



701 Washington • P.O. Box 603  
Concordia, KS 66901  
785-243-2670 • Fax: 785-243-3328

TO: Chairman Emil Bergquist  
House Local Government Committee Members

FROM: Amy L. Lange, City Manager, Concordia

DATE: January 30, 2023

RE: Written Only - Testimony in Opposition to HB 2083

---

Chairman Bergquist and Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to HB 2083 on behalf of the City of Concordia.

There is a shortage of quality, affordable housing in Kansas. This shortage is hurting Kansas communities' ability to attract qualified workers to fill current vacancies, and it is hindering our local businesses' ability to expand. A vacant property registry (VPR) is one tool in our economic development toolbox to address this housing shortage. Cities can use this VPR to facilitate conversations with local realtors and property owners to put these homes back into useful service, thereby providing one economical solution to the current housing shortage and benefit to local businesses, and ultimately the community. The VPR can also be used to quickly identify a cadre of homes that may benefit from home weatherization or other improvement programs available through the municipality, state, or other granting organizations.

Interestingly, the 2022 Concordia Housing Study and Market Analysis completed in June 2022 revealed that of the 2,212 residential parcels counted, 224 were vacant (10%). Of those vacancies, 39 were for sale (only 8 for sale now), 119 had idle utilities for six months or longer, and 35 had no evidence of daily use. The Housing Study also revealed that Concordia needs 245 moderate income homes, 12 high income homes, and 25 low income homes in order to meet current and near-future housing demands.

Concordia's Housing Study included recommendation to capitalize on the opportunity of existing vacancies to help address our significant housing shortage. Specifically, the recommendation is to develop a list of "most wanted" properties and associated programs to incentivize sale and/or renovation of those properties. This cannot be done without Concordia's ability to maintain a VPR.

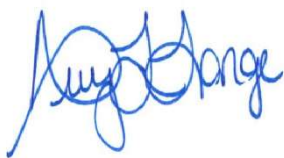
(continued next page)

Addressing the needs of the community is best left to the local community. Constitutional Home Rule has supported decision-making at the local level since 1960. Local communities are already tasked with code enforcement related to nuisances as well as building and fire codes to ensure the health and safety of properties. Local law enforcement is already tasked with peace-keeping and responding to crimes within our communities. Local Fire and EMS are responsible to respond to emergencies of our residents to preserve life and property. Allowing the local governing bodies to determine whether a VPR is an appropriate means to manage this workload is an appropriate use of Home Rule and good stewardship of public resources.

In some communities, there may be a cost to affected property owners enforcing a VPR. However, I argue there is a cost to the city residents at large in the absence of a VPR. Over the past decade, the City of Concordia has condemned and demolished over 100 unsafe and dangerous structures, with 30 of those structures demolished in 2022. There are at least 50 more on our list to consider as funding becomes available. These structures, mostly homes, had been vacant for a number of years and had not been maintained. While some of these demolitions were the result of significant fire damage, others were simply the result of tremendous neglect, many times due to absentee property owners. The general property tax payers of Concordia incur a portion of the cost of unpaid nuisance abatements for habitual unkempt yards as well as a part or all of the cost of demolition when neglected structures become unsafe and dangerous. The City allocates \$50,000 per year to a local demolition cost-sharing program. Additionally, from 2011 to 2019, the City sent \$180,974.99 in unpaid invoices for nuisance abatement and city-initiated demolition to the County Clerk to be placed on the property tax rolls. Of those unpaid special assessments, the City writes off approximately \$20,000 per year due to procedures associated with the property being sold at tax sale, meaning the bill was ultimately paid by the residents at large. Our backlog of long-term vacant and abandoned properties continues to increase. Our resident at large are paying for this deferred maintenance of vacant properties in the form of lost property tax revenue, as well as the opportunity cost of unrealized utility revenue used to maintain infrastructure throughout the city and lack of available homes for needed workforce.

In closing, vacant properties have the potential to create a host of problems for cities, including a propensity to foster criminal activity, create public health problems, and otherwise diminish quality of life. Vacant properties have the potential to reduce the value of properties within established neighborhoods, increase the risk of property damage through arson, theft and vandalism, and discourage neighborhood stability. Vacant properties represent unrealized economic growth within cities. A VPR allows cities to discourage property vacancy and encourage property owners to maintain unoccupied buildings. A VPR provides a ongoing database of vacant properties and their owners which can be used to facilitate conversations with realtors regarding potential sale or renovation of those vacant properties to meet current housing needs. A VPR may allow cities to assess fees for the increased public costs associated with vacant properties such as nuisance abatement. A VPR is a proper exercise of a city's authority to protect the public health, safety, and welfare of community residents.

With this testimony in mind, the City of Concordia strongly urges you to oppose HB 2083. Thank you for consideration.



Amy L. Lange  
City Manager