: Fallon Theater  
Other names: Rex Theater

#### 2. LOCATION

Street Address: 71 S. Maine Street  
City or Town: Fallon County: Churchill Zip: 89406  
Original Location?  Yes  No. If no, date moved: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 3. OWNERSHIP & CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property: private  
Owner Name: Downtown Theater, LLC  
Owner Address: 445 S. Maine St., Fallon, NV 89406-3305

#### Number of Resources within Property

Buildings 2  
Sites \_\_\_\_\_  
Structures \_\_\_\_\_  
Objects \_\_\_\_\_  
Total: 2

#### FOR OFFICIAL USE:

In-house Nomination Received Senate # 17 Assembly # 38

Listing Criteria  A  B  C  D  E

#### A. BOARD OF MUSEUMS AND HISTORY

As the chair of the Nevada Museums and History Board, I hereby certify that this nomination meets the documentation standards for listing in the Nevada Register of Historic Places.

[Signature]  
Signature of the Chair

6/15/2017  
Date

#### B. STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

As the Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer, I hereby certify that this nomination meets the documentation standards for listing in the Nevada Register of Historic Places.

[Signature]  
Signature of the State Historic Preservation Officer

06/05/17  
Date

**5. FUNCTION OR USE**

**Historic Use/Function:** Recreation and Culture / Theater  
**Intermediate Use/Function:** Recreation and Culture / Theater  
**Current Use/Function:** Recreation and Culture / Theater

**6. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA** (select one or more from instructions)

- Criterion A** - Property is associated with events or trends that have made a significant contribution to Nevada history.
- Criterion B** - Property is associated with the lives of persons significant to Nevada's past.
- Criterion C** - Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction significant to Nevada, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- Criterion D** - Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important to Nevada's prehistory or history.
- Criterion E** - Property reflects cultural traditions important to historic or pre-historic peoples of Nevada. (Nevada State Register only).

**Criteria Considerations** (check only those that apply)

- Criteria Consideration 1** – The property is religious in nature, but is primarily significant for its architecture, or is the only remaining or best remaining resource from an historic community.
- Criteria Consideration 2** – The property has been reconstructed, but is an accurately executed reconstruction and is located in an environment that replicates its historic setting.
- Criteria Consideration 3** – The property achieved significance within the past fifty years but is rare or exceptional.

State Register Number:  
Property Name:

## 7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

<b>Area(s) of Significance</b>	<u>Entertainment/Recreation</u>
<b>Period of Significance</b>	<u>1920 – 1965 (ongoing)</u>
<b>Cultural Affiliation(s)</b>	<u></u>
<b>Significant Person(s)</b>	<u></u>
<b>Architect/Builder(s)</b>	<u>Frederic J. DeLongchamps</u>

### Narrative Statement of Significance:

The Fallon Theater is significant under Criterion A in the area of Entertainment/Recreation for its ongoing contributions as the premier entertainment venue for Fallon's downtown district in the twentieth century. J.W. Flood, a local entrepreneur, funded the design and construction of the Rex Theater in 1920, opening it on December 30 of that year. The venue opened with much fanfare, as figureheads from around northwest Nevada gathered for the theater's first opening. Since the Theater's construction, it has evolved through several architectural iterations, but retains its historic use as a performance and film venue. It generally reflects the historic character it acquired during the 1940s as Fallon's premier movie theater.<sup>1</sup>

### Early Twentieth Century Movie Theaters

Flood constructed the Fallon Theater near the end of the first boom in picture house construction. The theater building represented a transition between entertainment media in the early twentieth century. Originally, moving pictures were a documentation of existing life, and sustained a brief period on the market in the 1890s. However, in the early 1900s, movie producers began to tell fictional stories in order to generate excitement and a more attentive, loyal audience. As a result, the first decade of the twentieth century witnessed the first transition of entertainment venues from opera, stage, and vaudeville performances toward moving pictures. Existing opera halls, municipal buildings, church halls, and meeting rooms were adapted for use as temporary movie halls. Among the first types of buildings constructed specifically to show movies was the nickelodeon, a small theater, usually not a permanent establishment, that generally charged a five-cent admission, which increased the popularity of movies by engaging a popular audience. In the following decade, the nickelodeon quickly gave way to more permanent and architecturally distinct movie houses. By 1920, historians estimate that some 25,000 movie theaters had been constructed across the United States with an average daily attendance of approximately six million people. As motion pictures became a popular new form of entertainment, entrepreneurs quickly added new or updated existing entertainment venues in commercial districts for film display. Vaudeville venues that dominated the early twentieth century entertainment scene quickly added movie screenings to their array of shows.<sup>2</sup>

Defined by their small size and cheap ticket price, early movie houses often carried both film screenings and vaudeville performances, and frequently displayed Classical Revival architecture on the building's façade. The Classical architecture stemmed from two cultural values present in American cities in the early twentieth century. The first was a general interest on the part of the

<sup>1</sup> Ron Eland, "Fallon Theatre 75 years old," *Lahontan Valley News/Fallon Eagle Standard*, 1-2-1996, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ross Melnick and Andreas Fuchs, *Cinema Treasures: A New Look at Classic Movie Theaters*, (St. Paul, Minn.: MBI Publishing Co., 2004), 13-15; Dennis Sharp, *The Picture Palace and other buildings for the movies*, (New York & Washington: Frederak A. Praeger, 1969), 70.

American middle class in Classical Revival architecture that led architects of many new commercial buildings of the period to express Classical stylistic features such as pediments, columns, and symmetrical designs. The second was an allusion to the Classical roots of modern theatre, both from the new practice of movie screenings and the established theatre genre of vaudeville. As innovators refined movie technology and reduced the cost of movie production, more expensive vaudeville productions and venues shifted entirely to films. However, their Progressive-era owners and art and film critics further valued the new movie theater as yet another means for the enculturation and education of the public, especially through its design.<sup>3</sup>

Both new technology and refined movie production helped bring movie theaters into a more permanent class of entertainment venue by the 1920s. As Progressive Era city officials added fire safety to the array of municipal codes, theaters were among those building types monitored most closely due to the higher incidence of fire with film technology. Better structural and safety design requirements also led to the employment of architects to design new theater buildings with these codes in mind, aiding, along with the cultural reasons listed above, in the adoption of higher style aesthetics in the theater's architecture. Those architects now centered their new designs on the projection booth and screen, not the stage. While the earliest films were silent, occasionally accompanied with live music, the movie production industry experimented with synchronized audio during the 1920s, requiring new adaptations within theater technology and design. The Warner Brothers achieved success through their vitaphone technique, as applied to the famous 1927 film, *The Jazz Singer*. The cost of retrofitting existing theaters for the new sound-accompanied films, initially known as "talkies," prevented most theaters from beginning to adapt existing auditoriums until the late 1920s. Even then, many smaller theaters were beset with acoustic problems, leading some theater entrepreneurs to construct larger movie "palaces" with much more extravagant interior and exterior architecture, designed for larger and more discriminating audiences.<sup>4</sup>

The movie palace of the early twentieth century played upon the monumental character of the film technology on which it relied, incorporating monumental architecture into its design. As a precursor to the even grander Art Moderne theaters of the 1930s, movie palaces generally sat several hundred to well over a thousand patrons, putting the film viewing experience on par with the larger opera houses and stage theaters of the period, in part as another attempt to attract middle and upper class patrons. The design itself exaggerated the revival styles so typical of early twentieth century architecture, including Renaissance and Mediterranean motifs. Both through the films and the theaters in which the films were shown, proponents of the new movie theaters and palaces viewed the buildings as expressions of the nation's shifting cultural values. Playing into Progressive Era American culture, some architects hoped that theaters could acculturate both immigrants and the working classes into a new sense of what American life could be.<sup>5</sup>

However, national trends in movie house development between the 1930s and the 1960s inclined toward larger, more ornate architecture using Modern styles, as well as expanded auditoriums. In 1930, theater critic R.W. Sexton called for new, modern architecture to suit the exhibition of new technologies in the form of audio-visual entertainment. Many of the earliest movie houses and nickelodeons were demolished in favor of the grand Art Moderne movie palaces of the 1930s. Beginning in the 1910s, but increasingly typical moving into the middle of the century was the vertical integration of the movie industry. As larger film companies such as Paramount, Fox, and First National established nation wide theater chains in which to distribute their films, the majority of urban, first-run movie theaters transferred from independent to corporate hands. Although the

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<sup>3</sup> Melnick and Fuchs, 13-15; Sharp, 70; Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 18, 21, 88.

