



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURE

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22 June 2015

City Commissioners
City Hall
P.O. Box 708
Lawrence, KS 66044

Dear Commissioners:

We are writing on behalf of the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, a national people-powered movement mobilizing creativity for social justice. Our work is animated by a strong commitment to cultural democracy, recognizing that everyone has a right to take part in and shape the cultural life of their own community, and that the best solutions to our social challenges emerge from those most directly engaged and affected by them.

USDAC Cultural Agents and Citizen Artists live and work in towns and cities across the United States, including Cultural Agent Dave Loewenstein and many local Citizen Artists in Lawrence. On a recent site visit to the Lawrence Field office, Chief Instigator Adam Horowitz was able to visit East Lawrence, meeting with local residents and learning firsthand about their community and their concerns.

What is happening in Lawrence, with East Lawrence community members contesting the approach underlying the Ninth Street Corridor Project, is not unique. Across the country, we are seeing advocates of community preservation rooted in diverse, resourceful, low- and middle-income housing come into conflict with a community development model that fails to recognize the cultural assets of an established community as valuable social capital.

As Commissioners, you have the opportunity to stand for humane values against a notion of beautification that devalues both tangible and intangible heritage. East Lawrence is a residential neighborhood with a high degree of civic participation, as East Lawrence Neighborhood Association (ELNA) involvement in this process has demonstrated. The statement of shared values put forward by ELNA reflects serious concern for the future of the community, valuing diversity, inclusion, equity, and heritage.

TOGETHER, WE CREATE.



We urge you to endorse the recommendations put forward by more than 60 community members, calling for three modifications to be adopted before the Ninth Street Corridor Plan can be accepted:

- To recognize and be guided by the ELNA statement of values;
- To adopt a locally grounded Artist Participation Model that invests in local artists and contributes to the sustainability of Lawrence’s impressive arts community; and
- To apply a conservation overlay district to the neighborhood as a significant older area that requires preservation and protection.

No long-term good can come from a plan that is supported by developers and implemented over the objections of the people who are directly affected. Across the country, there are countless stories of such displacement resulting in housing former residents cannot afford, businesses that local enterprise can’t compete with, and a profound sense of loss for everyone who has come to know and cherish the cultural fabric which took so long to weave, and was so quick to unravel.

These recommendations are asking you to slow down and reflect on all the consequences—even the unintended ones you may not be able to predict—of this plan. If you adopt them, you will be able to proceed in a far more collaborative spirit and give these important decisions the time they take. We urge you to do so.

Sincerely,



Arlene Goldbard
Chief Policy Wonk



Adam Horowitz
Chief Instigator