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June 21, 2021

Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council (IHSAC)  
c/o Andrew Heckenkamp, National Register Coordinator  
IL State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) – IDNR

RE: Thompson Center (State of Illinois Building) – Nomination to the  
National Register of Historic Places

Dear IHSAC Members,

On behalf of Landmarks Illinois, it is with great pleasure that I strongly support the nomination of the James R. Thompson Center (State of Illinois Center) to the National Register of Historic Places. Landmarks Illinois commissioned the nomination before you with financial support from a grant provided by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Founded in 1971, Landmarks Illinois is the state's leading voice for historic preservation. Our mission is to inspire and empower people to save the places that matter to them and their communities. The Thompson Center has been included multiple times on the endangered historic places lists of Landmarks Illinois, Preservation Chicago, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Our organizations, as well as several others which have submitted letters to you, including the Society of Architectural Historians, Docomomo U.S., AIA Illinois and AIA Chicago, all believe Thompson Center deserves national recognition for its preeminent role as one of the best examples of grandly scaled Postmodern architecture, the most significant architectural style of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's last two decades.

Its most prominent features include its soaring atrium, which represents a bygone era of great, open public spaces and its broad plaza, which is regarded one of the great public artwork plazas in Chicago's downtown Loop. Thompson Center's plaza contains Jean Dubuffet's whimsical sculpture *Monument with Standing Beast*, which is in a viewer's distance from the Daley Center, anchored by Chicago's Picasso, and the Brunswick Plaza, anchored by Miro's *Moon, Sun, and One* and completes this important trio of public art plazas.

Thompson Center's enormous and impressive atrium is a true place of community gathering. As noted by former *Chicago Tribune* architecture critic Paul Gapp, at the time of the building's completion in 1985, "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 no less than breathtaking, as the public will soon find out. 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."

Helmut Jahn, who tragically died in May, designed the building for the people of Illinois. It has since become one of the world's greatest examples of Postmodernism, dubbed by many as a "Post-Modern People's Palace."

There is no doubt that Thompson Center meets Criteria C and G for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1999, fourteen years after its completion, Thompson Center was featured prominently on the cover of *A History of American Architecture*, published by the University Press of New England, a standard text book for many historic preservation and architectural history programs throughout the nation. In addition, you have before you several letters from national and international experts in support of National Register listing for Thompson Center, including Owen Hopkins, author of *Postmodern Architecture* (2022) and editor of *Conversations on Postmodernism* (2018).

It is no coincidence that also in the 1990s, and again in 2009, SHPO staff determined Thompson Center eligible for listing in the National Register. Due to these determinations, the SHPO several times has conducted Section 707 regulatory review for work performed on the building. The building's groundbreaking design has been featured in architectural periodicals, documentaries, books and articles. Now, at 36 years old, its role in the legacy of the architectural heritage of Chicago, our state and nation is clear. It should join the ranks of other prominent Illinois buildings that were listed in the National Register prior to 50 years of age, including:

- Campana Factory Building in Batavia (1936)
- Bahai Temple in Wilmette (1921)
- South Shore Beach Apartments in Chicago (1926)
- Oriental Theatre in Chicago (1926)
- Chicago Theatre in Chicago (1921)
- Egyptian Theatre in DeKalb (1929)
- Rialto Theatre in Joliet (1926)
- Coronado Theatre in Rockford (1925)
- Paramount Theatre in Aurora (1931)
- 860-880 Lake Shore Drive in Chicago (1944).

(Source: Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council Handbook, page 15).

With this overwhelming support from professional organizations and agreement from experts that Thompson Center meets the necessary criteria for listing in the National Register, we urge your approval of this nomination to help recognize Thompson Center's important legacy.

Sincerely,



Bonnie McDonald  
President & CEO