<sup>4</sup> Valentine, 29; Sharp, 100-102, 104.

<sup>5</sup> Valentine, 34, 88-89.



majority of movie theaters remained privately owned well after the Second World War, most of these were second-run theaters that had little leverage when negotiating film purchases from the major production companies. At the same time, other theater experiences including stage and vaudeville performances declined as movies began to dominate American entertainment.<sup>6</sup>

The Great Depression provided the catalyst that developed the movie theater as it is known today. Architectural historian Maggie Valentine splits movie theaters into three categories: remodeling, novelty theatres, and neighborhood houses. After the fanfare that greeted the movie industry and its movie theaters in the 1910s and 1920s, the Depression and war era gave the movie theater industry its first economic test. Since most theater entrepreneurs could not amass the capital for new theaters, many existing theaters experienced low-cost remodels during this time in an attempt to attract patrons. Prizes and other marketing gimmicks attempted to encourage ticket sales as family incomes dropped or disappeared. However, as evidenced below, the trend away from downtowns and towards suburban and neighborhood shopping centers had already begun, and theaters generally moved along with that trend, creating the neighborhood house which became typical of the mid-twentieth century American theater scene. While the theater itself remained central to American entertainment during the transition, its location and design changed almost completely by 1950. During the Second World War, movie theater construction stalled due to limitations on material, but the theater industry recovered the attendance it had lost in the 1930s as theater news reels became one of the only ways to witness images and footage of the front lines. Following the war, as the demand for smaller theaters increased, some owners attempted to upgrade or redesign their façades, but were limited by lingering war shortages and the regulation of building materials needed for housing production, limiting available materials to concrete and glass. It was not until several years after the war, when supply shortages had been addressed, that the industry could afford to revisit and update its movie houses, but by that time, Americans demanded an altogether different experience.<sup>7</sup>

Beginning in the late 1940s, Americans became increasingly mobile and increasingly suburban. New families abandoned downtown apartment buildings for suburban, single-family homes. Those same families enjoyed auto-touring on highways and through parks as much as they did the evening movie experience, leading to a decline in movie ticket sales. As noted above, theater owners of the 1940s and early 1950s responded by moving their operations to the suburbs, thus altering the form and format of the theater. In the late-1940s, most new theater construction involved small facilities, typically seating less than 1,000 patrons, located near newly constructed residential areas. Even as early as the 1930s, the design of theaters increasingly used Modern styles influenced by industrial architecture, subduing stylistic flourishes as the attention of patrons was increasingly focused on the film itself rather than the theater in which it was shown. While this quieter architectural motif dominated the theater's interior, the façade of most mid-century theaters used large neon signs and monumental features to attract pedestrians and automobile drivers in the front door. The marquee, a feature added to most theaters by the 1930s, attempted to dominate the skyline, especially at night, through vibrant displays of towering lights that used neon signs and singular tower-like features to signal the theater's location from blocks away. Amid this shift in theater location and design came a transition in the movie industry itself. After decades of complaints, independent theater owners finally sought legal action against the vertically-integrated movie companies. A Supreme Court decision forced these production companies to divest themselves of their theaters, most of which were split off into separate, if still closely related, theater companies by 1957.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Melnick and Fuchs, 40-43, 115; R.W. Sexton, ed., *American Theatres of Today: Plans, Sections, and Photographs of Exterior and Interior Details*, (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1930), 8-9.

<sup>7</sup> Melnick and Fuchs, 98-101; Valentine, 91-92, 95-97, 144.

<sup>8</sup> Melnick and Fuchs, 115-119, 127-129; Valentine 95.

As the splitting of movie production and theater companies finalized, the splitting of movie theater auditoriums themselves became standard practice. Although having multiple auditoriums in the same theater was not altogether new, beginning in the early 1960s the practice of retaining multiple screens under one theater roof became industry standard. The need for more comprehensive entertainment options to compete with the growing home television market pressured theater owners to innovate once again after losing nearly half their audience. While many urban theaters in larger towns generally weathered the television challenge through the 1950s and 60s, many small town theaters closed their doors after losing too much of their market. Entrepreneurs constructed most of the larger multi-screen theaters in or near suburban shopping areas, but older downtown theaters with little room to expand frequently sought solutions as well, usually involving the acquisition of neighboring properties for additional auditoriums, or the subdivision of larger auditoriums. Theaters also began expanding or redesigning lobby space to allow for the greater scale of merchandise. However, as the trend toward providing additional screens gained momentum, smaller downtown theaters faced significant challenges to competition. A shift toward suburban and multi-plex theaters that began in the early 1950s steadily reduced ticket sales in smaller downtown theaters, leading many to close by the 1990s.<sup>9</sup>

### The Rex Theater and Early Downtown Fallon

Fallon's commercial downtown began to coalesce in the first decade of the twentieth century. With Maine Street and Williams Street (now U.S. Highway 50) forming its major north-south and east-west thoroughfares, the town had become the focal point of Churchill County by 1910. Shops, hotels, theaters, and other businesses lined Maine Street, with Fallon swiftly becoming the largest of the County's communities, as it is today. This bustling downtown drew John Walton Flood, a native of Mississippi, and his wife Maebelle, who arrived in the winter of 1910. At this time, the Floods, and Maebelle's sister Marie, ran a vaudeville act, known as *Flood and Hayes*, that toured the country. While in Fallon, the Flood company performed at the Clark pavilion located near the Overland Hotel (SRHP# 990106). During this time, the Temple Theatre, a brick building that was near East Center Street, the Tavern Theater, and the Palace Theatre (located where the Fallon Nugget now stands and dismantled in 1930) were in operation. During this time, Flood attempted to establish a permanent theater for his own operations, purchasing and renovating the Fallon Picture Theater in 1913.<sup>10</sup>

However, in 1920 Flood began a much grander project that resulted in the new Rex Theater, which later became the Fallon Theater. The project required the removal of six wooden buildings from the block, and the movement of the New River Hotel to Center Street where it resided behind the I.H. Kent Store. The Vannoy Harness Shop was also moved a block to the north, and the Porter Cleaning and Pressing Parlor's building was moved to North Maine Street. Flood hired renowned area architect Frederick DeLongchamps to design the theater to seat 1,150 people, featuring a balcony towards the rear of the seating area, a pipe organ, and a Steinway piano, and including an eight-room apartment on the second story for Flood and his family. Once completed, the newly open theater received supportive press from around the state.<sup>11</sup>

For a short time in the 1920s, Flood brokered a ten-year lease contract with the Hurst Brothers, who owned theaters in Reno, Carson City, Yerington, Lovelock, Winnemucca, and Elko. However, by 1927, Flood returned to primary management of the theater, establishing the Fallon Amusement Corporation which included the Palace Theater also in Fallon, and courting investors for the company. In 1930, Flood upgraded both the Fallon and Palace theaters with talking picture

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<sup>9</sup> Melnick and Fuchs, 101, 146-147, 175; Valentine, 153; Barbara Stones, *America Goes to the Movies: 100 Years of Motion Picture Exhibition*, (North Hollywood: National Association of Theatre Owners, 1993), 162.

