



8 December 2024

Mr. John L. Nau, III, Chairman
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 Institute for the Study of International Expositions (ISIE) strongly encourages the University of Texas at San Antonio to preserve the Texas Pavilion / University of Texas San Antonio Institute for Texan Cultures Building, as well as acknowledge its place on the National Register of Historic Places and support its listing as a Texas State Antiquities Landmark.

ISIE is the main academic organization to support the study and preservation of world's fairs. It consists of a global interdisciplinary network of researchers interested in the design, promotion, reception, and consequence of the world's fairs and expositions held since 1851. Though rooted in the history of architecture, science, diplomacy, art, and technology, ISIE's members hail from many disciplines and it welcomes the participation of all those interested in exploring the many intersecting aspects of international expositions, past, present, and future.

International expositions are critical events that bring the world together at specific moments in time to engage, educate, and promote new ideas and developments in a wide range of areas that have shaped and continue to shape the modern world. For the host city, like San Antonio, these events provide opportunities to market themselves on the world stage and attract development funds to allow for major infrastructure developments that help shape the urban structure in positive and meaningful ways for many decades to come. San Antonio's Expo 1968 is no exception. The fair made possible San Antonio's largest urban park, HemisFair Park, substantially contributing to the success of the city's most significant tourist area, the River Walk.

The University of Texas at San Antonio has announced plans to demolish one of the largest permanent structures erected for the 1968 world's fair. The Institute of Texan Cultures Building, designed by award-winning architect and decorated WW II veteran William M. Peña of the firm Caudill, Rowlett, and Scott and built by the State of Texas, served as the Texas Pavilion for HemisFair '68 and then as the home of the State's museum of diverse Texan cultures for over 50 years.

The Institute for Texan Cultures Building is a significant element of San Antonio's history and built environment. Its importance is reflected in its listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 2024 for its architectural and historical significance. In 2017, the American Institute of Architects San Antonio recognized the Institute for Texan Cultures Building with its Twenty-Five Year Distinguished Building Award, one of the highest honors the organization can give to a building.

The University of Texas at San Antonio's website states that "UTSA is proud to be a Hispanic Serving Institution and nationally recognized as a Tier one research university advancing Hispanic student success." Yet, the proposed demolition would destroy a building important to the city's and state's history, including its Hispanic past. San Antonio-native Henry B. Gonzáles, the country's first Hispanic congressman, helped pull together an alliance of local business and civic leaders who brought the 1968 World's Fair to San Antonio, in part as a catalyst for attracting international commerce and trade. As the only downtown San Antonio landmark designed by a Mexican American architect and one of the less than 4% of sites on the National Register that reflect Latino history, the building is an important symbol of UTSA's integral role as a leading Hispanic Serving Institution.

The Institute of Texan Cultures Building is a crucial element in a unique collection of modern buildings in Texas, echoing an earlier group of buildings in Dallas from the 1935 World's Fair that today serve as the home of the Texas State Fair. In both cases, they are significant in that they reflect the trends and developments of architecture within a Texas context and are rare for their relatively intact status decades after the events were held as in most cases fair pavilions are viewed as temporary structures and removed from fairgrounds within months of the close of the event. The Institute of Texan Cultures Building and the other main pavilions for the fair (the original Convention Center and Arena, the U.S. Pavilion, now the Confluence Theater/John H. Wood Federal Courthouse, and the Tower of the Americas) were all designed by prominent Texas architects and envisioned as permanent features of the city.

That the University of Texas at San Antonio appears not to have explored other options for its evolving needs nor fully explored the reuse of the structurally sound, 180,000-square-foot Institute of Texan Cultures Building is disheartening and short-sighted. 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, the University of Texas at San Antonio entered an exclusive option with the City of San Antonio to redevelop the land, which involved turning the entire area into a sports and entertainment complex, according to a 23 February 2024 article in the *San Antonio Express-News*.

Once demolished, a building is lost forever, preventing future generations from experiencing firsthand part of the past. ISIE strongly supports the Conservation Society of San Antonio's nomination of the Institute of Texan Cultures Building for inclusion as a Texas State Antiquities Landmark, and for its listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Such listings honor the important history of the building and its architect and open access to historic rehabilitation tax credits of 45% to developers, which can be used to leverage creative adaptive reuse of buildings. ISIE firmly encourages the University to explore options for the reuse of the building. One only needs to look around the country to see recent examples of impactful reuses of other historically significant structures to begin to understand how much of a win-win solution adaptive reuse can be for a building's owner and the neighboring communities.

ISIE urges the Texas Historical Commission to designate the University of Texas San Antonio Institute for Texan Cultures Building as a Texas State Antiquities Landmark, and for the University of Texas at San Antonio to creatively reuse the building so that future generations can experience and enjoy this important monument of American and exposition architecture.

Sincerely,

Lisa D. Schrenk, Ph.D., Professor of Architectural History, University of Arizona

James Fortuna, Ph.D., Associate Lecturer, University of St. Andrews

Co-Founders, Institute for the Study of International Expositions

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