



TUCSON
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
FOUNDATION

October 14, 2023

Dr. Robert C. Robbins, President
University of Arizona
Old Main, Room 200
1200 East University Boulevard
P.O. Box 210021
Tucson, Arizona 85721-0021
president@email.arizona.edu

Hon. Fred DuVal, Chairman
Arizona Board of Regents
John Arnold, Executive Director
2700 N. Central Ave. Suite 400
Phoenix, AZ 85004
Fred.DuVal@azregents.edu

Subject: Urgent request for Preservation of Tucson's Architectural Gem: The University of Arizona Cancer Center Chapel

Dear President Robbins and Arizona Board of Regents Chair DuVal,

On behalf of the Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation and our thousands of members and supporters in Tucson and Southern, Arizona I am writing with the utmost urgency and a heartfelt appeal for your intervention to stop the destruction of the University of Arizona Cancer Center Chapel designed by internationally celebrated architect Paolo Soleri. Our commitment lies in the protection and preservation of the historical treasures that define our community, ensuring their enduring relevance for generations to come.

It has just come to our attention that the University of Arizona plans to “dismantle” elements of this unique and iconic space, install fragmented pieces in the new Weil Wellness Center as decorations that no longer

convey any meaningful significance, send other pieces elsewhere in the state and ultimately destroy this iconic sacred and architecturally important space.

The University of Arizona Cancer Center Chapel stands as a hidden gem of late mid-century modern architecture, conceived by the celebrated Arizona modernist architect, Paolo Soleri. It is a living testament to our city's architectural heritage and the legacy of an innovative visionary.

The significance of the University of Arizona Cancer Center Chapel cannot be overstated. It was featured in the 2018 book, "Holy Modern - Celebrating Tucson's Mid-Century Modern Sacred Spaces," an acknowledgment of its pivotal role in narrating the unique architectural history of our city. The chapel has been an integral part of Tucson Modernism Week, featured in 2013 and 2018. During these programs, we ensured that UA Architecture Students had the opportunity to visit this space to enrich their understanding of architectural design and enhance their education. Additionally, tourists, architectural enthusiasts, and historians from across the country and state specifically visited Tucson to see this remarkable space. We strongly believe the property is individually eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation and our Foundation designated the space a Modern Architectural Classic in 2013.

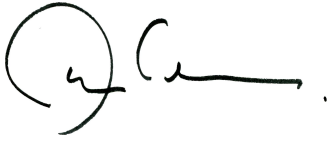
The chapel is celebrated not only locally but also on a national scale. Its distinctive design, characterized by cast-in-place barrel-vaulted concrete ceilings, is a testament to Paolo Soleri's vision and his unwavering commitment to forging an aesthetic connection with our desert environment. The concrete, textured with the very character of our landscape, cast upon a silt foundation, pays tribute to our arid surroundings. The chapel's embedded botanical graphics are an homage to our desert flora and fauna, painting a vivid canvas of our natural milieu. It is this unique combination of elements that renders the chapel a masterpiece of mid-century modern architecture.

The Paolo Soleri Chapel's importance extends beyond its architectural value. It is a vital asset, not unlike other art chapels across the world including the Rothko chapel in Houston, Ellsworth Kelly chapel in Austin, Louise Nevelson chapel in New York, James Turrell's chapel in Berlin. If protected, preserved and made accessible to the public would become a cornerstone of cultural and heritage tourism, drawing visitors to Tucson from across the nation. By preserving this unique architectural treasure, we ensure that Tucson and the State of Arizona maintains its status as a destination for those who possess an abiding appreciation for our communities rich cultural heritage.

We request that University of Arizona reconsider the proposed alterations to the chapel and to embark on a collaborative dialogue with all stakeholders who comprehend its importance to Tucson's architectural heritage and tourism sector. The retention of the chapel in its current state is not merely an ode to Paolo Soleri but also a tribute to Arizona's cultural and heritage tourism, an economic lifeline for our community.

We extend our deepest gratitude for your attention to this matter and earnestly hope for your unwavering support in preserving the University of Arizona Cancer Center Chapel. Its preservation is paramount for the enrichment of our culture and the vitality of our heritage tourism, ensuring that Tucson's architectural gems endure for generations to come.

Sincerely,



Demion Clinco, CEO
Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation
PO Box 40008, Tucson, Arizona 85717
Preservetucson.org
demion.clinco@preservetucson.org
mobile: 520-247-8969

CC:

Regent Cecilia Mata, Cecilia.Mata@azregents.edu
Regent Lyndel Manson, Lyndel.Manson@azregents.edu
Regent Robert J. Herbold, Robert.Herbold@azregents.edu
Regent Larry Edward Penley, Larry.Penley@azregents.edu
Regent Jessica Pacheco, Jessica.Pacheco@azregents.edu
Regent Doug Goodyear, Doug.Goodyear@azregents.edu
Regent Gregg Brewster, Gregg.Brewster@azregents.edu
Ben Henderson, Director of Operations, Arizona Governor's Office, bhenderson@az.gov
Kathryn Leonard, Arizona State Historic Preservation Officer, kleonard@azstateparks.gov
Steve Voeller, VP, Government and Community Relations, sivoeller@email.arizona.edu
Maura Ross, UAHS Planning and Facilities, mauraross@arizona.edu
John Arnold, Executive Director, Arizona Board of Regents, John.Arnold@azregents.edu
Jim McPherson, President, Arizona Preservation Foundation, jmcpersoniii@gmail.com
Terry Majewski, Chair, Tucson-Pima County Historic Commission, tmajewski@sricrm.com