

Save Smith Hall

"Please reconsider getting rid of Smith Hall. Please don't let my aunt's vision and legacy be demolished."

DALE SUITER GRANDNEPHEW
OF IRMA SMITH

Smith Hall history

Smith Hall, built in 1967, is a cherished landmark with rich history; KU notes "the site has been home to buildings dedicated to spiritual and religious subjects since the 19th century." The building has housed KU's Department of Religious Studies since 1977.

The mid-century modern building features a reading room with a floor-to-ceiling stained glass window depicting the burning bush; a ten foot tall bronze sculpture of Moses rests outside the window. This artwork is a larger-than-life embodiment of KU's seal and represents the quest for knowledge.

Smith Hall was built with the support of a donor named Irma Smith, along with a host of other benefactors. Irma hailed from Macksville, Kansas and devoted much of her time and money to civic pursuits for the betterment of her home state.

The sculpture of Moses was created by world-renowned bronze sculptor Elden Tefft. Elden dedicated his professional life to the University of Kansas and devoted 15 years to the creation of the sculpture. It was built specifically for the scale of Smith Hall and its environs.

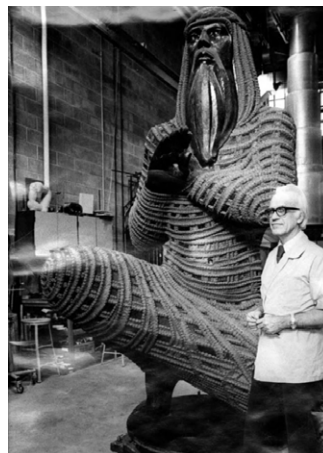
Smith Hall is located in one of KU's historic districts. The State Historic Preservation Office determined that Smith Hall is likely a historic Kansas place, but without KU's support the effort to formally give it that designation cannot move forward.



KU's seal



Detail of KU's seal featuring Moses



Sculptor Elden Tefft



Irma Smith, donor

Demolition plans

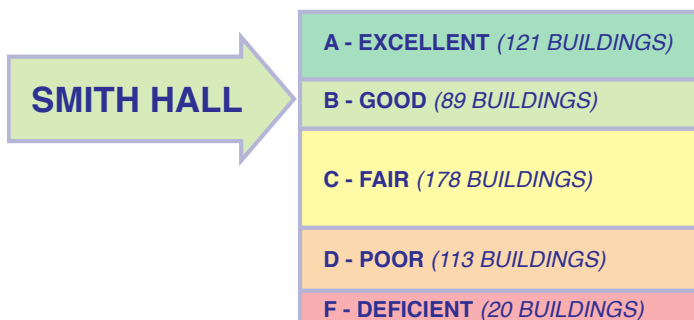
In January 2021, the Kansas Board of Regents released a [building condition study](#) that assigned a “Facility Condition Index” (FCI) score to buildings at Regents institutions across the state.

The FCI score is described in the study as...

“an industry standard metric that identifies the magnitude of needs and deficiencies for a building or campus. The ratio is derived by dividing the total estimated cost to replace a building into the renewal costs to address all past-due work that has been deferred on a planned or unplanned basis, along with five years of projected future maintenance needs.”

The [minutes of the November 18, 2020 KBOR meeting](#) show that the assessed buildings broke down into the following grades: 121 excellent, 89 good, 178 fair, 113 poor, and 20 deficient.

Smith Hall received an FCI score of .25 in this study; which correlates with “Grade B; Good.” Smith Hall scored better than hundreds of other university buildings across the state.



In April 2022, the legislature [provided \\$10 million dollars](#) for the purpose of demolishing obsolete buildings on university campuses. These public dollars are derived from the State General Fund.

In May 2022, the University of Kansas asked the Regents for \$650,000 to demolish Smith Hall; the Regents approved this funding request. The [minutes from the May 2022 Kansas Board of Regents meeting](#) reflect that Smith Hall was deemed “obsolete” by KU, but there is no information about Smith Hall’s condition, the rationale for destroying it, or what the university would do with the space after demolition.

[Kansas Board of Regents policy](#) states that if a capital improvement project, including demolition, is expected to cost less than \$1,000,000, the full board does not need to vote on the demolition project itself. Instead, decisions are made by the university’s chief executive officer and the president of the Board of Regents, with the concurrence of the Board’s Director of Facilities.



Smith Hall has been earmarked for destruction even though the Kansas Board of Regents’ own study showed that the building is in good condition — much better condition than many other buildings on KU’s campus and on campuses across the state.

KU could demolish Smith Hall within the first half of 2023, though the exact timing isn’t known.

Building demolition is an irreversible act; the decision-making process should not be treated the same way as painting walls or replacing a roof.

The Regents’ Facilities Capital Renewal Initiative is expected to receive tens of millions of public dollars in the coming years to address deferred maintenance issues. It is imperative that the legislature establish a transparent, consistent, and sensible procedure for deciding which public buildings will be demolished.

We ask legislators to...

- Require that every request to demolish a Regents building be presented publicly to the Joint Committee on State Building Construction along with information about the building’s condition, the cost of the project, any special significance of the building/site, and the university’s plan for post-demolition use of the site.
- Require that every decision to demolish a Regents building be made by the full Kansas Board of Regents, after receiving recommendations from the Joint Committee on State Building Construction.
- Amend building demolition account restrictions to state that any remaining or additional funds may only be used for buildings with an FCI score of .31 or higher (the equivalent of grades C-F) based on the Regents’ study.