

2017 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois

James R. Thompson Center

100 W Randolph St., Chicago, Cook County



Credit: Landmarks Illinois

As legislation continues to move through the Illinois General Assembly to authorize the state's sale of the James R. Thompson Center, assumptions continue to be made that the building must be demolished for a viable new development. The state's search for revenue is understandable, but posing demolition as part of a sale devalues the civic and cultural advances displayed in Helmut Jahn's groundbreaking Post-Modern design and the opportunities for a development that could integrate the building.

The Thompson Center's voluminous atrium is reminiscent of monumental and bygone public spaces. At the time of its opening in 1985, the [Chicago Tribune's architectural critic Paul Gapp wrote](#), "What we did not have in Chicago until Jahn designed the center was a contemporary vertical space of such splendid and theatrical dimensions." Regarding the Center's curved glass facades, which provide a break in the streetscape of surrounding linear office towers, Gapp wrote, "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."

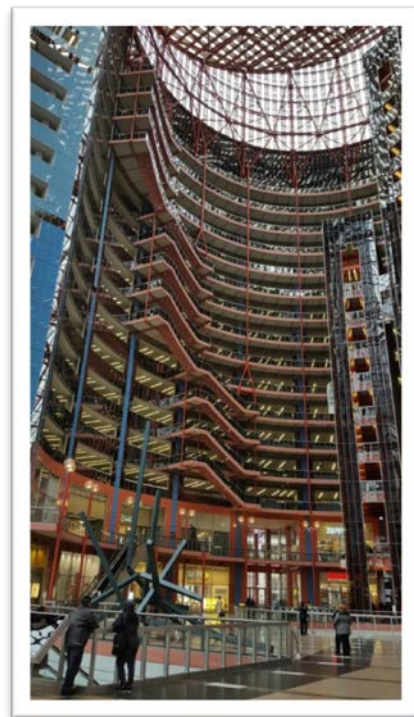
The Thompson Center's broad plaza, prominently marked by Jean Dubuffet's whimsical sculpture Monument with Standing Beast, continues a three-block path of great public artwork plazas, from 69 W. Washington St. with Miro's Moon, Sun, and One Star, to The Picasso at Daley Plaza to Thompson Center's plaza. While not officially designated, Jahn forged a landmark with Thompson's Center's building design and setting.

Now, 33 years since its opening, the Thompson Center is a place some people love to hate, the ire coming from aspects that can be alleviated through reinvestment and a reengineering of its systems. Through reuse, it's possible the space could be a potential energy generator for a future corporate headquarters or the next trending hotel or condo project. The state recently released an image encouraging full demolition and replacement of the Thompson Center with a new super

tower. In response, Architect Helmut Jahn released his own re-envisioning of the Thompson Center, which includes a new, approximately 13,000-square-foot tower to house a hotel and residences. According to the design, the new tower would be carved into the existing complex at the southwest corner of the block. The new tower would connect to the existing building up to level four. The remainder of the existing building can be utilized as office space, under Jahn's re-envisioning.

The Thompson Center's eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places was determined in 2009. A full rehabilitation and reuse of the Thompson Center, without a tower addition, could be undertaken using the Federal Historic Tax Credit, the very incentive that continues to allow some of Chicago's greatest landmarks, such as the Chicago Athletic Association, the Wrigley Building and the IBM Building, to be economically brought back to life.

Landmarks Illinois supports the state's sale of this great asset, but only if such a sale includes reuse options. Let the numbers show the benefits of reuse. Demolition would be complicated with an existing CTA station on the site, and demo costs are anticipated to be no less than \$15-\$20 million. See other big atrium spaces that have been economically remade at ASM International Headquarters near Cleveland and West Baden Springs Hotel in French Lick, Indiana. We're too quick to throw in a landfill reusable buildings, which while may seem "dated" in design, should have a chance to survive. It's the right thing to do economically, environmentally and architecturally.



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What you can do:

- [Contact Governor Bruce Rauner](#) to voice support for the sale of the property, but not to voice demolition as a preferred outcome. Give the real estate market the chance to explore reuse opportunities – it's the better choice economically, environmentally and for Chicago's architectural legacy.

Additional Links:

- "Why Chicago's Thompson Center is worth saving," *Chicago Curbed*, Jan. 23, 2017 ([PDF](#))
- "Spare Jahn's Thompson Center from Rauner's death sentence," *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 14, 2015 ([PDF](#))
- "Helmut Jahn's State of Illinois Center a 'spectacular building'," *Chicago Tribune*, May 16, 1988 ([PDF](#))