

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing with deep concern and unwavering support for Ordinance #260283, which would designate Leonard Smith Hall as a Historic Building on the Kansas City University campus at 1700 Independence Boulevard. Smith Hall is not just another old structure—it is a living piece of Kansas City’s soul. It carries the legacy of Dr. Alice Berry Graham and Dr. Katharine Berry Richardson, two extraordinary women whose compassion and vision gave birth to Children’s Mercy Hospital. To lose this building would be to lose a tangible piece of who we are.

Kansas City has already sent roughly 40% of its landfill volume to the ground in the form of demolished historic buildings. Forty percent. That is a staggering, heartbreaking statistic. And every time we allow another historic structure to fall, we are choosing to make that number worse. I ask this committee, with all sincerity: will we continue burying our history in landfills, or will we finally choose preservation over destruction?

The demolition of Smith Hall would bring consequences that go far beyond the loss of a single building:

1. A permanent erasure of our shared story

Smith Hall is a rare, irreplaceable link to the founders of Children’s Mercy Hospital and to the early medical history of our city. Once it is gone, that connection is gone forever.

2. Environmental harm we can no longer justify

Demolition is wasteful. It is destructive. It fills our landfills with materials that could have been reused, repurposed, or reimaged. Preservation is not just about nostalgia—it is about responsibility.

3. A painful continuation of a troubling pattern

For years, under the broad shield of its Master Plan Development, KCU has removed historic structures in the Historic Northeast despite community objections and independent engineering reports. The 2017 demolition of the Maple Boulevard colonnaded apartments—sound buildings with strong integrity—left us with nothing but a surface parking lot. That loss still stings. It damaged trust. It signaled that our voices, our history, and our neighborhood did not matter.

4. A missed opportunity for meaningful, inspiring reuse

Smith Hall can be saved. It can be adapted. Across Kansas City, historic buildings have been transformed into vibrant, functional spaces that honor the past while serving the present. Smith Hall deserves that same chance.

As a resident of the Historic Northeast and someone who believes fiercely in the value of our architectural heritage, I urge the Neighborhood Planning & Development Committee to support Ordinance #260283. This is more than a policy decision—it is a statement about what kind of city we want to be. One that discards its history, or one that protects it.

Thank you for your time and your consideration. I truly hope this committee chooses preservation, sustainability, and respect for the legacy of the Graham-Berry sisters. If you have any questions about my position, I welcome the opportunity to discuss it further.

Sincerely,

Joseph L. Peterson

Scarritt Renaissance Historic Homeowner

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