<sup>10</sup> Shery-Hayes Zorn, "Flood and Hayes," in "Chapter 4: 1921-1930 Prohibition, Politics, and Prosperity," in *In Focus: Annual Journal of the Churchill County Museum Association* 13, No. 1 (1999-2000), 64-65.

<sup>11</sup> Zorn, 65.

equipment. The same year, Flood sold the business to H.A. Stone and W.G. Hull, owners of theaters in Ely and McGill. Stone and Hull also purchased the equipment at Fallon's Palace Theater, effectively closing that venue. Stone and Hull modified the façade of the Rex Theater into a Spanish Mission style under the direction of prolific Great Basin architect W.C. McCuddin. McCuddin was formerly of a San Francisco architectural firm, and had already provided designs for other major projects around Nevada, including the "new Ely Theater," the Hotel Nevada and Wilson-Bates mortuary also in Ely, and the Hotel Bonneville in Idaho Falls. Even at this time, with the theater remodeled and the balcony removed, the Rex Theater was considered one of the largest in the state, seating over 500, and one of only two in the state that had now been remodeled exclusively for talking pictures. The *Fallon Eagle* considered the newly remodeled theater to be "a distinct asset to the city" that would "add materially to the already attractive appearance of Maine street."<sup>12</sup> The *Eagle* continued, citing the theatre as the latest addition to what it envisioned as a lively and prospering downtown district:

Maine street will soon be paved from curb to curb, with concrete, adding further to the metropolitan aspect the section will assume at night when the glow of the theatre lights will blend with those from other Maine street buildings and from the new boulevard lights, to attract the admiration of travelers passing through on the Lincoln highway as well as that of local residents, whose pride in their home community is strengthened by these evidences of progress.<sup>13</sup>

Considering the timing, the fanfare with which the *Fallon Eagle* met the theater's opening may have been an attempt to booster the theater and other downtown businesses that had begun to struggle following the sharp economic decline known as the Great Depression. As a predominantly agricultural town, Fallon was more susceptible than other Nevada communities to the economic downturn, because its agricultural base meant it was unable to rely on divorce and gambling venues to carry it through the crisis.

#### The Fallon Theater and Mid-Century Development Downtown

During and after the Second World War, the Fallon Theater remained an icon in downtown Fallon, but experienced several changes in both design and operation during that time. Two fires and market pressure in the 1940s compelled the Hull family to modernize the theater's façade into the Art Moderne design it continues to exhibit. By 1944, the façade of the theater had shifted from its earlier Mission Revival iteration into a representation of Modern theater architecture that reflected the demand on the part of moviegoers for modern venues, and expressed mid-century modernity in Fallon's war-time and post-war economy. With Cold War defense and aircraft development being a significant factor in both Nevada's and Churchill County's post-war economy, the expression of modernity through new styles and technologies became all the more significant.

In 1943, Walter Hull, the owner of both the Fallon Theater and the Lawana, was in ill health and sold the venues to Thomas L. Karren of Vernal, Utah. Karren had operated a theater in Vernal, a comparable town to Fallon in the 1940s. It appears that during this time, the Mission Revival façade was replaced with the streamlined Moderne façade that currently graces the building, dominated by the flat concrete stucco above the marquee, the angled neon marquee sign, and the glass block infill in the second story windows. While the remainder of the theater retained much of its historic character, the façade covering signaled a recovering economy in downtown Fallon.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Zorn, 66; "Ely Men Purchase Theatres at Fallon," *Fallon Standard*, April 2, 1930, p1; "New Theatre to Open Here Next Monday," *Fallon Standard*, August 27, 1930, p1; "Beautiful Theatre Will Open Monday," *Fallon Eagle*, August 30, 1930, p4; "New Theatre Structure Fine Asset to City," *Fallon Eagle*, August 30, 1930, p4.

<sup>13</sup> "New Theatre Structure Fine Asset to City," p4.

<sup>14</sup> "Fallon Theatres Both Bought by Utah Man," *The Fallon Standard*, May 12, 1943.

Following the war, Fallon, like much of the country, experienced a tremendous economic boom as wartime rationing ended, American families expanded, and Cold War defense spending all stimulated the market. As an agricultural and military town, Fallon experienced success when traditional markets in the Great Basin and California increased demand from local farms, and the Naval Air Station brought servicemen and women downtown. Both farmers and service personnel alike shopped in local stores and demanded modern entertainment such as the films shown at the Fallon Theater.

In 1949, the Karrens sold the theater to Walt Whitaker and Barney Fritz, who continued to operate the theater through 1966. During the Whitaker and Fritz tenure, a series of severe earthquakes in Churchill County in 1954 severely damaged much of downtown Fallon. Many store and shop owners repaired their building façades while also shifting their façades to styles from the Modern movement. The Fallon Theater's Art Moderne façade improvements pre-dated this trend and suffered little documented damage during the earthquakes. The operation of the Theater appears to have remained fairly consistent through much of the mid-century, including during a shift of ownership in 1966 to the Soltice family, who utilized the upstairs apartment as their residence.<sup>15</sup>

The Soltice family enlarged the snack bar in the theater lobby and expanded the program offerings in the theater as a means to draw customers away from their television sets at home. In 1978, Bob and Mary Beth Erickson purchased both the Fallon Theater and the Roper Drive-In Theater from Walt Whitaker, co-owning the two venues with Bill and Nancy Janess until 1987. In 1984, the co-owners re-developed the Fallon Theater, splitting the auditorium into two spaces and making façade modifications as well. The Ericksons continued to operate the theater until 2014. The building is currently owned by the Downtown Theatre LLC, and is progressively being rehabilitated to accommodate future downtown theater showings and community events.<sup>16</sup>

### Conclusion

The Fallon Theater is eligible for listing in the Nevada State Register under Criterion A. It has largely transformed in response to the changing entertainment demands of American society. It remains a movie theater today, and fulfills modern movie goers' needs with concessions and multiple theaters, which show current films. Considering its continued use and success, the theater has received modifications and upgrades to allow for its continued use as a movie theater, the most invasive of which was the splitting of the auditorium into two theaters in 1984. It remains a central gathering place for entertainment in Fallon and a significant element of the community's entertainment history.

*Acknowledgements: Special thanks to ZoAnn Campana, Bunny Corkhill, and Yvonne Sutherland for their research assistance. Also special thanks to ZoAnn Campana, Nichelle Frank, and Shannon Schaefer for their peer review of the nomination.*

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<sup>15</sup> Advertisement, *The Fallon Standard*, March 30, 1949, p5; "New Owners at Fallon Theater," *The Fallon Standard*, January 7, 1966.

<sup>16</sup> Ron Eland, "Drive-in was once the favorite hangout," *The Fallon Eagle-Standard*, January 11, 1994, p1.

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**8. DESCRIPTION** (select information that best describes exterior fabric, structural system, and roofing material)

**Architectural Style or Type:** Modern Movement / Moderne

**Materials** Foundation: Concrete  
Walls: Brick, Stucco,  
Roof: Asphalt  
Windows: Synthetics/Vinyl, Glass, Glass Block  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description:**

Provide a narrative description of the property's present and historical physical appearance (include significant exterior and interior features).

