

S. L. Closes 2 Theaters As Fire Hazards

Aroused by a caustic report from the National Board of Fire Underwriters, criticising fire hazards in Salt Lake City, the city commission Tuesday unanimously ordered the closing of two downtown movie theaters until conditions which Fire Chief LaVere M. Hanson reported as hazardous are remedied.

The theaters ordered closed are the Empire, at 158 South State street, and the Gem, 162 South State street. The properties adjoin.

Closing Ordered

The closing was ordered after a heated discussion in the city commission meeting, during which Mayor Ab Jenkins and Commissioners John B. Matheson and P. H. Goggin urged that the action be delayed to give the theaters time to remedy the alleged fire hazards.

The closings were ordered on recommendations signed by Fire Chief Hanson; William J. Goodwin, chief building inspector, and William J. Hancock, as acting fire marshal.

At the same time, the commission ordered owners of the Roxy theater, 132 South State street, closed after a disastrous fire May 16, to make extensive repairs before reopening.

The orders affecting the Gem and Empire theaters, transmitted to the city legal department for enforcement, stipulated:

1. That "projection booths do not meet requirements as to structure, equipment and maintenance."
2. "That rear exit doors shall be equipped with panic locks."
3. "That all electrical wiring

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shall be checked and any defects or hazardous conditions be corrected.

4. That the conditions cited for correction are "most urgent and necessary" and that the theater not be allowed to reopen until the conditions charged are remedied.

Letter Ordered Mailed

A letter concerning the Gem theater was ordered mailed to the owner of record, W. E. Shipley, West Los Angeles, Cal.

A letter concerning the Empire theater was ordered mailed to the law firm of Cheney, Jensen & Marr, attorneys and trustees for the Young estate.

Letters concerning the Roxy theater were ordered mailed to the Clayton Investment company, in care of William McEwan, agent, 12 East South Temple street, and to the Roxy theater manager, Andy B. Floor.

The order affecting the Roxy theater specified, regarding rebuilding of the interior: "Plans and specifications must be submitted to the building inspector and the fire chief before the work is begun."

When the report covering the three theaters was submitted to the city commission, Commissioner Goggin moved that it be filed.

Voices Objection

"That isn't far enough," objected Commissioner George D. Keyser. "We shouldn't just stop at writing letters. If necessary we should instruct the closing of these premises."

Mr. Goggin then moved that "we refer the matter to the legal department to see that the places are closed until repairs are made to satisfy the recommendations of the fire chief and the building inspector."

"I don't think we should jump right in and close these people," interposed Mayor Jenkins. "If they are given a reasonable time to do the work and fail to comply, then we should close them pronto."

"I don't believe they should be closed if the work can be done without closing the places," Commissioner Matheson said.

Second Motion Passes

However, Commissioner Goggin's second motion was passed without a dissenting vote.

"We should also have a report back on these things and know whether the work has been done," said Commissioner Keyser.

E. R. Kjergard, manager of both the Gem and Empire theaters, said that the first word he had that changes would be required was "last Friday when the fire inspector dropped in."

"We will be glad to comply," Mr. Kjergard said.

At the same time, Fire Chief Hanson announced that satisfactory progress was being made on the elimination of alleged fire hazards at the Star theater, 72 East First South street.

Harris E. Anderson, fire department inspector, said the theater closed "for painting and other redecorating" shortly after the fire department, in a letter dated May 4, suggested that the theater close and make repairs to eliminate "certain fire hazards."

Theater Can Operate

"The work has now progressed to the point where the theater can operate, with safety to the public, while the remaining repairs proceed," said Chief Hanson.

The theater was open for business Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Mayor Jenkins conferred with a number of city officials in a search for funds to carry out recommendations of the fire underwriters' report that the city fire department be strengthened both in men and equipment.

The report was filed for study by the commission, after several commissioners remarked that they had not yet seen copies of it.

Puzzled About Funds

Still baffled as to where the city will find funds to carry out recommendations made by the underwriters' engineers, but determined "to do something," the mayor said:

"When the new fire station is ready (the station now under construction at Main and Seventeenth South streets), it will not be allowed to stand empty and idle.

"I believe what new equipment we can get should be stationed at headquarters, and the best of the resulting surplus equipment there should be moved to the outlying stations."

The underwriters' report, listing 38 recommendations, asked principally that five new companies be added to the fire department, that 12 additional firemen be hired immediately to reinforce existing companies and that antiquated equipment be replaced.

Voices Agreement

George D. Keyser, commissioner of waterworks and water supply, voiced agreement in principle with recommendations made in the underwriters' report for improvements and replacements of many mains in the city water system.

Mr. Keyser also agreed with the recommendation for placing water department, building inspection and electric inspection employes under civil service.

"I supported the bill which was up before the last session of the legislature, to place all our city employes under civil service," Mr. Keyser said. "The bill failed of passage, but I still favor it."

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Commissioners Keyser and Goggin indicated they wished further time to study the report before

declaring what steps they favor for enacting the recommendations. Commissioner Matheson declined to comment on the report.

Commissioner William Murdoch was absent on a fishing trip and could not be reached for comment.

All three members of the Salt Lake City civil service commission, which was criticized in the underwriters' report as being "unduly active in fire department management," agreed with the recommendation included in the report that the three additional city bureaus be placed under civil service.

"It would take an act of the legislature to accomplish that," said E. R. Christensen, city attorney.

Favors Proposal

"We are now operating under a law passed by the legislature in 1921," C. C. Richards, civil service commission chairman, said. "I feel that it would be a good thing to extend civil service to the employes in question, if it can be done under a carefully prepared law."

"It is up to the legislature," said J. B. Whitehill, commission member, "but I believe it would be a good thing."

R. J. Hogan, third member of the civil service commission, agreed with the view of his colleagues, but emphasized:

"While it would be advantageous to have the employes mentioned placed under civil service, I can't feel the same way about adopting civil service on a state-wide basis for all city and county employes. That would create a new and large department of the state government, and it would be too expensive."

M. W. Silver, fire alarm superintendent for the fire department, Tuesday was busy perfecting an alarm system which will "double check" on the locations of fire alarms.

Might Be Garbled

The fire underwriters' report cited the present system, which is solely a public address voice hook-up to the various stations, as inadequate—on the theory that verbal directions as to the location of a fire might be garbled or misunderstood.

Chief Hanson and Mr. Silver said they are perfecting a system whereby a fire alarm "code tapper" system will verify the location of each alarm.