

**SOCIETY OF  
ARCHITECTURAL  
HISTORIANS**

18 October 2024

Mr. John L. Nau, III, Chairman, Texas Historical Commission  
Texas Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 12276  
Austin 78711-2276

Re: Texas Pavilion / UTSA Institute of Texan Cultures Buildings, 801 E César E. Chávez Blvd, San Antonio, TX

Dear Mr. Nau,

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) strongly encourages the University of Texas at San Antonio to preserve the Texas Pavilion / University of Texas San Antonio Institute for Texan Cultures (ITC) Building and supports its listing as a Texas State Antiquities Landmark and on the National Register of Historic Places.

SAH is the principal scholarly organization for architectural historians in North America. It does not regularly become involved in local preservation issues and speaks only to issues of national and international importance. We evaluate threats to nationally and internationally significant architectural resources thoroughly, and do not take positions on them lightly.

The University of Texas at San Antonio has announced that it plans to move the museum's contents and demolish the building in 2025. Designed by the major Texas architecture firm Caudill, Rowlett, and Scott (CRS), with the project led by CRS partner, architect, and WWII veteran Willie Peña, the Texas Pavilion was constructed for the 1968 World's Fair. Today, the Texas Pavilion/ITC anchors the southeastern end of San Antonio's largest urban park, Hemisfair Park, where it serves as a city-designated landmark and offers many possibilities for creative adaptive reuse. Peña, a Mexican American architect, is known for his contributions to the field of architectural programming, which was used to design the Texas Pavilion. While CRS's contributions to the built environment of Texas are well-known, Peña's contributions are less so; this is typical of the contributions of Mexican American architects nationwide, as fewer than 4% of the buildings on the National Register of Historic Places have connections to Latino/a/x history. This proposed demolition -- in the country's largest Mexican American majority and by the state-supported university system -- would remove a building designed during the Civil Rights Movement, by a Mexican American architect, that was intended to represent all of Texas.

The Texas Pavilion/ITC is a significant component of a collection of modern buildings that remain in their original location, making it one of the most intact modern world's fair sites. Led by San Antonio-native Henry B. Gongales, the country's first Hispanic congressman, an alliance of local business and civic leaders brought the 1968 World's Fair to San Antonio, with the goal that it be used as a catalyst for international commerce and trade. Significantly, the intent was that the large-scale structures, all designed by prominent Texas architects, would be permanent and continue to serve the San Antonio community long after the fair concluded. In addition to the Texas Pavilion/ITC, these buildings included the original Convention Center and Arena (demolished), the U.S. Pavilion (Confluence Theater/John H. Wood Federal Courthouse), and the Tower of the Americas. This vision was acknowledged in 2017 when the American Institute of Architects San Antonio recognized the Texas Pavilion/ITC with its Twenty-Five Year Distinguished Building Award.

Unfortunately, USTA appears to be uninterested in exploring the reuse of the Texas Pavilion/ITC. A request for qualifications to reuse the site, which noted the building's historic significance, was issued in 2016 and subsequently cancelled. In February 2024, UTSA entered into an exclusive option with the City of San Antonio to redevelop the land. While the details of the agreement have not been made public, a 23 February 2024 article in the *San Antonio Express-News* cited plans to turn the entire area into a sports and entertainment complex.

We support the Conservation Society of San Antonio's nomination of the Texas Pavilion/ITC for inclusion as a Texas State Antiquities Landmark, and for its listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Such listing would not only honor the important history of the building and its architect, but it also opens access to historic rehabilitation tax credits, which can be used to leverage creative adaptive reuse of the building. We strongly encourage USTA to explore options for the reuse of the building.

In encouraging the retention and preservation of the Texas Pavilion/ITC, the Society of Architectural Historians joins with the Conservation Society of San Antonio and encourages USTA to look for ways that the building might be creatively reused. The Texas Pavilion/ITC is an architectural landmark of national and international distinction and is well deserving of this protection. We urge the Texas Historical Commission to designate the building as a Texas State Antiquities Landmark, and for USTA to creatively reuse the building so that future generations are able to experience and enjoy this monument of American architecture.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. C. G.' followed by a horizontal line.

Bryan Clark Green, Ph.D., LEED AP BD+C  
Preservation Officer and Chair,  
Society of Architectural Historians Heritage Conservation Committee

cc:

Kenneth Breisch, Ph.D.; Anthony Cohn, AIA; Pushpita Eshika, Ph.D.; Yannick Etoundi; David Fixler, FAIA; Mohammad Gharipour, Ph.D.; Suha Hasan, Ph.D.; Priya Jain, AIA; Basak Kalfa, Ph.D.; Theodore H. Prudon, Ph.D., FAIA; Deborah Slaton; Ben Thomas, Ph.D.; Members, SAH Heritage Conservation Committee; Kevin P. Eltife, Chairman, The University of Texas Board of Regents; Corrina Green, Associate Vice President of Real Estate, Construction and Planning, The University of Texas at San Antonio; Lewis Vetter, President, San Antonio Conservation Society.