

**SOCIETY OF
ARCHITECTURAL
HISTORIANS**

7 August 2019

Governor Greg Abbott
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 12429
Austin, Texas 78701-1495

Re: Support for the preservation of the Alamo Historic District, San Antonio, Texas

Dear Gov. Abbott:

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) expresses strong support for the preservation and adaptive reuse of the Crockett Block and Woolworth Building as integral parts of the Alamo Plaza.

Mission San Antonio de Valera \ The Alamo is the northernmost part of the San Antonio Missions World Heritage Site. The public plaza between the Alamo and the threatened buildings forms part of the World Heritage buffer zone, and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1977. The Crockett Block (designed by Texas architect Alfred Giles, 1882) and the Woolworth Building (designed by the architectural firm Adams and Adams, 1921), stand opposite the Alamo. These buildings contribute to the architectural cohesion of the Alamo Plaza's historic streetscape, and comprise significant portions of the urban fabric at the core of downtown San Antonio. During the second half of the 20th century, San Antonio lost much of its 19th and early 20th century commercial fabric. The Crockett block is significant as one of the few remaining examples of 1880s commercial fabric designed by one of Texas's most important architects. The Woolworth Building is an excellent example of 1920s commercial architecture, and is significant for its ties to the national civil rights movement, acknowledged in its 2019 designation as a Texas State Antiquities Landmark.

The current Alamo interpretive plan and lease agreement, approved by the City of San Antonio and the Texas General Land Office in October 2018, endangers three historically significant buildings (the Crockett Block, The Woolworth Building, and the Palace Theatre Building). The plan also proposes to restrict access to the plaza by means of a small number of controlled entry points. While the plan seeks to increase security and reverence for the Alamo site, it significantly diminishes the urban function of the plaza and damages its ability to serve as the urban and civic space as it has for more than 100 years. The San Antonio Conservation Society (SACS) has proposed a compromise that concedes the demolition of the Palace Building to provide a central entry to the new museum, acknowledging that the Palace Building is an annex for the demolished Palace Theatre. SACS also proposed a pedestrian arcade cut longitudinally through the historic buildings as a substitute for the ability to walk unimpeded through the plaza. These compromises are sound, and worthy of consideration and adoption, as they support the larger goals of the redesign of the Plaza while minimizing the loss of historic fabric.

The Society of Architectural Historians strongly supports the preservation of the Crockett Block and the Woolworth Building, as a part of the larger effort to preserve and interpret the Alamo. The Alamo has a long and rich history, from its beginnings as the *atrio* of a colonial Spanish church to its current place as part of the vibrant, public, urban space known as Alamo Plaza. The proposed demolitions greatly damage the Alamo Plaza, and the loss of the Crockett Block and the Woolworth Building would partially unravel the urban fabric that that is now a part of The Alamo's unique history. The Alamo Plaza is a landmark of American architecture, and it is important

that these buildings be preserved. The Society of Architectural Historians also supports the alternative development proposal presented by the San Antonio Conservation Society, and encourages your consideration of this respectful compromise.

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
Chair, Society of Architectural Historians Heritage Conservation Committee

cc: Mr. George P. Bush, Land Commissioner; Mr. Mark Wolfe, Executive Director, Texas Historical Commission; Hon. John L. Nau III, Chairman, Texas Historical Commission; Ms. Susan Beavin, President San Antonio Conservation Society; Mr. Kenneth Breisch, Ph.D.; Mr. Jeffrey Cody, Ph.D.; Mr. Anthony Cohn, AIA; Mr. David Fixler, FAIA; Mr. Sandy Isenstadt, Ph.D.; Ms. Pauline Saliga; Ms. Deborah Slaton; Members SAH Heritage Conservation Committee.