



To: Senate Ethics, Elections and Local Government Committee
From: Mark Wassom - Chief Building Official, Olathe, KS
Subject: SB 31 Testimony in Support
Date: January 24, 2017

Dear Committee Members,

Please consider this letter as our testimony in support of Senate Bill 31. Abandoned and blighted structures cause a wide array of concerns for our City and its residents including, but not limited to the following:

- Reduction of property values for surrounding property owners, and in some cases, the inability to sell their property.
- Serving an attractive nuisance to children who might play in the building or structure.
- Becoming a harbor for vagrants, criminals or immoral persons; or enabling persons to resort to the building or structure for committing unlawful acts.
- Creating public health concerns, such as rodents, wildlife, mold, stagnant water and similar issues.
- An increased risk of fire and potential fire exposure to surrounding properties.

Our adopted building, fire and property maintenance codes provide some authority to require owners to maintain their property, but there are limited actions that can be taken if the owner is unresponsive or refuses to abate the problem. These are typically lengthy processes including multiple notifications, public hearings and court proceedings. If the owner refuses to respond or appear in court it remains difficult to get the work completed. Frequently, proceedings can be drawn out to the point where the structure must be demolished. This is unfortunate when, had the problem been addressed years earlier, it may have been possible to repair the structure rather than demolish it.

I would estimate that there are 2 or 3 structures every year in our City that could benefit from the provisions of this bill. Although this doesn't sound like a large number, it is important to note that the 2 or 3 from last year are still a problem, as well as the years before that. This is how the abandoned and blighted properties become more of a significant problem. I have included a couple of examples of concerns in our City on the next page.



This residence has been abandoned for several years. There is evidence of people entering the structure through broken doors and windows. The owner continues to pay for electricity and taxes, so it has limited our ability to abate the conditions. We receive numerous complaints on this structure every year concerning its condition.



This structure was abandoned in the middle of construction in 2012. There was evidence of animals and people entering the structure. It was unsafe for several reasons including unprotected balconies inside, water in the basement and wild animals. After 4 years, and in cooperation with the home owner's association, the City was able to convince the owner to sell the property as is so that it could be repaired and finished.



In summary, we believe this Bill would give us an additional and better tool to help address these abandoned properties more quickly; before they get to the point where the only option is demolition. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or if you would like further information.

Best Regards,

Mark S. Wassom, P.E., CBO, CFM
Chief Building Official