

May 23, 2016

Dear Mayor Amyx and Lawrence City Commissioners,

The East 9th Street project is the first in Lawrence that imagines using placemaking as a development tool. The ambitious plan before you employs this new development tool by proposing dramatic changes to the use and design of this historic street, some of which would come into direct conflict with the way neighbors and small business people have used it for generations and continue to today. Although some of the stated goals of the project are laudable, the plan presented to you does not achieve them in a way that is equitable, cost effective and safe. It is out of synch with the character, history and practical use of the street, and it is not a pressing community need.

Accountability

This project began with a troubling lack of transparency, highlighted by the project organizers [unwillingness to share their plans or budget](#) with the public. (They claimed it was a private project, when in fact 85% of its cost would be paid for by taxpayers.) Today, the project is faced with equally serious questions about accountability. Former Mayor Farmer and the City Commissioners who championed this project are no longer in office. The city manager who facilitated the partnership between the Arts Center and the City resigned and took a new job in Colorado. And the CEO of the Arts Center who originated the idea for remaking 9th Street and who pushed it using all means necessary, has announced she is retiring before any potential work would begin. So this commission has inherited yet another expensive boutique project that strains our community's dwindling resources, while our commitment to more pressing community needs like affordable housing and mental healthcare are in desperate need of more support.

A flawed plan

The plan presented is deeply flawed. Late recognition by the design team that East 9th Street is a truck delivery route (many in the neighborhood had made this point for months) led the designers to present a plan that has major safety issues and places an undue burden on residents. It includes a completely new transportation infrastructure in addition to the street and sidewalks. This eight-foot wide concrete path would come into direct conflict with traffic at seven dangerous alley intersections, where cars have for decades driven to the edge of the street before turning, but now will have to stop way back in the alley so as to not collide with bicyclists. These proposed new alley intersections (many of them blind due to building obstructions) have major safety concerns that have not been addressed by a serious traffic study.

To make room for this recreational path (which is not supported in the [Pedestrian – Bicycle Issues Task Force Report](#) submitted to the City), the design team proposes to take away more than half of the residential parking (50+ spaces) in the project area. Taking away residential parking, in an area where many rely on it and where parking pressure in the neighborhood is increasing dramatically, is unacceptable. In addition, this heavy handed plan takes away residents access to green space for gardening, in favor of concrete boxes planted with native grasses. (This happens at the same time the City has passed a new ordinance encouraging citizens to use right of way easements for gardens.)

Cost: Evaluating wants vs. needs

85% of this proposed project would be paid for by taxpayers (2.7 million of 3.2 million – based on a low estimate of the total project cost). The recent evaluation of City spending and income compels citizens and the City to distinguish wants from needs. The proposed project does not address a serious need like affordable housing or mental health services. It is a want, a desire of a few, and an imposition for others. Currently, East 9th Street provides safe access for pedestrians, bikes, cars and trucks. The street also gives neighbors access to the green space adjacent to the street for gardening.

Time invested

The time invested in this process has been essential. Having the time to carefully evaluate the many proposed plans and whether or not they would be compatible with the street and its uses has given us the opportunity to make a good decision now. The time invested has also allowed neighbors and other stakeholders, who were not initially engaged or aware of the project, to learn about its goals, costs and potential impacts. Although difficult at times, this civic process has been instrumental in our ability to make a responsible decision about this complicated project.

Recommendation

This is a flawed and controversial plan. The plan is too costly at a time of belt-tightening. And, there are persistent and unanswered issues with accountability. For these reasons, the City should not move forward with phase II of this project. Instead, we encourage the City to do what a consensus of the community can agree on - basic street resurfacing, filling-in lighting gaps, making sidewalk repairs where needed (including one sidewalk improved to ADA standards) and addressing water runoff into East 9th Street intersections.

As a community, we need to put equity before extras, and people values before property values. Making this tough decision is the right thing to do. It will save precious financial resources for more pressing community needs, and will ensure that East 9th Street continues to be the affordable, historic, and beloved place for residents, neighbors and small businesses that it has been for generations.

Thank you,

Marty Olson	416 East 9 th St., business owner
Tom Patchen	9 th & New Jersey, business owner
Charles Naramore	416 East 9 th St., resident
Kristen Vermeire	416 East 9 th St., resident
Phil Collison	9 th & Pennsylvania, property owner
Chris Ogle	9 th & Pennsylvania, property owner
Dave Loewenstein	411 East 9 th , business owner
Arch Naramore	9 th & New Jersey, property owner
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Sarah Rooney	Lane Eisenbart	Jensen Pratt Llc
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