



Testimony

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Abandoned and Blighted Housing HB 2506

Delivered March 13, 2018
Senate Ethics, Elections and Local Government Committee

The Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City strongly supports legislation which streamlines and expedites the process for local governments, neighborhood organizations and private businesses to deal with the blight of abandoned, nuisance and foreclosed properties to protect the rights and property values of surrounding property owners. The City of Kansas City is making the revitalization of neighborhoods a top priority.

In a recent Citizen Survey of Wyandotte County residents, only 27% were satisfied with the appearance of the community. The average in the overall Kansas City metro is a 71% satisfaction rate. One of the biggest reasons for the low ranking in KCK is abandoned and nuisance housing.

The Unified Government, with help from the Bloomberg Foundation What Works Cities program, inventoried our housing stock. We identified 3,491 parcels with vacant and abandoned structures. 813 of those houses are more than 3 years tax delinquent.

A significant contributor to the abandoned housing problem is zombie mortgages. During the Great Recession, Wyandotte County experienced thousands of home foreclosures. People lost their homes and walked away. But in many cases, the bank didn't follow through with reclaiming ownership of the property. So it just sits with no owner claiming responsibility for the property.

Abandoned homes and vacant lots, most with code violations, are creating blight and depressing home values for neighbors. Many of the abandoned properties which are creating blight sit empty for so long, they become unsalvageable and can not be rehabilitated and returned as useful housing. The goal is to save these homes and return them to the market as properties which can again be lived in. That will help citizens, neighborhoods and the city at-large.

A recurring discussion around this issue is property rights. I would ask you to think about the property rights of the neighboring homeowners who have to live next door to one of these abandoned decaying properties. And another reminder: this legislation only deals with abandoned properties where no owner can be found.

The Unified Government has launched an ambitious program to make improvements to 10,000 properties in the next five years. The goal is to reduce the number of abandoned and vacant housing stock from 3,491 to 1,900 by the year 2021. This legislation will be an important tool in meeting this goal.

This legislation is the result of many years of discussions, compromises and revisions. The Unified Government is confident the bill is now in a form which will help us effectively deal with the problem of abandoned and blighted housing, while still protecting the rights of property owners.