As Fallon's only remaining early-twentieth century movie theater, the Fallon Theater has experienced several renovations and remodels in response to technological updates, changes in movie practice, and natural disasters. However, throughout that time, the building's L-shaped footprint, its interior circulation patterns, and its massing have remained intact. Furthermore, its core materials, comprised of heavy timber framing supporting brick walls, remain from the building's original construction in 1920. Although the exterior façade facing Maine Street, and its interior finishes, have received significant and persistent alteration since construction in 1920, the structure and layout of the building retain many of the features of the original DeLongchamps design.

Overview and Setting

The Fallon Theater sits on the east side of Maine Street near the geographic center of Fallon, Nevada, anchoring what was the historic core of the town during its development in the first half of the twentieth century. Facing Maine Street, it is part of a continuous line of commercial properties along the east side of the street from Williams Avenue / U.S. Highway 50 to Center Street. Maine Street is a two-lane downtown street with diagonal parking and spacious sidewalks. A project by the Nevada Department of Transportation redesigned the streetscape in the mid-2000s. A concrete alleyway runs along the rear of these buildings between Center and Williams. Behind the Theater is a small heating plant, a contributing building, constructed in 1923 to service the Rex Theater. East of the Theater and its neighboring commercial buildings, between the alleyway and Nevada Street, the landscape is predominantly open and graveled, except for a utility building and residence, and is generally used for parking.

Fallon Theater - Current Building

The Fallon Theater is a two-and-one-half story Art Moderne movie theater in downtown Fallon on Maine Street, the city's primary north-south thoroughfare. The L-shaped theater has a narrow, two-story lobby and apartment unit that fronts Maine Street, while the two-and-one-half story auditorium wraps around the back of neighboring buildings to the south. The entire building has brick exterior walls laid in a common bond with structural pilasters bracing the taller auditorium walls. The theater has a concrete perimeter wall foundation and a flat, asphalt composition roof.

The west façade fronting Maine Street includes a recessed entry at street level defined by stone veneer walls, wood panel siding, and two sets of double, glass-and-steel double entry doors. A steel awning marquee extends away from the façade and has a letter board on its front for advertising movie showings, which is bordered with small decorative lights. Above the marquee, the façade is stucco-over-brick to the roof. The façade is defined by a centered, L-shaped, red-and-white neon blade sign that runs from the marquee up to and onto the roof, with the letters "FALLON" stacked vertically. The blade sign is flanked by two windows of glass block.

Along the sides and rear of the Theater, walls remain unadorned except for some window and door openings, and the brick structural pilasters. Where they exist, windows are either multi-light steel fixed windows or vinyl replacements, but are generally not defining characteristics of the building. Along the rear (east) elevation of the theater, there is a small shed addition constructed on a poured concrete foundation with railroad tie walls and an open screened area near the roof, rising almost halfway up the rear wall of the building near its southeast corner. Two modern fire exits also punctuate the rear wall, providing egress from the two auditorium spaces. The half-story of the theater building consists of the rear of the 1920 auditorium space which was raised to accommodate the balcony that used to be housed at the rear of the auditorium.

On the interior, the majority of the first floor is finished in plaster, as it has been since the 1940s. The first floor lobby is defined by three sections. Upon entering, a small greeting space includes a raised platform bordered by a black, decorative metal railing situated in front of an access door. South of this entry lobby is office space and the ticket booth, as well as the access stair to the second floor. In the lobby space, a corridor with curved archways at both ends leads to the snack bar and restrooms. The snack bar area sits under a curved, vaulted ceiling and directs people to the right (south) down the main hallway into the auditoriums. Along the south end of the snack bar area is a corridor leading to the restrooms which are behind (east of) the snack bar.

From the snack bar, an arched-ceiling hallway runs south into the auditorium section, providing access to the two theater spaces. The auditoriums were originally a single space when constructed in 1920, and remained so until 1984 when a renovation project divided the auditorium into two sections. The finishes in these spaces express modified mid-century finishes, with plaster walls and ceilings, trim molding, and arched panels. Seats are predominantly new in both auditoriums. The rear (north) auditorium faces a screen wall. The front (south) auditorium retains the overall plan of the 1930 theater space, including the historic wooden stage for performances, as well as a movie screen that can be dropped for showing. The south auditorium is still used for stage performances, as well as movie showings and other events.

The upper floor of the lobby comprises an apartment that has been used by theater owners since the construction of the building. It retains the original floorplan and hardwood floors, but many of the wall finishes and kitchen and bathroom fixtures are new. The walls are defined by board paneling, likely added in the 1980s. The stair from the office space downstairs leads upward into the living room of the apartment. A central corridor runs east to the rear of the lobby section, providing access to the bedroom spaces. Exterior windows along the north and south elevation are predominantly vinyl sash and slider windows of varying sizes, mostly visible from upper floors in neighboring buildings. Some steel, multi-light, fixed windows appear on various elevations.

### Fallon Theater Heating Plant (c.1920), Contributing Building

To the rear of the theater, on the east side of the alley in a large open parking area, there is the heating plant that was constructed just after the Theater in 1923. The building is a rectangular, single-story, concrete block building finished with plaster. It has a low-pitched, front-gable roof with exposed rafter tails and block parapet walls at the east and west gable ends. The east elevation is dominated by two large openings, suggesting that it was modified into a garage. The west elevation facing the rear of the Theater has a simple door near its southwest corner and a small window opening near the center of the elevation. All window and door openings have been boarded over with plywood.<sup>17</sup>

## **The Fallon Theater Iterations**

### The Rex Theater: Classical Revival, 1920

As designed by Frederick J. DeLongchamps in 1920, the Rex Theater's façade was as an example of the "Two-Part Block" type of commercial building, with the main theater hall attached to the rear of the façade ell, wrapping around the other buildings to the Theater's south. The Theater's first story street façade was almost entirely glass with wood frames.<sup>18</sup> The remainder of the building's façade exuded Classical architectural styling, with decorative pilasters on the first floor, along with a decorative entablature, and the words "REX THEATRE" centered above the entry. The second story continues this Classical theme with three symmetrical one-over-one sash windows with revealed brick sills, and a decorative cornice below the roof cap with a large, flat frieze. The first floor of the façade ell contained the Theater lobby and ticket booth, while the second story of the ell contained an apartment, usually for the Theater's operator.<sup>19</sup>

The remainder of the Theater exhibited a fairly typical design for an early-twentieth century motion picture theater. The primary framing of the building was heavy timber, with brick lining and a stucco finish on the façade. The brick remained visible on the exterior of the main theater hall, which stretched forty-five feet above grade and had a concrete wall cap, with brick pillars reinforcing the walls every sixteen feet. As the theater's auditorium extended south, it also descended below grade to allow for a slope in the auditorium seating. A balcony near the rear (north) of the auditorium provided additional seating, accommodating up to 1500 guests according to contemporary newspaper accounts. The flat roof tapered downward to the south as well. The main screen at the south end of the Auditorium ell was a 20' by 20' square screen, with the upper left and right ends of the screen clipped. The entire stage, used for both movie screenings and vaudeville performances, had plaster backing with cast plaster molding around the edges of the screen.

