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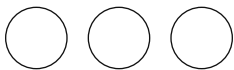
NEWS

Historic hospital building cleared, condemned after massive earthquake

The building is more than 100 years old.

Priscilla Aguirre

Updated: Nov. 17, 2022 3:18 p.m.





A historic building on University Health's Robert B. Green campus was condemned and cleared after a 5.3 magnitude earthquake exacerbated existing issues.

Warren Brown/MySA

A historic building on University Health's Robert B. Green campus was cleared after a record-setting 5.3 magnitude earthquake exacerbated existing issues on Wednesday, November 16. According to a release from University Hospital on Thursday, November 17, structural engineers have determined the downtown building to be unsafe.

The Robert B. Green historical building, named for former Bexar County Judge Robert B. Green, was designed by architect Atlee B. Ayres and opened in 1917. According to University Health, "It was lauded as 'one of the best and most modern institutions of its kind in the Southwest.'"

According to the hospital, administrative services housed in the historical

building have been moved to the health systems other locations in the city.

"This building has been closed off and a safety zone has been established around it until we have definitive plans on how to proceed. The vast majority of the building's clinical services were moved in 2013 to the newer Robert B. Green clinical building, which appears to be unaffected by the temblor. However, engineers are examining all the buildings on the campus," the release stated.





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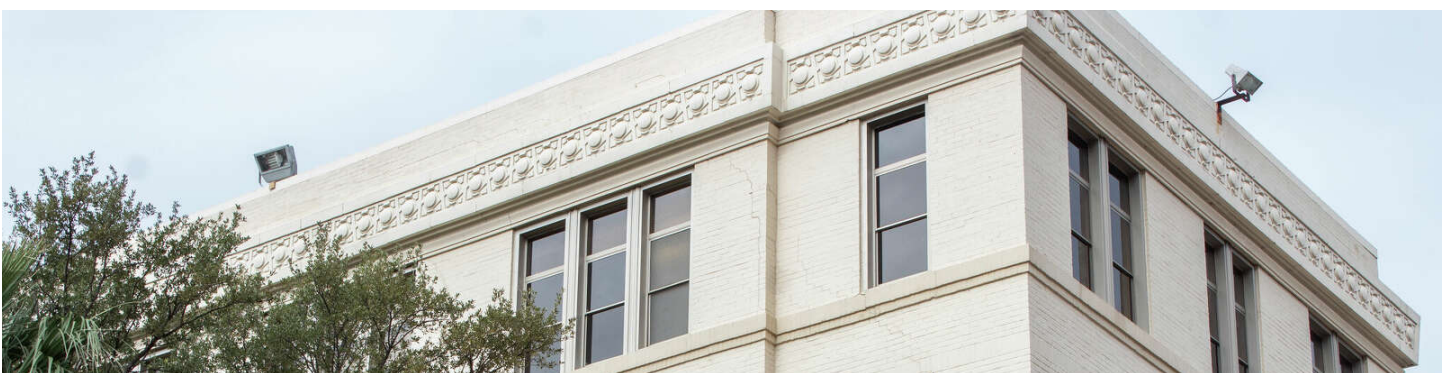


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Warren Brown/MySA

The building has a storied history, according to University Health, and was even added to the state registry of historic buildings in October 2020.

"The hospital was the first center of our long partnership with the U.S. military, providing examinations for service members, and was the site for training multiple generations of nurses and doctors. Many San Antonians received care there during the influenza pandemic of 1918, and many more were treated there during the 1940s and 1950s polio epidemic that terrified parents and shut down San Antonio schools."





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The USGS reported the massive earthquake struck around 3:32 p.m. near Reeves and Culverson County Line in West Texas at 3:32 p.m., which is about 350 miles northwest of San Antonio. The magnitude 5.3 quake appears to be [one of the largest in Texas history](#). The largest known earthquake to ever hit Texas was a 6.0 magnitude quake in the town of Valentine, near Marfa, in 1931.

TexNet, [the Texas state earthquake monitoring network](#), stated the following about the seismic activity:

"We are still investigating the data associated with these seismic events," said Scott W. Tinker, the State Geologist of Texas, and the director of the Bureau of Economic Geology. "Our first concern, of course, is for any people who might have been affected by these earthquakes. The professional scientists on the TexNet team, led by Alexandros Savvaidis, are working diligently to analyze the data that we have received from the TexNet network of monitoring stations."

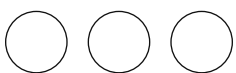
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NEWS

What to know about Kirk Watson as he once again becomes Austin mayor

Chris O'Connell

Jan. 2, 2023





Once and future Austin mayor Kirk Watson was part of an effort, led by Wendy Davis' 11-hour filibuster, to block an anti-abortion law in 2013.

Erich Schlegel/Getty Images

On December 13, 2022, [Kirk Watson defeated Celia Israel in a runoff](#) to become the next Austin mayor. In advance of Watson taking office on January 6, here's what you need to know about him.

