

SAN JOSE

City should talk about preserving significant buildings

Conversations about historic preservation are essentially about answering the question, “What things from our past are worth saving?” And, honestly, everyone’s answer is different, especially in San Jose — a city with a rich history that is constantly striving for the future.



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COLUMNIST

With the Preservation Action Council’s latest iteration of its “Endangered 8” — a list of architectural and cultural landmarks it believes are threatened by neglect or redevelopment — the nonprofit is trying to spark those conversations well before the wrecking ball strikes.

The list, which you can find at preservation.org/e8-2025, includes many of the usual suspects — the dilapidated First Church of Christ Scientist, the Greyhound bus depot and the Beach & Bessler-Haynes buildings on Santa Clara Street. But it also includes a collection of modernist buildings on San Jose State’s campus that are slated to be torn down and replaced with bigger

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buildings, according to the university campus master plan.

These include the Science and Music buildings, Dudley Moorhead Hall and the old Administration building — all built from 1952 to 1957, a significant period of growth and change for the university.

PAC-SJ Executive Director Ben Leech says his organization recognizes that San Jose State needs to grow and evolve and concedes that not every building can be — or should be — saved. But, he noted, the campus’ iconic Tower Hall, a Spanish revival building constructed in 1910, was saved from demolition when most of its connected buildings were torn down in the mid-1960s after protests by student and alumni protests.

It’s hard to imagine the campus today without Tower Hall, which houses the university president’s office.

“Let’s think about this campus as something that can adapt without wholesale demolition,” Leech said. “Will these buildings be recognized for their architectural significance? I don’t know, but this is why we want to call the question before it’s too late. Putting these buildings on our list is our way of saying, ‘Let’s think of these buildings as resources.’”

Similarly, a trio of former San Jose movie theaters — the landmark Century 21, the shuttered Towne on The Alameda and the Burbank — also made the list this year as a group. All three have potential reuses in their futures, and Leech said PAC-SJ hopes their inclusion helps spur those plans along instead of letting the buildings languish and deteriorate further.

Personally, I’d still love it if Netflix adopted the domed Century 21, which was designated a city landmark in 2014 and is not far from Netflix’s Los Gatos headquarters. The company could transform it into a midcentury modern shrine to movies, as well as using it as a Bay Area location to screen the streaming service’s own films.

That’s what it did with the classic Egyptian Theater in Hollywood, which was



San Jose State University’s Science building, constructed in 1955, is among the campus buildings included on the Preservation Action Council’s “Endangered 8” list for 2025 because of plans to eventually tear down and replace the building. **PHOTOS BY SAL PIZARRO — STAFF**



The Century 21 theater in San Jose, photographed in 2023, was designated a city landmark in 2014 but has remained empty since that year. Along with the Towne and Burbank theaters, it was added to the Preservation Action Council’s “Endangered 8” list for 2025.

restored and reopened in 2023. Could the same model succeed in Silicon Valley? I don’t know, but it’s a conversation worth having.