### Fallon Theater: Mission Revival, 1930

In 1930, the Rex Theater was renovated to allow for movie pictures with sound, or "talkies." The façade ell underwent a transition from Classical Revival to Mission Revival styling, and the interior

<sup>17</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Fallon, 1923, Sheet 7, University Archives and Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno, <https://contentdm.library.unr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/hmaps/id/4957>, accessed May 20, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> "Commercial, Public & Industrial Building Types," *Utah's Historic Architecture Guide*, Utah Division of State History, <https://heritage.utah.gov/history/commercial-public-industrial-building-types>, accessed October 19, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Frederick J. DeLongchamps, "Rex Theatre Building" Sheet Nos. 2 and 3, Nevada Architectural Archives, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Nevada, Reno (hereafter NAA).

experienced significant remodeling as it transitioned from a combined vaudeville and movie stage to solely a film theater. The project included the demolition of the interior balcony, and complete replacement of seating in a new arrangement. The lobby was completely redesigned with retiring rooms and new entrances, and decorative finishes in the interior space were replaced. The ticket booth occupied the center of the lobby, with entrances and exits on both sides of the booth. The ice cream parlor that had formerly operated out of the Rex Theater was eliminated to allow for a larger lobby. Upon completion, the new theater accommodated 500 moviegoers, still being among the largest in the state. According to a 1930 article in the *Fallon Eagle*, the new theater had considered “contour of balcony rails, depth of beams and ceiling, slope of seats and shape of stage, and even the material that goes into the plaster on the walls” as part of the theater’s redesign into a film theater. Architect W. C. McCuddin described some of the acoustic features of the new theater, relating that “prominent projection, sharp corners, and the material going into the walls must all be combined properly to prevent echo.” The wall finish was modified into Spanish-style plastering with matching fixtures. When finished, the new auditorium had taken eight tons of plaster to complete the audio retrofit.<sup>20</sup>

Many Fallon residents further marveled at the new architectural design completed under the direction of McCuddin. Frederic DeLongchamps’ design on the façade of the building was modified heavily into a Spanish Revival presentation to Maine Street. The *Fallon Eagle* described the theater and Fallon’s burgeoning downtown shortly before its grand opening:

The front of the building is stuccoed, and finished in Spanish style. Yellow is the predominating color, while black metal balcony rails at the upstairs windows provide a pleasing contrast.

There is a tile floor approach to the ticket window which is flanked by the entrances and exits to and from the foyer proper, which will be illuminated by high wall lamps. A marquee, that will be brilliantly lighted at night, canopies the sidewalk to the curbing.<sup>21</sup>

The building’s front including a rectangular marquee extending over the sidewalk, with a ticket booth recessed underneath with entrances to the lobby on either side. Three wood one-over-one sash windows with concrete sills and arched brick lintels remained on the upper floor, with metal grates below the two windows near the corner. Perhaps most indicative of the Mission Revival style, the façade was completely stucco and had a decorative curved parapet wall above the secondary, including a centered quatrefoil, but without coping.

Once finished, the remodeled Fallon Theater was lauded as a significant development in both entertainment technology and fire resistant design. The rewiring of the building for film showings was considered by the *Fallon Eagle* to be the largest interior electrical job in Fallon at that time. With so much power running into the building, and with nitrate film being so flammable, the new design included several fire safety features. The film projector room was encased in metal with plate glass windows that could be shut quickly to contain fires. Metal features throughout the building included metal lath under the plaster, and what would become standard fire exits that

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<sup>20</sup> “Rex Theatre May Open by July Fourth,” *The Fallon Eagle*, May 24, 1930, p3; “Beautiful Theatre Will Open Monday,” p4.

<sup>21</sup> “New Theatre Structure Fine Asset to City,” p4.



could be locked from the outside but still allow for egress from the inside. The exits even featured emergency lighting with backup currents in case one electric cable shorted out. The new theater also had a central heating and cooling system as an early attempt at climate control.<sup>22</sup>

### Fallon Theater: Post-War Moderne

In the midst of World War II the theater suffered two fires, one in 1941 and the other in 1943, both believed to be caused by cigarettes in the auditorium. The first blaze was the most destructive, and erupted on December 25, 1941. The second blaze occurred on May 23, 1943, precipitating the redesign of the theater into its current form. Although the fire was less damaging than early estimates, it nevertheless forced the theater's closure for much of the spring as owner Thomas L. Karren repaired and redesigned the venue. 175 seats in the balcony were burned or damaged from smoke or water. However, the structure itself suffered little damage beyond a hole burned in the balcony floor, and a hole torn in the roof by firemen. Work included rebuilding the upper balcony, replacing damaged seats, adding new decorations, and repairing "considerable damage from smoke." Rushing the repair work, Karren was able to re-open the theater by September of that year, although with cigarette smoking banned in the main auditorium. The new theater retained echoes of its former Mission Revival design, chiefly in the rectangular marquee and concrete stucco finish on the façade, but the remainder of the theater was now fashioned as Art Moderne.<sup>23</sup>

In 1949, the theater changed hands to Walt Whitaker and Barney Fritz who operated the theater into the 1960s. In 1966, Whitaker and Fritz sold the theater to the Soltice family. While operating the theater, the family stayed in the second floor apartment. They enlarged the snack bar in the theater lobby and expanded the program offerings in the theater, in part to attract customers away from their television sets at home.<sup>24</sup> The Soltice family in turn sold the theater to the Janess and Erickson families who operated the theater from 1978 to 2014.

In 1984, the two families completed a major renovation project that modified the first floor street façade below the marquee, and split the auditorium into two theaters. Much of the interior was re-plastered and re-painted. Most impactful were modifications to the façade below the marquee, which covered the glass entry with vertical weatherboard and smooth river rock, covering the ticket booth and leaving one glass entry near the building's northwest corner.

### Integrity

The Nevada State Register of Historic Places requires resources to exhibit integrity of association and design in order to be eligible. The Fallon Theater retains its overall

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<sup>22</sup> "Beautiful Theatre Will Open Monday," p4.

<sup>23</sup> "Damage Slight to Structure of Fallon Theatre," *The Fallon Standard*, May 26, 1943, p1; "Fallon Theatre Rebuilding Rushed," *The Fallon Standard*, June 9, 1943, p1; "Theatre May Reopen Next Wednesday," *The Fallon Standard*, August 25, 1943, p1; "Fire Damage to Theatre Will Be Repaired at Once," *The Fallon Eagle*, May 29, 1943, pp1,6.

<sup>24</sup> Advertisement, *The Fallon Standard*, March 30, 1949, p5; "New Owners at Fallon Theater," *The Fallon Standard*, January 7, 1966.

State Register Number: 170156  
Property Name: Fallon Theater

integrity of design as an Art Moderne movie theater redeveloped in the early 1940s. The Moderne roofline, stucco façade, blade sign, and marquee remain intact. The façade below the marquee reflects alterations made in 1984, but does not disrupt the overall historic design of the theater. Interior circulation patterns from the lobby, snack bar, and into the auditorium remain intact. While the auditorium has been split with a wall constructed in 1984, the subdivided space still retains many of its mid-century finishes including plaster finishes on the ceiling, and is still used for its historic function. The integrity of the floorplan, circulation routes, and primary façade features from the marquee and above allows the theater to retain integrity of association to its historic period and renders it eligible for the Nevada State Register.

State Register Number: 170156  
Property Name: Fallon Theater

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES** (include all sources of information)

\*Special thanks to Yvonne Sutherland for research assistance at the Churchill County Museum Archives to make this nomination possible.

Repositories

Churchill County Museum Archives, Fallon, Nevada.  
University Archives & Special Collections, University of Nevada – Reno, Reno Nevada.

