



AIA San Antonio

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POSITION PAPER

Historic Building Demolitions

The San Antonio Chapter of The American Institute of Architects (AIA San Antonio) supports a moratorium on the demolition of historic structures in San Antonio pending a thorough review of current City of San Antonio policy.

AIA San Antonio recognizes the importance of public policy in preserving the character and historic fabric that defines San Antonio. The AIA has been an advocate for historic preservation and for the creation of historic districts for over 120 years. In fact, the AIA Historic Resources Committee, founded in 1890, is the oldest national historic preservation organization in the United States. As stated in the AIA's "Ten Principles for Livable Communities," AIA San Antonio believes that preserving historic buildings also reduces sprawl, promotes the stability of city neighborhoods, and conserves environmental resources by not demolishing existing structures and constructing new ones to replace them. San Antonio has been at the forefront of the historic preservation movement in America for decades, and the city is recognized around the world for its diverse historic buildings and neighborhoods.

While recognizing that buildings that pose an immediate public safety hazard must be dealt with swiftly, AIA San Antonio endorses a policy of deliberate and coordinated evaluation of all structures by qualified personnel prior to demolition. The Dangerous Structures Ordinance indicates that demolition is to be an order of last resort. The Historic Design and Review Commission (HDRC) has jurisdiction over historic structures and is authorized to review requests for the demolition of historic buildings. The Dangerous Structures Determination Board (DSDB), which is composed entirely of city staff, determines when a structure is dangerous and has the authority to order the building demolished. Recent events have suggested that the City has no clear policy to coordinate the efforts of the various entities dealing with the demolition of historic properties. Furthermore, AIA San Antonio understands that personnel who order the emergency demolition of historic structures may not be adequately trained to evaluate the structural integrity of these important properties. Apparently, the Historic Preservation Officer has not been consulted before some historic structures have been demolished. As a result, important historic resources may have been demolished without proper structural evaluation.

AIA San Antonio recommends that the following policies be implemented:

- The City of San Antonio should appoint a minimum of two licensed architects familiar with historic buildings and preservation architecture to the DSDB.
- The City of San Antonio should appoint at least one structural engineer familiar with historic buildings and preservation architecture to the DSDB.
- The City of San Antonio should require that staff members of the DSDB who inspect historic buildings to determine their structural integrity be structural engineers experienced with preservation architecture or hold Certificates in Historic Preservation (with coursework in preservation technology, architectural conservation, or building pathology) that meet the guidelines of the National Council of Preservation Education.
- The Historic Preservation Officer should be consulted before the demolition of historic buildings.

AIA San Antonio encourages the City to make every effort to preserve valuable historic resources by carefully managing the emergency demolition process. We continue to offer our service to assist the City in crafting a viable solution to this critical issue.