



May 14, 2024

Alexis McKinney, AIA  
Chair, Honor Awards Committee  
Texas Society of Architects  
500 Chicon Street  
Austin, TX 78702

**RE: Katie O'Brien, Hon. AIA Dallas for the TxA Honorary Membership**

We are most excited to nominate Katie O'Brien for TxA Honorary Membership. She has had a career dedicated to shaping public policy to serve the interests of the larger community. That career, which began with important experience in state-wide issues while working in the office of then-State Senator Kirk Watkins, eventually led her to open her own consulting practice, Trinity Public Affairs, and to guide AIA Dallas as the chapter sought greater effectiveness in expanding our passions in design and planning for clients to the benefit of all. Katie took on the non-design tasks that architects are typically least prepared to do and has changed North Texas in the process.

Her experience, effectiveness and trademark charm have made a difference beyond Dallas. She is also known and respected at the State Capital, enabling her to gain both insight and influence for all of AIA. The efforts she has helped develop and guide are well known and other AIA chapters in Texas have sought out her guidance as they seek better results for their own policy efforts. She simply makes us all better at helping our communities.

Yet, her influence is not limited to helping us. She has a remarkable track record of leadership and results in transformational placemaking. She has been a leader in the Southern Gateway Park effort. This is a new deck park that extends across Interstate Highway 35 in the Southern Sector of Dallas, and will knit back together two important, underserved neighborhoods that were actually one neighborhood before the Interstate Highway System was introduced and split the area apart. She served in many roles in this project, including Interim Executive Director. This large, expensive and complex project is currently under construction.

She has shown comparable leadership and effectiveness in the Circuit Trail Conservancy, an effort to construct and connect a 50 mile-long trail system, known as the Loop Trail, that connects exiting trail segments and expands the trail network to provide not just recreation, but a true mobility option for all of Dallas County. Again her leadership extends from public policy, to planning, to serving as Interim Executive Director of the organization.

As reflected by her previous Honorary AIA Dallas award, AIA Dallas believes that Katie O'Brien typifies the leadership that is needed to illustrate the value that architecture and planning contributes to all of Texas, both in the present and in the future. We enthusiastically support her nomination for TxA Honorary Membership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Darby". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that extends downwards and to the right.

Peter Darby, AIA  
2024 AIA Dallas Chapter President

# Katie O'Brien, Hon AIA Dallas

Nomination for 2024 TxA  
Honorary Membership

Katie happily takes on one of those jobs that are essential to a healthy and sustainable built environment, but which we architects are often ill prepared or hesitant to do. To us, she is dedicated, organized and knowledgeable in promoting our passions to the decision makers. To the politicians, donors, and our partner organizations in this quest, she is a source of knowledge, a passionate advocate and a reliable reminder of the responsibilities and opportunities we face daily.

The skills architects offer seems so obvious to us. Katie is a talented professional in establishing connections, aligning agendas and making our good ideas obvious to others.

When AIA Dallas sought a more engaged and effective advocacy program, she developed multiple initiatives that better informed membership on critical issues, while building relationships with numerous, key decision makers.

Relying on her history with the Texas Legislature, she greatly improved our communications and helped guide AIA Dallas in addressing critical issues that have arisen in Austin.

Katie has been a force for architecture at both State and local government.



## INTRODUCTION

## Nomination of **Katie O'Brien** for TxA Honorary Membership

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*Trisha Windham & Katie O'Brien  
of Trinity Public Affairs*

### **Leadership Training**

- Dallas Mayor's Star Council
- Leadership Austin
- Americorps

### **Work History**

- Founder and Principal, Trinity Public Affairs, 2020—Present
- Director, Davis Advocates, 2016—2020
- Senior Policy Analyst, Office of State Senator Kirk Watson

Katie has provided public policy and community relations consulting in the Dallas area since 2016. She helps architects and other clients navigate the legislative processes at the local and state level, and provides services like policy oversight, board management, fund development, and community relations. Her recent client work ranges from green space initiatives to support for transformative ordinance changes to big picture policy and strategy. She's committed to making Texas a more livable and dynamic place year after year.

Katie received a Bachelors in Political Science from Boston College and went on to receive a Masters of Public Affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin.

Prior to returning to Dallas, Katie worked in the Texas Senate for more than six years. She developed strong relationships and policy depth in issues such as public and higher education, state finance, insurance, redistricting, and pensions.

Personally, she's very involved in her kids' schools and their church community in Dallas.

Katie also participated in several leadership programs, including Engage Dallas (formerly Mayor's Star Council), Leadership Austin, and AmeriCorps. She currently serves as a board member of the My Possibilities Foundation. As a young woman, Katie was a member of the City of Dallas Youth Commission.

In 2021, Katie was recognized as an **Honorary Member of AIA Dallas**

## Nomination of **Katie O'Brien** for TxA Honorary Membership



In need of a more effective advocacy effort, AIA Dallas turned to Katie O'Brien in 2017. Since that time, she has molded and empowered the organization's efforts to the point that AIA Dallas is known and trusted by local, regional and state-wide agencies and officials who steer major critical projects in planning, mobility, sustainability, and governance. In many cases, organizations like the City of Dallas staff and Council members, as well as Dallas Area Rapid Transit, have sought out AIA's expertise and support for policy development and broader public engagement.



