



September 14, 2020

Hon. John L. Nau III, Chairman
Texas Historical Commission
P. O. Box 12276
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Chairman Nau:

The Conservation Society of San Antonio appreciates your longtime commitment to heritage conservation. We applaud the Texas Historical Commission's 2019 designation of the Woolworth Building on Alamo Plaza as a State Antiquities Landmark.

The Conservation Society of San Antonio played an instrumental role in the designation of San Antonio's five Spanish missions, including Mission San Antonio de Valero, as a World Heritage Site. We have also advocated for conservation work at the Alamo, and for preserving the historic resources surrounding it, for decades. Beginning in 2015, we urged the State of Texas to locate the proposed new Alamo Museum in the Crockett and Woolworth Buildings, and in 2019 we provided architectural drawings showing how that could be achieved.

Recently the Alamo released the first new drawings for the Alamo Plaza in almost two years. While the illustration does not depict or address the Crockett and Woolworth Buildings, we still have a few concerns over the changes proposed for the plaza.

The Alamo's illustration depicts several reconstructions, including the south entry gate and lunette, the southwestern rampart, the acequia, the palisade adjacent to the church, and a portion of the missing second story of the Long Barracks, demolished in 1913. According to the World Heritage Convention,

"In relation to authenticity, the reconstruction of archaeological remains or historic buildings or districts is justifiable only in exceptional circumstances. Reconstruction is acceptable only on the basis of complete and detailed documentation and to no extent on conjecture."

We seek reassurance that any decision to undertake reconstruction will meet this high standard in order to maintain the site's World Heritage status. We are also aware of the Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nation's concerns about the location and designation of cemeteries within the plaza. Does this plan respond to the concerns of those whose ancestors lie buried at the Alamo?

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Lastly, we offer an observation. In today's world, a variety of digital tools such as augmented reality can reconstruct historic elements without physically altering an existing site. Moreover, the 21st century tourist expects to be able to participate in the recreation of historic events through such tools, which are more cost effective than construction and can be updated with new information at any time.

The complexities of interpreting Alamo Plaza – mission, burial ground, battlefield, and Civil Rights site – require the inclusion of best practices in heritage conservation, local community input, and interpretive innovation to achieve a truly transformational project.

Sincerely,



Patti Zaiontz, President