

December 10, 2020

Dear Commissioners,

As the president and executive director of The Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, we ask you to support our application for Downtown Mixed-Use (DMU) zoning for our property and to oppose historic zoning. Doing so would honor Delta Kappa Gamma's work and legacy by empowering us to revitalize the organization and better position us to deliver on our mission and vision.

Delta Kappa Gamma is a professional honor society whose grants and programs support women educators and students across the world. Our founder, Dr. Annie Webb Blanton, was a trailblazer for women's rights in Texas. At a time when women faced extraordinarily high professional barriers, Dr. Blanton earned her doctorate, became the third woman ever promoted to the rank of professor at the University of Texas, and became the first woman ever elected to statewide office in Texas, as the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Dr. Blanton founded Delta Kappa Gamma in 1929 as a way to organize women to fight gender discrimination, advocate for pro-education legislation, and assist women educators in their professional development. She initially founded our organization at the University of Texas at Austin's campus, the first of five different locations from which we have operated. The office building in question for this case (at 416 W. 12th St.) is our fifth location. Dr. Blanton never saw this building; Delta Kappa Gamma moved into it over a decade after she passed away.

While we have enjoyed working from this office space, the structure has become a major barrier to Delta Kappa Gamma's continued health and stability. The building's age and layout have made it nearly impossible to retrofit for modern technology, hampering our ability to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our work, while the increasing cost of building maintenance is forcing us to divert critical resources. Historic zoning would lock in these barriers and escalating costs forever and deprive Delta Kappa Gamma of the ability to deploy one of our most important assets, the 416 W. 12th St. site.

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This is particularly important now, as Delta Kappa Gamma is at a critical juncture. Delta Kappa Gamma membership has declined since its peak in the 1990s and – as the organization’s leadership – we are actively working on strategies to revitalize Delta Kappa Gamma and ensure we can continue to deliver on Dr. Blanton’s vision of empowering women educators and students around the world. Prioritizing our resources in ways that support our mission and vision, rather than diverting them to building maintenance and upkeep on outdated technologies, is key to this effort. It is for this reason that both the 2018-2020 and the 2020-2022 International Administrative Boards have unanimously approved a sale of the building with the understanding that such a sale would result in demolition.

We also recognize that our current office building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, an effort that an architecture student took on in 2011 for a class project. At the time, it seemed like a natural fit. We are proud of our legacy and saw that application both as a celebration of that legacy as well as an opportunity to help empower a young woman to take initiative and develop professionally. We also were assured by the National Register coordinator, in writing, that National Register status would not impose any restrictions on the property. Today, however, that same status is now being raised as a reason to apply strict limits to the building.

Delta Kappa Gamma is not a building. It is our vision, our mission, our members, and the work we have done, as well as the work we hope to do going forward. We want to celebrate Delta Kappa Gamma’s legacy without endangering its future. Approving our request for DMU zoning and rejecting historic zoning would help us achieve this by implementing our vision for revitalizing Delta Kappa Gamma and supporting our continued health and financial stability.

We hope we can count on your support and we appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,



Becky Sadowski
International President

Sincerely



Nita R. Scott, CAE
Executive Director