Among her accomplishments:

- Develop, plan and “host” monthly or bimonthly Coffee & Conversation series about essential Dallas policy issues so that AIA membership could be knowledgeable and influential in both local and state-wide issues. Past topics/speakers include the Dallas City Manager, multiple Councilmembers, Dallas Assistant City Managers and Dept. Directors, and non-profit/community leaders. For Coffee and Conversation, she received the **AIA Dallas President's Award**
- Advocacy around I-345. The proposed removal of existing, elevated Interstate Highway I-345, adjacent to Downtown Dallas, in an effort to “stitch Downtown and Deep Ellum neighborhoods back together”, is an exceedingly bold plan. It's potential impacts, good and bad, on the core of the city are massive, making it one of the most important public issues and in critical need of AIA guidance. Katie led AIA member efforts at developing a position while coordinating with other like-minded stakeholder groups to promote that position. This project continues through TxDOT development with the current plan reflecting many of AIA Dallas's ideas and concerns.

**ADVOCACY FOR ARCHITECTURE,  
PLANNING AND DESIGN**

## Nomination of **Katie O'Brien** for TxA Honorary Membership

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*Katie O'Brien with Dallas  
City Council Members  
Tennell Atkins (District 8)  
and Jesse Moreno  
(District 2)*



- Katie has led or supported AIA engagement on many critical City of Dallas policy issues such as the City's recent Comprehensive Environmental & Climate Action Plan (CECAP), Article X (Landscape standards), Parkland Dedication Ordinance, zoning & Development Services, D2/DART, the role of historic preservation, and the Frank Lloyd Wright designed Kalita Humphreys Theater restoration/masterplan.
- She is an active participant, on behalf of AIA Dallas, in the City of Dallas Development Advisory Committee in an effort to improve the long, complicated and often troubled development processes of the City of Dallas. She has advocated for numerous common sense steps to improve the processes and free up AIA membership for better urban design.
- Katie worked to extend AIA Dallas' influence regionally by reaching out to a large number of City Managers in North Texas. These letters outlined the many fields of expertise where Dallas AIA members could assist and guide them as their cities rapidly grew.
- She continually provides feedback and advice to any staff or AIA leadership about policy issue/question within their purview. She regularly briefs the Board of Directors about chapter's policy engagement and advocacy efforts.
- Her ideas and efforts to enhance AIA Dallas' advocacy program have been noticed by others and serves as a model for others. AIA Austin is among those who have reached out to better understand the AIA Dallas framework. Katie has also worked closely with TxA staff and coordinated with TEXO on State legislative issues.

**ADVOCACY FOR ARCHITECTURE,  
PLANNING AND DESIGN**

## Nomination of **Katie O'Brien** for TxA Honorary Membership

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One of Texas' most important urban design and placemaking efforts is the Southern Gateway Park. Beginning in 2017 and following the acclaimed example of Dallas' Klyde Warren Park, TxDOT, the City of Dallas, the Southern Gateway Public Green Foundation, and numerous other stakeholders and supporters, a vision emerged of constructing a deck park over Interstate 35 in Dallas' Southern Sector. This park was specifically targeted to "right the wrong" that was inflicted on the neighborhood when the original I-35E was constructed and split multiple, fragile neighborhoods. The new park will provide greenspace, mobility, connectivity and economic opportunity to adjacent underserved neighborhoods.

This park is under construction and expected to open in early 2026.



Katie O'Brien has been instrumental in the success of this effort. Beginning with advocating to the City of Dallas for bond funded support of the project, she has been involved in the selection of design teams, management of the non-profit board, successful grant writing and fund raising, and hiring of staff.

Katie O'Brien even served as Interim Executive Director of the Southern Gateway Park Green Foundation in 2019 and 2020.

**ADVOCACY FOR ARCHITECTURE &  
PLACEMAKING**

**SOUTHERN GATEWAY PARK**

## Nomination of **Katie O'Brien** for TxA Honorary Membership

By forming a strong public-private partnership, the Circuit Trail Conservancy and its partner organizations, is building a strong framework for a premier urban trail network linking our city by connecting 38 miles of existing trails with 11 miles of new trails. By constructing five key connection trail projects, they are:

- Create a contiguous 50-mile urban trail
- Unite neighborhoods and enrich daily life
- Stimulate economic development
- Offer a safe, green, healthy transportation option
- Increase tourism
- Attract new residents to Dallas
- Connect people to nature



SOURCE: City of Dallas

Michael Hogue/Staff Artist

Katie O'Brien has been instrumental in the success of The Loop Dallas project. She worked closely with the board leadership and the architectural design teams during initial planning and design, represented the project at the City, provided donor management, and was the point of contact for The Dallas Foundation funding.

Katie O'Brien served as Interim Executive Director of the Circuit Trail Conservancy from 2017 to early 2019.

## **ADVOCACY FOR URBAN DESIGN & PLACEMAKING**

### *The LOOP Dallas*