Books, Articles, and Reports

Hayes-Zorn, Sheryl. "Flood and Hayes," in "Chapter 4: 1921-1930 Prohibition, Politics, and Prosperity," in *In Focus: Annual Journal of the Churchill County Museum Association* 13, No. 1 (1999-2000).

Melnick, Ross, and Andreas Fuchs. *Cinema Treasure: A New Look at Classic Movie Theaters*. St. Paul, Minn.: MBI Publishing Co., 2004.

Sexton, R.W. *American Theatres of Today: Plans, Sections, and Photographs of Exterior and Interior Details*. New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1930.

Sharp, Dennis. *The Picture Palace and other buildings for the movies*. New York & Washington: Frederak A. Praeger, 1969.

Stones, Barbara. *America Goes to the Movies: 100 Years of Motion Picture Exhibition*. North Hollywood: National Association of Theatre Owners, 1993.

Utah Division of State History. "Commercial, Public & Industrial Building Types," *Utah's Historic Architecture Guide*, <https://heritage.utah.gov/history/commercial-public-industrial-building-types>.

Valentine, Maggie. *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**Acreeage of Property:** .26 acres

**Verbal Boundary Description:**

The nominated area includes the entirety of Parcel #001-541-19 in the Oats Addition, Lot 9, Block 4. Commencing at the northwest corner of the parcel, the boundary runs east 100 feet, then crosses an alley right of way of 20 feet, then continues east 69 feet, then south 40 feet, then west 69 feet, then crossing the alley right of way again for 20 feet, then running south 72 feet, then west 50 feet, then north 83 feet, then west 50 feet, then north 31 feet to the starting point.

**Boundary Justification:**

The boundary includes the entirety of the theater building's footprint, consisting of the entire land parcel on which the theater rests, including the rear/east portion that includes the Heating Plant.

**Geo-Referenced Location** (Use NAD 83 UTM's): **\*\*add more points if necessary\*\***

347171 mE 4370902 mN

**Source and method of UTM's:** Digitized from GoogleEarth in WGS84 UTM's

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

**Name/Title:** Jim Bertolini  
**Organization:** Nevada State Historic Preservation Office  
**Address:** 901 S. Stewart St., Suite 5004

State Register Number: 170156  
Property Name: Fallon Theater

**City or Town:** Carson City **State:** NV **Zip:** 89701  
**Telephone Number:** 775-684-3436 **E-mail:** [jbortolini@shpo.nv.gov](mailto:jbortolini@shpo.nv.gov)  
**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## 12. ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

**Include the following items with your submission:**

**Photographs** (Provide one or more photographs of the building. At minimum, include one photograph of the front (façade) of the building. Please see guidance for this form for photograph specifications.)

**Floor Plan and/or Site Map** (For individual buildings, provide a line drawing of the floor plan of the building. If there is more than one building, structure, or for sites, provide a scaled site map to show the relationship between nominated resources. See guidance for clarification).

**USGS Quadrangle Map** (provide a scale section of a USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle or current city street map with the property marked).

### **Photo Log** (complete for all photos taken)

Name of Property: Fallon Theater

City or Vicinity: Fallon

County: Churchill

Photographer: ZoAnn Campana

Date photographed: July 14, 2015

Description of Photograph: Fallon Theater and surrounding buildings on Maine Street, looking northeast.

1 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater

City or Vicinity: Fallon

County: Churchill

Photographer: ZoAnn Campana

Date photographed: July 14, 2015

Description of Photograph: West façade, showing marquee and blade sign, looking northeast.

2 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater

City or Vicinity: Fallon

County: Churchill

Photographer: ZoAnn Campana

Date photographed: July 14, 2015

Description of Photograph: West façade from main street, showing entry. Looking east.

3 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater

City or Vicinity: Fallon

County: Churchill

State Register Number: 170156  
Property Name: Fallon Theater

Photographer: Jim Bertolini  
Date photographed: July 14, 2015  
Description of Photograph: North elevation of second floor, showing apartment (right) and auditorium. Looking southwest from the Fraternal Hall roof.  
4 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: ZoAnn Campana  
Date photographed: July 14, 2015  
Description of Photograph: Rear (east) elevation, looking northwest.  
5 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: ZoAnn Campana  
Date photographed: July 14, 2015  
Description of Photograph: Rear (east) elevation, looking southwest from Heating Plant.  
6 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: ZoAnn Campana  
Date photographed: July 14, 2015  
Description of Photograph: Lobby area, first floor, looking west.  
7 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: ZoAnn Campana  
Date photographed: July 14, 2015  
Description of Photograph: Lobby entry and corridor to Snack Bar, looking east.  
8 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: ZoAnn Campana  
Date photographed: July 14, 2015  
Description of Photograph: Snack Bar, looking east. Restroom corridor runs to the south (left) of the counter.  
9 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon

State Register Number: 170156  
Property Name: Fallon Theater

County: Churchill  
Photographer: ZoAnn Campana  
Date photographed: July 14, 2015  
Description of Photograph: Corridor to Auditoriums, looking north.  
10 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: ZoAnn Campana  
Date photographed: July 14, 2015  
Description of Photograph: Office area and window, both opening onto alleyway between Auditoriums and buildings to the south of the Theater. Looking south from southeast corner of first floor Lobby space.  
11 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: ZoAnn Campana  
Date photographed: July 14, 2015  
Description of Photograph: Stairway leading from Office area to second floor Apartment, looking west.  
12 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: ZoAnn Campana  
Date photographed: July 14, 2015  
Description of Photograph: Living Room area in Apartment, looking northwest. Glass block window in photograph is the left (north) block window seen on the second floor façade of the building.  
13 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: ZoAnn Campana  
Date photographed: July 14, 2015  
Description of Photograph: Apartment hallway, looking east.  
14 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: ZoAnn Campana  
Date photographed: July 14, 2015

State Register Number: 170156  
Property Name: Fallon Theater

Description of Photograph: Heating Plant, east elevation, looking southwest, rear of Theater in background.  
15 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: ZoAnn Campana  
Date photographed: July 14, 2015  
Description of Photograph: Heating Plant, north and west elevations, looking southeast.  
16 of 19.

