



Testimony

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Rehabilitation of Abandoned and Nuisance Housing HB 2404

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The Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City strongly supports HB 2404 and the identical SB 31. 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. We have another 1,371 unfit structures. The attached map shows where those problem properties are concentrated.

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 of HB 2404 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: HB 2404 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. HB 2404 will be a critical tool in meeting this goal.

HB 2404 is the result of several 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.

