

To To Whom It May Concern,

Historic Masonic Gainesville LLC (HMG) is the current owner of the former Masonic Lodge (the Building) in downtown Gainesville. The two current co-owners of HMG purchased this beautiful 112 year-old building after many discussions and considerations. Among these considerations, one of the co-owners, as a Gainesville native, and amidst the changes occurring in some of Gainesville's neighborhoods, found solace in the idea that by acquiring the old Masonic Lodge, he could ensure the beautiful, century-old building would remain a Gainesville landmark for at least another century.

HMG first attempted to purchase the Building in October 2019, but the Building was already under contract. When the prior owners learned that their selected purchaser intended not to preserve the Building, but to convert it to a nightclub, they were horrified, but legally bound. When the contract with the originally selected buyer fell through, however, the prior owners contacted HMG, as no other potential buyer had shown the same interest in preserving the Building. HMG made another offer with an agreement to continue leasing the Building to the Gainesville Masonic Lodge No. 41 until February 2021. The offer was accepted.

Within one week of the February 20, 2020 closing, the restoration process began. The process of restoring the exterior of the Building began by replacing the badly damaged brick, reusing the salvageable bricks, and checking thousands of brick seams, which became a three month process. Early on in that process, over 300 original bricks were found in the cellar from a badly damaged chimney that had been taken down in the 1990s. All 300 of those bricks were reused in the restoration of the Building.

Prior to HMG purchasing the Building, an attempt was made to add the Building to the local Register of Historic Places (RHP or the Register). As was stated during the January 23, 2020 City of Gainesville Planning Board hearing on whether or not to recommend to the city commission to add the Building to the Register, the Building is not currently on the local Register. Because HMG is now the new owner of the Building, the only legal conclusion that can be reached is that HMG be heard at any hearing regarding the Building, specifically, before any recommendation is made to the City Commission as to whether or not the Commission should add the Building to the local Register.

During the entire restoration process, HMG has attempted to return this building to its original architectural glory. We have chosen not to cut corners and keep everything as original as possible. This meant adding a small extension behind the Building to house the ADA required bathrooms, elevator, and fire stairwell. Had HMG not added the extension, two existing rooms in the Building would have to be removed and replaced. This also meant converting a door, which had been added in the 1990s, back into a window on the southeast corner of the Building. Last, but certainly not least, it also meant replacing the current, two-pane window sashes with a multi-paned sash that is a closer match to the Italianate style architecture used in the creation of this building. Before ordering any windows HMG verified that we were in total compliance with all local codes. Two of these specially and custom designed multi-paned

window sashes were ordered and installed in September 2020 to make sure the fitting was appropriate. The day after the first two sashes were installed and fit accordingly, the order for the remaining sashes was placed.

As was explained in a letter submitted to Jason Simmons with the Gainesville Historic Board on Wednesday, December 16th, 2020, the currently-installed, two-part sash windows found at the building are simply the product of a misguided attempt at modernization by prior owners. At the time, the ability to produce such large sashes, as opposed to several panes, was new and considered a very “state-of-the-art” feature. So the prior owners chose to deviate from this architecturally original, multi-paned, italianate style and instead used the current, inauthentic, two-part sash system currently on the building. During the restoration process, HMG decided to return the building to its original italianate style by ordering original style windows. Half of those windows have already arrived onsite and are ready for installation. The second half will be delivered in early January 2021.

HMG is very much looking forward to completing the restoration of this beautiful century old building so that it will last yet another century.

Thank you,

Historic Masonic Gainesville LLC
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