

27 April 2023

Baxter Travenol Laboratories Corporate Headquarters

I have the following comments about the proposed demolition of the Baxter International Headquarters.

The Baxter International buildings, formerly known as the Baxter Travenol Laboratories Corporate Headquarters, are award-winning modernist structures designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), one of Chicago's oldest and most prominent architecture and engineering firms. SOM is responsible for designing Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world, as well as other Chicago landmarks like the Millennium Park masterplan, the Hancock Tower, the Willis Tower, and the Inland Steel Building, among many others.

The Central Facilities Building at Baxter, which houses the cafeteria and other functions, is an exceptional example of both architectural excellence and engineering innovation. The project is notable for its distinctive cable system, which was used to support the 144 ft by 288 ft roof and create a spacious, open 24 ft high cafeteria. With only two internal columns and no perimeter columns, the resulting structure is a striking feat of engineering. The concept was first developed in 1968 by Lawrence Kenny, a master's student at IIT, under the guidance of Myron Goldsmith and Fazlur Khan. This design dates from a time when cable structures and other light-weight systems were being explored in a modern context, with other notable examples including the Munich Olympic complex from 1972 and other projects by Frei Otto and others in Stuttgart. The Baxter Central Facilities Building, designed in 1972 and completed in 1975, and the Hajj Terminal, designed in 1978 and completed in 1981, are both part of this body of work.

The Baxter Central Facilities Building is a significant achievement by one of the most influential architectural and engineering teams of the 20th century: Myron Goldsmith, Bruce Graham, and Fazlur Khan. Its distinctive design features largely column-free floorplates, resulting in an elegant and delicate structure. This unique design allows for a highly flexible space that can be adapted to various uses.

I urge you to consider the importance of these world-class buildings in your deliberations.

Thank you.

William F. Baker
Consulting Partner, SOM

William F. Baker is a Structural Engineering Consulting Partner for Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), an interdisciplinary practice of architects, engineers, interior designers and urban planners. He became a Partner in 1996 and led the structural design of numerous noteworthy projects including the design of the Burj Khalifa, the tallest structure built by mankind. He is the Honorary Professor of Structural Engineering Design at Cambridge University and a Clinical Professor at the University of Illinois at Champaign/Urbana. He is a member of the National Academy of Engineering (USA) and an International Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering (UK). He have received several lifetime achievement awards including the ASCE OPAL Award (USA), the IStructE Gold Medal (UK), the Fritz Leonhardt Preis (Germany), the Gustave Magnel Gold Medal (Belgium), the CTBUH Fazlur Khan Medal (International), and the IASS Torroja Medal (International). He has honorary doctorates from the University of Stuttgart, Heriot-Watt University, IIT and the University of Missouri at Columbia.