He's been here before

Watson was mayor of Austin from 1997-2001. After sending the 1997 election to a runoff, his opponent withdrew. His re-election bid was much more successful, with Watson garnering more than 84% of the popular vote, a city record. Watson resigned the following year to run for Texas attorney general, an election he lost to Greg Abbott.

He faced a more difficult challenge this election cycle, defeating Israel in a runoff after neither candidate garnered more than 50% of the vote in November's mayoral election. Watson's name recognition, from his time as mayor and subsequently as a member of the Texas Senate, helped push Watson over the top in the runoff against Celia Israel in mid-December.

West Austin and Williamson County were also the

difference

Watson actually trailed Israel in Travis County, but won after the Williamson County votes were counted. In his victory speech, Watson said: "It means a lot to me to know that Austinites in every part of this city still want the leadership I have tried to deliver." Some took exception to that phrasing.

**"Every part of this city" <https://t.co/fhXIm7M25q>
[pic.twitter.com/kcWwj9Wmi5](https://t.co/fhXIm7M25q)**

— Austin Sanders (@daustinsanders) December 14, 2022

Local Republicans openly rooted for him, too

Despite trailing Israel in the general election by more than five points, Watson managed to eke out a win in the subsequent runoff as a more center-left candidate than the progressive Israel. As such, local conservatives like Travis County GOP head Matt Mackowiak implored constituents to choose, essentially, the lesser of two evils in the runoff. Mackowiak and other right-leaning and centrist Austinites [cheered loudly when Watson defeated Israel](#).

He was a popular member of the Texas Senate for more than a decade

After losing the attorney general race in 2002, Watson was a member of the Texas Senate, representing District 14, from 2007-2020. Throughout his tenure, particularly early on, Watson was praised as a legislator, and was named [Rookie of the Year by Texas Monthly](#) in 2007 and was named among the best legislators in 2009. Upon his retirement in 2020, [Planned Parenthood said that Watson was](#) "one of [our] fiercest allies in the fight to protect reproductive health care access and rights for all Texans," noting his role in Wendy Davis' highly publicized 2013 filibuster of anti-abortion legislation.

He's well-versed in the I-35 conundrum

Transportation, particularly I-35, took up a lot of Watson's time in the Texas Senate. A plan to introduce tolls onto I-35 came and went (and came and went) coinciding with the beginning of his tenure. The toll question was twofold — whether it should exist at all, and if so, who should build it? — and lingered until HB2861 failed during the 2017 Texas Legislative Session, which would have made it easier to build an I-35 toll road that ran from Round Rock to Buda.

Watson, who served on the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO), has been a supporter of improving I-35, which includes TxDOT's Capital Express projects. That includes a controversial, \$4.9 billion Capital Express Central plan to expand I-35 for eight miles through the heart of Austin, adding two HOV lanes and at certain points reaching 20 lanes across.

Detractors, like the advocacy group Rethink35 have pointed out the safety, congestion, and environmental issues that the project could enhance. Watson (and a few other mayoral candidates) supported the I-35 expansion during the general election cycle, noting that the plan "needs to be improved upon."

...and in issues of downtown development

Tearing down cultural touchstones to make way for big tech may seem novel in 2022 Austin, but Watson's first term was marred by controversy that mirrors today's outcry over a rapidly changing city.

In 1999, the city was torn over a proposal by Watson and backed by Austin City Council to redevelop downtown and construct a new City Hall bookended by twin buildings intended for IT company Computer Sciences Corporation. The problem? That space was occupied by Liberty Lunch, a legendary Austin venue that for decades had been integral to the establishment of Austin as the so-called Live Music Capital of the World. Liberty Lunch closed its doors that year, but the war over Austin's cultural landmarks continues as the city expands at a compounding rate.

... but affordability is issue No. 1 right now

Housing affordability was on the ballot in the mayoral election after median home prices peaked at \$550,000 in May and rents jumped 24% in 2021 alone.

Watson and his main challenger, Celia Israel, were on opposite sides of how to solve the problem even if both agreed that cost of living was a major issue in Austin.

Israel had hoped to change the city's development code, which has remained the same since 1984. Watson, on the other hand, wanted to add housing but only at the discretion of neighborhoods, which could decide the pace and location of new housing. Specifically, Watson campaigned on the idea that districts could opt out of code reform individually, with incentives for opting in, like tax revenue from new housing to spend toward public infrastructure in the district.

Israel referred to Watson's more conservative plan as “a return to redlining” in a campaign email, but Watson held firm, saying just before the runoff: “For us to achieve this goal, we’re going to need to listen to the people. They’re going to be able to tell us where greater density can be used.”

He will have to run again in two years

If Watson wants to repeat as mayor, he'll have to run again in 2024 rather than 2026. In 2021, rules on mayoral elections in the city were changed to align them with presidential elections. As such, mayoral elections will fall on presidential election years beginning in 2024, after which the next one will be in 2028.

■