

Dear Senator,

I would like to express my opposition to HB2083 regarding the proposed Kansas Vacant Property Act that passed the House of Representatives and has now been referred to the Senate Committee on Local Government.

Vacant properties—and to be more specific ‘chronically vacant’ properties—are a major concern for many rural areas and any tools local governments can develop to address this issue is critical. Most owners of these types of property have become too complacent in dealing with the property or have eventually ended up using them as junk storage.

In rural Kansas, when a property becomes chronically vacant the impacts of that vacancy are felt by the entire community due to the lack of maintenance, declining property values, code violations, health and safety issues, etc. A chronically vacant property takes away an opportunity to gain a new business or a new household. That property eliminates a chance for a new downtown business, new employees in the local workforce, new students in a school, new sales tax revenue to a city, new income tax to the state, and the list goes on.

Chronically vacant properties are blight and blight leads to more blight. Municipalities need tools to either incentivize or disincentivize the trajectory of their local property conditions. If a community is generally against vacant property ordinances, then a municipality doesn’t have to pass one. But if a community feels enough is enough with blight, then a municipality should have the tool of a vacant property ordinance including building registration and associated fees as an option. We believe it is best to let the local municipalities decide through their own process of public input and debate.

As an example of what a vacant property ordinance can do, Sylvan Grove (pop. 291) enacted a vacant property ordinance in 2020. Within a year, several chronic vacant properties were either sold to new owners with plans for improvements or they were rehabilitated by current owners and are now being used and contributing to the local tax base.

In that year alone, the city gained eight new utility service accounts after years of declining account numbers. While eight might not sound like much to a larger, urban community, that is a very significant to smaller, rural communities. The vacant property ordinance and the threat of a fee is what prompted the property owners to had become complacent . We have a draft ready to go to assist our community with these issues as well and were about to pass it prior to the state’s consideration.

Thank you for letting me express my strong opposition to HB2083. If you have any questions, please feel free to give me a call. Thank you for all you do for Kansas!

Warmest regards,

Lucas Herb-Mullin  
City Administrator  
City of Eureka