

docomomo_us

documentation and conservation

of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the
modern movement

Northern California Chapter

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December 1, 2019

Members of the San Jose City Council
200 E. Santa Clara St., San Jose, Ca 95113

CC: André Luthard, Preservation Action Council of San Jose

Re: Former Bank of California Building by César Pelli

Dear Honorable San Jose City Council Members,

I am writing on behalf of the board of Docomomo US/NOCA to express support for the preservation and adaptive reuse of the former Bank of California building (170 Park Center Plaza, aka Sumitomo Bank). Docomomo US/NOCA is the Northern California chapter of the international non-profit organization Docomomo (Documentation and Conservation of the Modern Movement), established nearly 25 years ago to provide leadership, education, and advocacy assistance to people committed to saving places and collectively shaping the future of America's stories.

We feel that the former Bank of California building is an excellent example of Brutalism in San Jose and is by master architect César Pelli. Brutalist architecture, which is characterized by concrete construction methods, geometric massing, sculptural form, and strong contrast between solid and void, is iconic of institutional buildings the 1960s and 1970s. An imposing style of architecture, Brutalist architecture is under threat across the country. Like other architectural styles before it, Brutalism is currently falling victim to the cycles of taste. However, many architects, historians, photographers, and others, are leading the fight to preserve these buildings. Organizations such as Docomomo US/NOCA and Preservation Action Council of San Jose locally, and groups like SOS Brutalism abroad, are working to build awareness and appreciation of these often misunderstood buildings.

We agree with the findings of Archives & Architecture's Historic Resource Evaluation (Rev. 4.18.18), and believe that this building is clearly eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources and to be a San Jose City Landmark, and is therefore a historic resource for the purposes of CEQA.

Board members of the Northern California Chapter of Docomomo US support the Preservation Action Council of San Jose in their efforts to preserve this building, and encourage the City of San Jose to seriously consider preservation alternatives during the EIR process. Please feel free to contact us for more information, or if you have specific questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Hannah Simonson, President, Docomomo US/NOCA
December 1, 2019