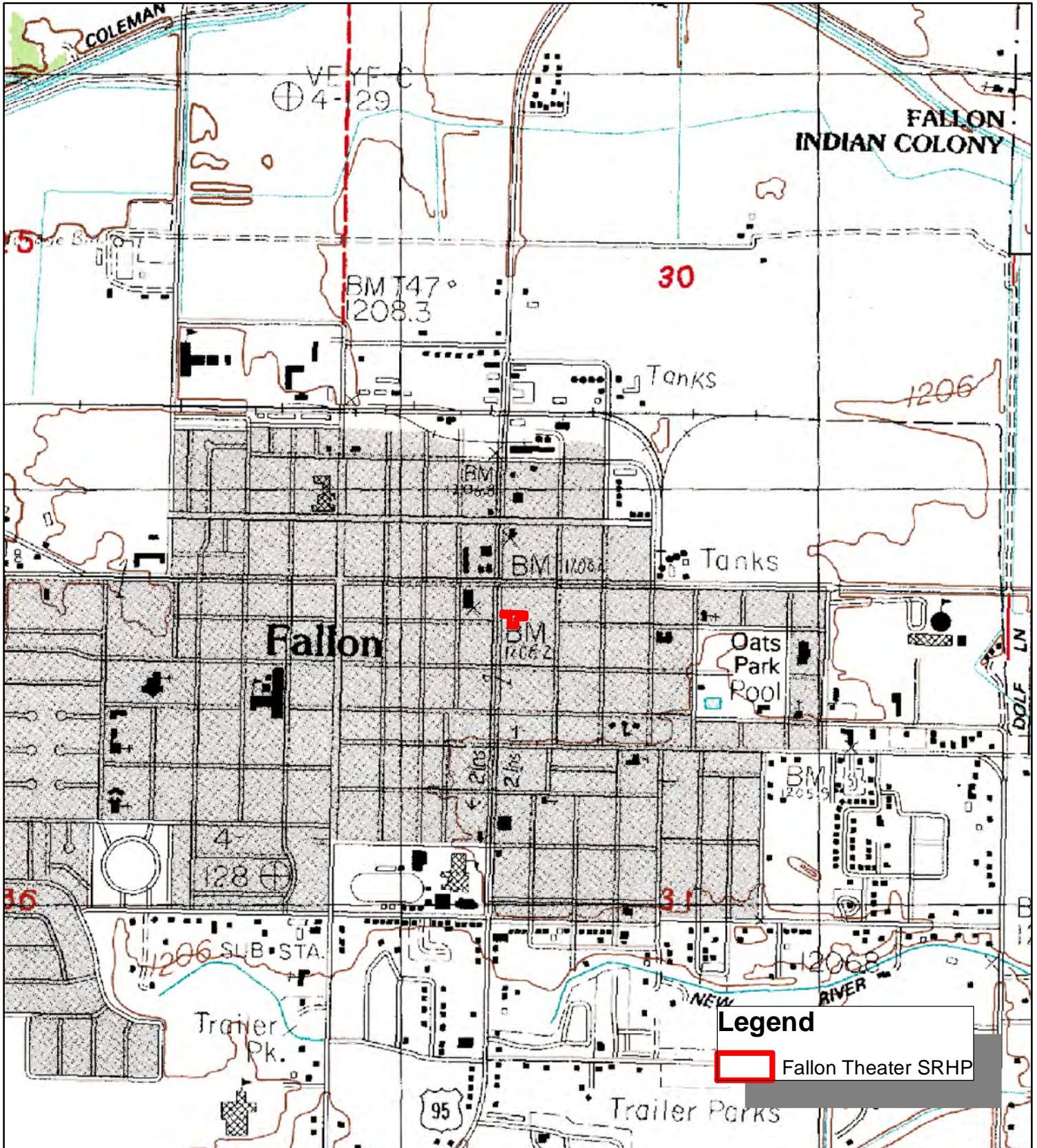
Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: Jim Bertolini  
Date photographed: March 1, 2017  
Description of Photograph: South auditorium looking north to projection booth from stage.  
17 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: Jim Bertolini  
Date photographed: March 1, 2017  
Description of Photograph: South auditorium, looking south to screen and stage from entry.  
18 of 19.

Name of Property: Fallon Theater  
City or Vicinity: Fallon  
County: Churchill  
Photographer: Jim Bertolini  
Date photographed: March 1, 2017  
Description of Photograph: North auditorium, showing seating, and dividing wall and screen (at right) constructed in 1984 to divide the auditorium.  
19 of 19.



# Fallon Theater USGS Fallon Quadrangle - large extent



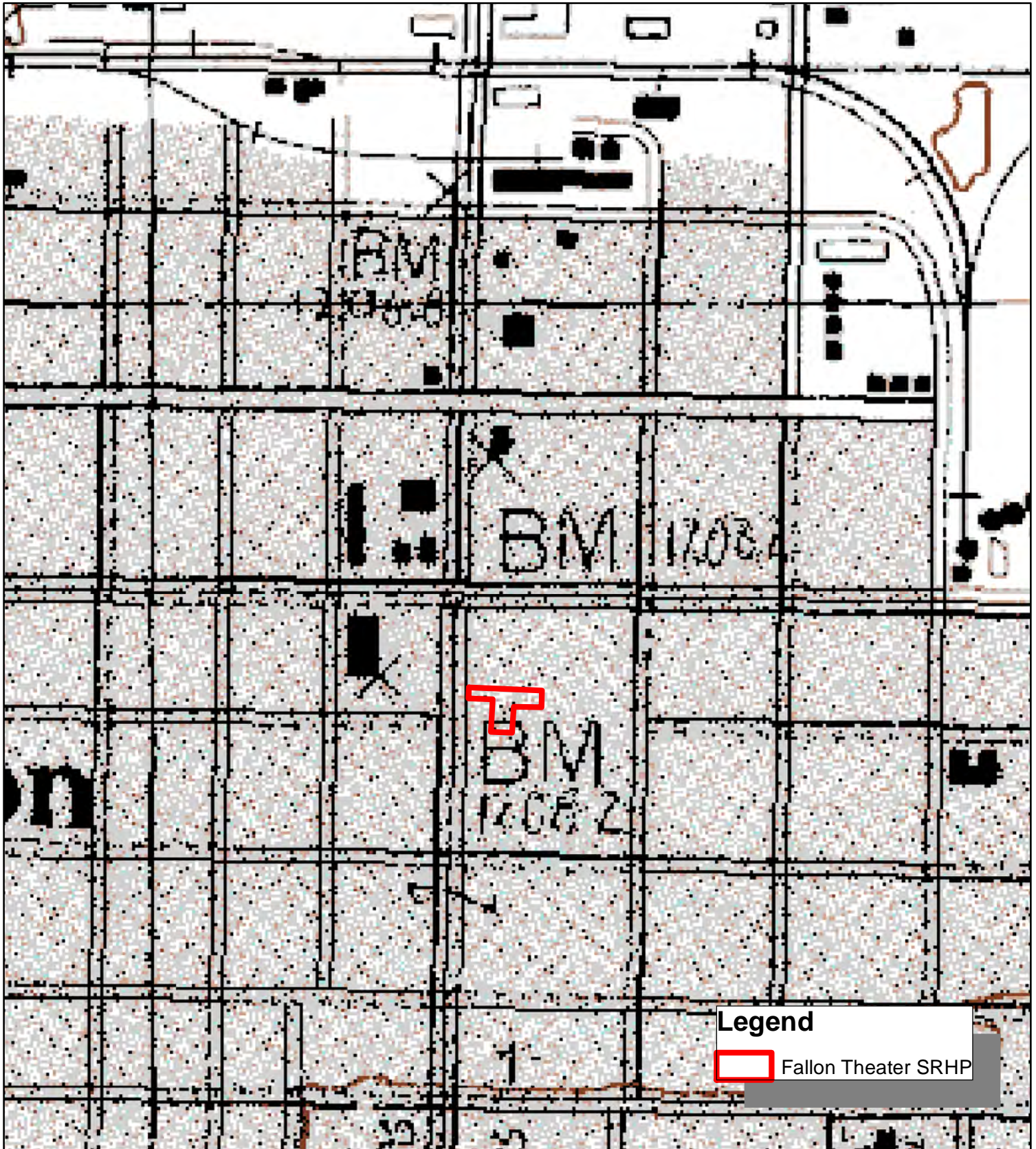
Author: NVSHPO (Bertolini)  
Date: May 20, 2016  
Datum: NAD 83  
Projection: UTM Zone 11 North  
Source: NAIP Nevada 2015

0 275 550 1,100 Meters





# Fallon Theater USGS Fallon Quadrangle - small extent



Author: NVSHPO (Bertolini)  
Date: May 20, 2016  
Datum: NAD 83  
Projection: UTM Zone 11 North  
Source: NAIP Nevada 2015

