

October 2, 2024

Members of the WPA  
Historic Landmark  
Designation Subcommittee

Texas Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 12276  
Austin, TX 78711

Enrique Alemán, Jr., Ph.D.

Dear Chairperson Nau and Members of the Texas Historical Commission:

Sherry Campos

We write in our capacities as Executive Director of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, Co-Chair of the Westside Resident’s Association, and founding member of the Westside Preservation Alliance, three community based Mexican American/Latine organizations in San Antonio, TX. Individually and in concert, our organizations advocate for preservation of the tangible and intangible historical and cultural legacies of the working class Mexican American/Mexican/Latine communities of San Antonio, most especially, but not exclusively, of the Westside of San Antonio de Bexar. We write in strongest support of the State Antiquities Landmark designation of the Texas Pavilion/Institute of Texan Cultures (ITC) building in San Antonio, which the State built for HemisFair ’68 as a permanent home and museum to celebrate our state’s diverse cultures, a purpose it served for over fifty-six years. In 1973 the University of Texas at San Antonio, which was founded in 1969, a year after the Texas Pavilion/ITC was built, took over management of the building for the UT System. UTSA, who now proposes to demolish the ITC building, shuttered it at the end of May of this year.

Antonia Castañeda, Ph.D.

Rachel Delgado

Sarah Zenaida Gould, Ph.D.

Donna Morales Guerra

Amy Kastely

Cathryn Merla-Watson, Ph.D

Ray Morales, Architect

Richard Mogas, Architect, AIA

Graciela I. Sánchez

Leticia Sánchez – Retamozo

Susana Segura

In January 2024, the building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural and historical significance. UTSA opposed the National Register designation and opposed to the San Antonio Conservation Society’s (SACS) application for the State Antiquities Landmark designation.

Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, Ph.D.

The University of Texas, San Antonio (UTSA), which nowadays proclaims its status as an Hispanic Serving Institution, only reluctantly and under great community pressure established its initial presence downtown. UTSA inherited the Institute for Texas Cultures and the Institute has always been an unwanted stepchild. Now it wants to demolish the building, claiming that it has no use for it and that renovating it take funds away from its mission. Yet it seems to find funding for any number of initiatives that only marginally relate to its educational mission.

The complete membership  
of the WPA and its supporters  
includes over 100 individuals.

The site of HemisFair ’68 included a long-lived Mexican American community, whose homes the state acquired via eminent domain to build the campus for the Fair. The community not only lost their homes and were displaced, but in many cases had nowhere to go and were bereft. In many cases, those families never recovered from the loss.

922 San Pedro Avenue  
San Antonio, TX 78212  
210.228.0201

Caudill, Rowlett, and Scott partner William Merriweather Peña, a decorated WWII veteran and award-winning Mexican American architect known as the “father of architectural programming,” contributed to the design of the Brutalist building. Pena’s contributions make the ITC one of less than 4% of the sites on the National Register that reflect Latino history and the only downtown landmark by a Mexican American architect.

We are deeply concerned about the continued loss of historically and culturally significant buildings, within and without the Westside, that are vitally important to San Antonio’s Hispanic communities, and to San Antonio writ large. One of the constants in our work to save and preserve historical buildings from demolition, is the argument that rehabilitation costs are prohibitive. Yet, as the Report cited above states, demolition costs exceed rehabilitation and reuse costs.

We concur with the SACS that UTSA can save money and remain true to its mission, which includes community engagement and public service, by selling or at least leasing the site with the building intact. We cite SACS’ statement:

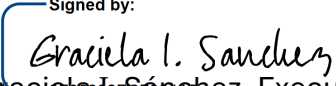
To that end, reports posted on UTSA’S ITC Centennial 2068 website show that:

- The public engagement portion of UTSA’s 2021 visioning process focused on the future of the museum, not the building.
- A 2023 Property Conditions Assessment by Raba-Kistner Consultants lists \$7M in short term rehab costs, while Skanska’s 2023 revised Demolition Assessment comes in at over \$10M. Demolition costs will exceed either number.
- A 2023 Historic Preservation Assessment Report by Architexas proposes five different categories of compatible uses, six different types of entertainment destinations, and five different immersive art experiences.

Demolition of the Institute of Texan Cultures building without public review is premature and unwarranted. Please vote for the State Antiquities Landmark designation. We ask that you give this irreplaceable landmark the opportunity to be repurposed for the benefit of all Texas, but most especially, for the San Antonio community.

Sincerely,

Signed by:

  
Graciela I. Sanchez, Executive Director, Esperanza Peace and Justice Center

  
Leticia Sánchez, Co-Chair, Historic Westside Resident’s Association

  
Antonia I. Castañeda, Ph.D., Co-founder, Westside Preservation Alliance