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Date: January 30, 2023  
To: Chair Bergquist and House Committee on Local Government Members  
From: Ethan Reimer, City Manager  
Re: Written Only – Testimony in Opposition of HB 2083

Chair Bergquist and House Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition of HB 2083 on behalf of the City of Halstead, our Governing Body, and our residents and businesses. The City of Halstead is opposed to HB 2083, its interference with Constitutional Home Rule, and the potential for it placing yet another barrier into municipalities' ability to deal with vacant and abandoned properties.

The City of Halstead enacted our local ordinance in 2019 regarding vacant or abandoned properties within city limits. This ordinance came about following community-wide strategic planning for the City of Halstead, that included multiple community engagement sessions, where a continued issue brought forth by residents was dealing with properties within the city which were either continuously vacant or had essentially been abandoned by the property owners. These properties often take years to fall into such condition that would make them appropriate for dangerous, distressed, or nuisance proceedings, but often the issues such as vandalism, overgrown yards, or junk and trash accumulation begin within months of the property becoming vacant. Residents quite simply were not happy that there was nothing that the city could essentially do on these properties until they were already negatively impacting other properties or posing serious safety issues.

Our ordinance does not seek to “go after” a property simply for being vacant or unoccupied or require registration arbitrarily. Instead, our ordinance has provisions where multiple factors must be met in order for a property or structure to qualify to be placed on the vacant property registry. There are exemptions for things such as structures primarily used for storage, those being actively marketed for sale, lease, or rent, and even the ability for property owners to contest the designation of their property as vacant or abandoned to the City Council directly if they feel the designation is in error. To date we have put no properties on our registry and have charged no fees as we have been able to work with property owners in a fair and transparent manner.

Since enacting our local vacant property ordinance, the City of Halstead has seen increased communication from property owners that before often ignored things such as property maintenance letters or other official city requests regarding their properties. The City of Halstead opposes HB 2083 as we believe the issue of vacant and abandoned properties is inherently local and all municipalities should be able to use their home-rule powers to address the issue as appropriate for their communities or based on the communicated desires of residents.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Reimer", is positioned below the text "Respectfully submitted,".

Ethan Reimer, City Manager