



Stage Center – An Oklahoma City Landmark

AIA POSITION:

The American Institute of Architects, Central Oklahoma Chapter, endorses the continued use or adaptive re-use of Stage Center. As an internationally important piece of architecture, as an all-too-rare piece of Oklahoma City history, and as an integral component of downtown OKC's arts, cultural, and recreational community, AIACOC supports Stage Center's continued and enhanced use as a vibrant part of our City.

ACTION SOUGHT:

The Central Oklahoma Chapter of the American Institute of Architects urges Oklahoma City civic leaders and governmental officials to retain, repair, and place the Stage Center building back into use. It may be possible to create newer and shinier theater and office spaces, but this Oklahoma City landmark can be repurposed if need be to serve alternate or additional functions. To that end, the Central Oklahoma Chapter of the American Institute of Architects stands ready to assist.



EXPLANATION AND JUSTIFICATION:

The building we know as Stage Center is facing a critical juncture in its history. Conceived as early as 1965 and constructed between 1970 and 1972, the building's architecturally refreshing design was recognized by the profession with the highest honor in the land in 1972, the National American Institute of Architects Honor Award. Also in 1972, the Museum of Modern Art in New York accepted the building model into its permanent collection.

Yet, from the beginning, local public opinion was split regarding the building's progressive design. Even today local public opinion remains split. Across the country and around the globe Stage Center is celebrated as a pivotal piece of modern architecture.

Jane Jacobs in [The Death and Life of Great American Cities](#) defines a landmark as a distinctive element rather than being "merely one among an assemblage." Kevin Lynch in [The Image of the City](#) reinforces this idea by saying the landmark "involves the singling out of one element from a host of possibilities." As such, Stage Center certainly is a landmark of Oklahoma City for the world.

In 1990, its colors were faded and ivy was growing on its concrete walls. Funds were raised to convert dance spaces to multipurpose rooms, add loading docks to ease the flow of stage set installations, add elevators and ramps for wheelchair accessibility, soften raw sheet metal walls with drywall and "update" its 1960's color scheme. Barbara Koerble, writing for [Cite](#) said that the renovations "recognize the historical significance of the Mummies Theatre." John Johansen, the architect of Stage Center / Mummer's Theatre, said at the time that he "saw the building as a palimpsest, not a permanent solution but rather one that would someday accommodate additional and changing functions."