

**SOCIETY OF
ARCHITECTURAL
HISTORIANS**

7 February 2019

Governor J. B. Pritzker
Office of the Governor
James R. Thompson Center
100 W. Randolph Street, Suite 16-100
Chicago, IL 60601

Re: Support for the preservation of the James R. Thompson Center/ State of Illinois Building, 100 W. Randolph Street, Chicago, IL

Dear Governor Pritzker:

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) expresses strong support for the preservation of the James R. Thompson Center/ State of Illinois Building by the State of Illinois. We also support its designation as a Chicago Landmark by the City of Chicago.

The James R. Thompson Center / State of Illinois Building, designed by Helmut Jahn of Murphy/Jahn and completed in 1985, is one of Chicago's most iconic late 20th century buildings. It is recognized nationally as an important example of postmodern American architecture, the most significant architectural style of the 1980s and 1990s. The James R. Thompson Center was designed in an era before computer-assisted design was widespread and enabled construction companies to assemble complex building components, such as the Jay Pritzker Pavilion. The Thompson Center features an innovative curved façade, which was designed specifically to address the other two government buildings facing it—the modern Daley Civic Center and the classical City Hall-County Building. Together, the trio of the Thompson, Daley and City-County Buildings and their plazas form a unique grouping of government structures that are as iconic as Times Square and as powerful as grouping of four 1920s skyscrapers at the corner of Michigan and Wacker—the Tribune Tower, Wrigley Building, 333 N. Michigan Building and London House Chicago Hotel.

The Thompson Center's expansive 17-story atrium is covered by a vast skylight and stepped glass curtain-wall, which spans the entry and extends across most of the building's footprint. The design creates a large public plaza that extends from the interior out into the site, visually and physically linking the soaring atrium with the entry at Clark and Randolph. To quote a 1985 Chicago Tribune article, "Helmut Jahn's State of Illinois Center is the most cerebral, the most abstract, yet easily the most spectacular building ever constructed in the Loop. Its interior is breathtaking...In a city where architects so long worshiped the 90-degree angle and black curtain walls, the center's asymmetry and multicolored skin appear as almost impudent nose-thumbing at the past." Jahn's stated goal for this design was to invite the public into this large government building through the use of accessible public spaces on multiple levels, with the extensive use of glass curtain walls intended to evoke an open and transparent state government. Originally named the State of Illinois Building, it was renamed the James R. Thompson Center in honor of Illinois' longest-serving governor. Not only was Gov. Thompson the building's namesake, he played an active role in the selection of the architect and of the design itself, demonstrating his commitment to the physical embodiment of open government from Illinois' highest office.

At the outset, the James R. Thompson Center and its vast atrium were a unique building type that blended governmental offices with commercial and retail offices in a single structure, with the intent to provide the State with rental revenue and to reinvigorate Chicago's business district along Randolph and Clark streets. Unfortunately, this intended vibrancy had a short lifespan, as the mix of occupants shifted to exclusive governmental use, public functions such as concerts were no longer scheduled, and maintenance was deferred. The State of Illinois Center stands as Chicago's most ambitious building of the Postmodern era, and its open atrium is a compelling symbol of open government and democratic values.

The Society of Architectural Historians strongly supports the preservation of the James R. Thompson Center/ State of Illinois Building. We request that the City of Chicago move to designate the James R. Thompson Center / State of Illinois Building

as a Chicago Landmark. We further strongly suggest that the State of Illinois and the City of Chicago work together to protect this significant example of Postmodern architecture and to entertain restoration or adaptive reuse solutions over sale and demolition.

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: Ms. Bonnie McDonald, President, Landmarks Illinois; Mr. Ward Miller, Executive Director, Preservation Chicago; Mr. Kenneth Breisch, Ph.D.; Mr. Jeffrey Cody, Ph.D.; Mr. Anthony Cohn, AIA; Ms. Phyllis Ellin; Mr. David Fixler, FAIA; Mr. Sandy Isenstadt, Ph.D.; Ms. Pauline Saliga; Ms. Deborah Slaton, members SAH Heritage Conservation Committee.