

**SOCIETY OF  
ARCHITECTURAL  
HISTORIANS**

10 June 2021

Ms. Susan Mendenhall, President  
Arts United of Greater Fort Wayne  
Fort Wayne, IN 46802  
smendenhall@artsunited.org

Re: Support for the proposed restoration of the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre (Arts United Center), Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dear Ms. Mendenhall:

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) strongly supports efforts to rehabilitate and restore the Louis Kahn-designed Fort Wayne Civic Theatre (now the Arts United Center) in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Kahn is one of America's most important modern architects; given the fact that his productive career began relatively late in his life, the number of his completed projects is limited. The Arts United Center is an excellent example of Kahn's work.

The Fort Wayne Civic Center was first envisioned by Kahn in 1961, while working with a group of local business leaders. They envisioned a multi-venue campus for the arts, to consist eventually of ten buildings, though only one was built at the time (the complex now consists of seven buildings). For twelve years, Kahn worked on this project. Its grand opening in September 1973 was the last that Kahn completed before his death on 17 March 1974. During the years that he worked on the Fort Wayne Civic center, Kahn completed the architectural masterpieces on which his reputation rests. These works include The Richards Medical Research Laboratories, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (completed 1965); the Salk Institute, La Jolla, California (completed 1965); First Unitarian Church, Rochester, New York (completed 1969); the Phillips Exeter Academy Library, Exeter, New Hampshire (completed 1972); and the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas (completed 1972). The Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, India, and the Yale Center for British Art, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, were both under construction, and completed in 1974, shortly after Kahn's death.

The Fort Wayne Civic Center / Arts United Center is nearly a half-century old and in need of a sympathetic renovation to extend its life. Studies estimate that approximately \$30 million is required to fund this renovation, which must address accessibility, safety, technology, and general age-related deterioration of building fabric. Among the challenges are retrofitting Kahn's original lobby lights: the bulbs that fit the fixtures are no longer manufactured. The roof requires replacement, as does the HVAC equipment and some electrical wiring. Of the \$30 million, \$5 million is required in the next 12 to 18 months for essential work.

We write in support of the efforts of Arts United as this organization initiates a significant fundraising campaign to support the renovation. Kahn's work is essential to an understanding of modern architecture in the United States, and the Arts United Center is central to Kahn's work. This project is a nationally significant one, and the careful, systematic restoration of Kahn's Fort Wayne Civic Center is a most important project.

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. Kenneth Breisch, Ph.D.; Mr. Jeffrey Cody, Ph.D.; Mr. Anthony Cohn, AIA; Mr. David Fixler, FAIA; Ms. Priya Jain, AIA; Mr. Theodore H. Prudon, Ph.D., FAIA, Ms. Pauline Saliga; Ms. Deborah Slaton; Ms. Victoria Young, Ph.D.; Members, SAH Heritage Conservation Committee.