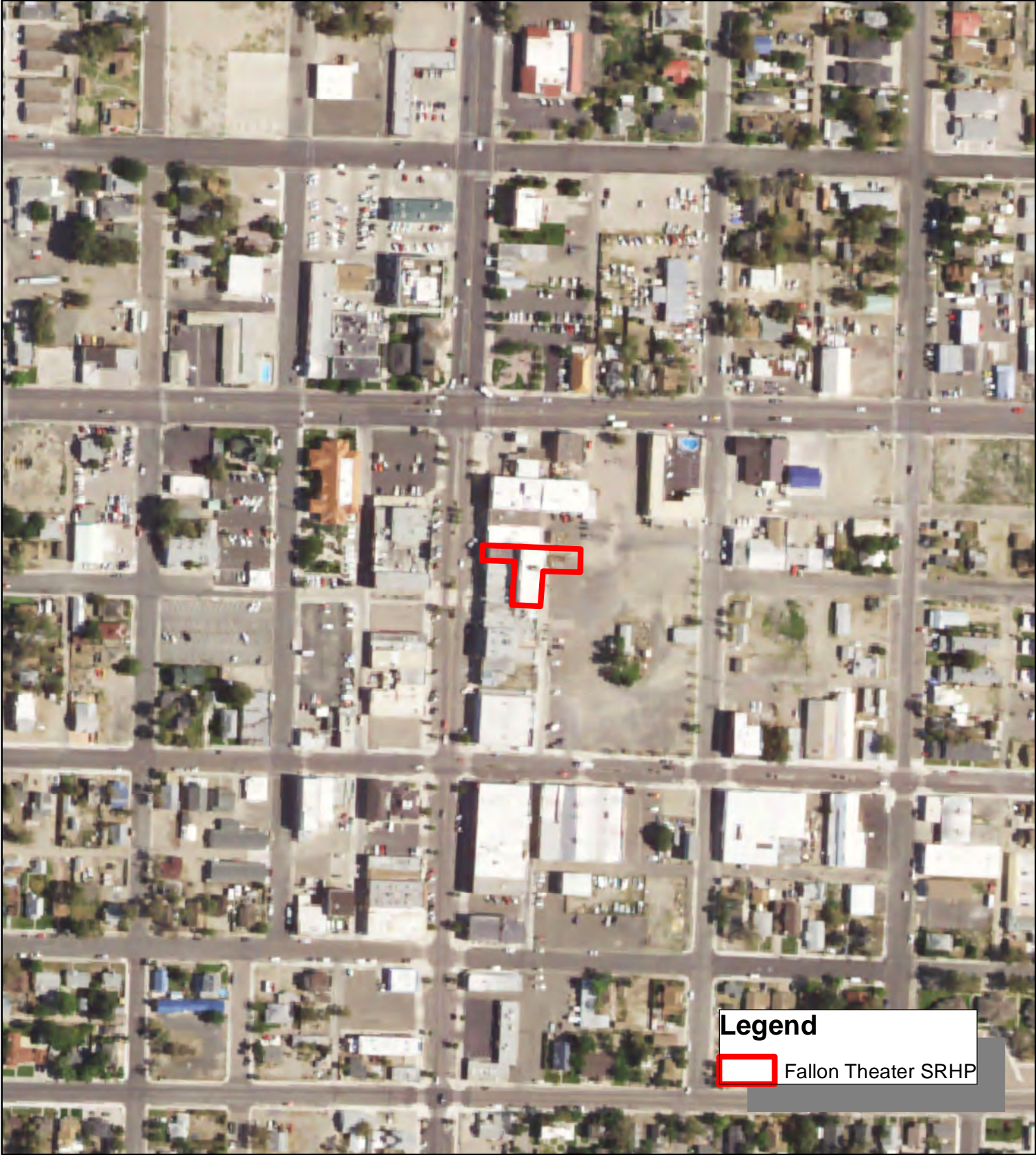
0 87.5 175 350 Meters





# Fallon Theater

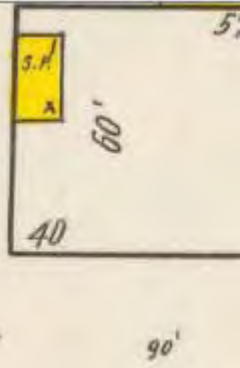
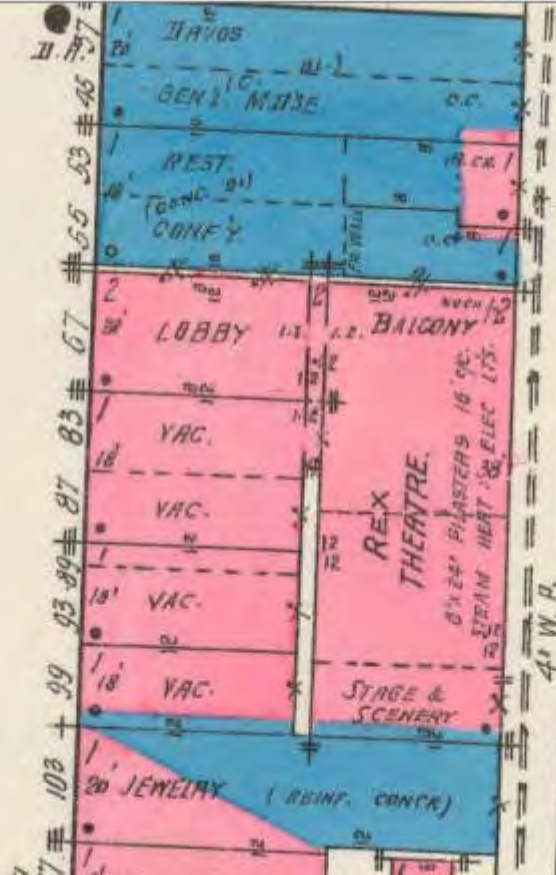
## USGS Fallon Quadrangle - large extent



Author: NVSHPO (Bertolini)  
Date: May 20, 2016  
Datum: NAD 83  
Projection: UTM Zone 11 North  
Source: NAIP Nevada 2015



10" W.P.



J.H.

1923 Sanborn, Sheet 7, UNR





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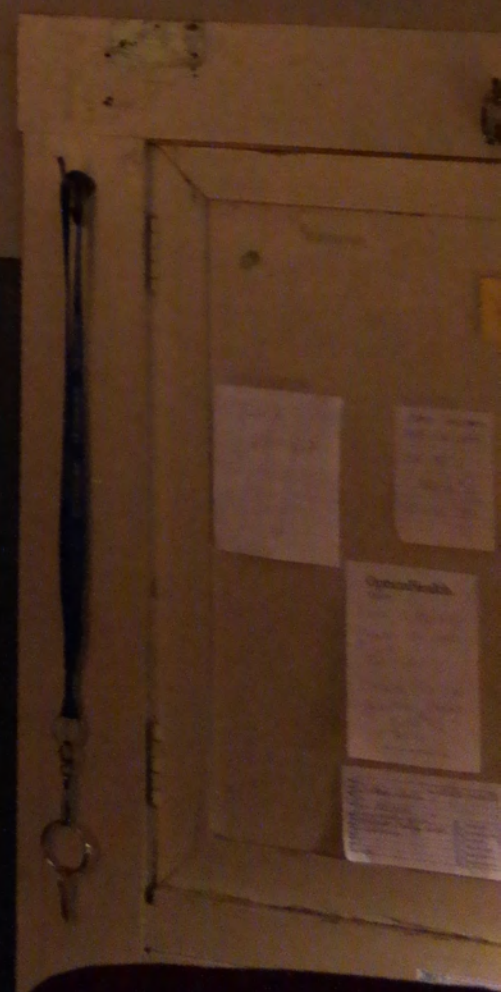
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