

Mr. Gregory Wolf, Chair
City of Prairie Village Planning Commission
Prairie Village, KS 66208

Dear Chairman Wolf and Planning Commission Members,

We first want to thank you for your service to our community. We listened to last night's meeting, and it's apparent to us that too many Prairie Village residents are unfamiliar with the critical role you play in giving guidance to our City Council. We do understand, and greatly appreciate the time and effort your position requires. Accordingly, the AD Hoc Committee housing recommendations and potential changes to our zoning regulations have unleashed unprecedented reaction from our community. We have all witnessed months of rational and often times emotional appeal before our City Council. Unfortunately, there continues to exist a push by a few to make this about racism, exclusion and reconciliation. Regardless of its place in the national spotlight, for Prairie Village, we believe this issue should not be distracted by calls for social justice. It is simply too fundamental for political posturing.

We all know that early Prairie Village plats were filed under shameful deed restrictions. We must, however, acknowledge that notwithstanding the developer, the plan that has evolved as Prairie Village is nothing short of inspired. In fact, in 1949 the National Association of Homebuilders named Prairie Village as "The Best Complete Planned Community in America".

By the mid-1950s, the final boundaries of Prairie Village were determined. We were to remain landlocked and small, and as our city matured, the accolades continued. In 1976, Bob Meneilly wrote "Love at First Sight". In 2005 the KC Star named Prairie Village one of the five best suburban cities in the region, and as recent as 2018, Mayor Wassmer's Citizen Survey found that 93% of Prairie Village residents approved of our City's image. None of this would be possible, nor sustainable, if ours was a City of racists and social NIMBYS. For eight decades, thousands of families and countless Planning Commissioners, City Council members and Mayors have lived in and served this community in support of the plan, not the developer. They were and are not racists. Neither is our City. With all due respect to comments made, "Prairie Village is not broken" and "our community was not built on bias."

Those who believe that supporting new zoning regulations will finally rid Prairie Village of the stain of JC Nichols, don't choose to understand the reality of what for years has made ours a great community. Designated single family and multi-family neighborhoods, walkability to clearly-defined shopping/business districts, schools and houses of worship prove the desirability and long-term viability of our current zoning regulations. Good planning is color blind. Good planning includes affordability, as currently exists in Prairie Village. And good zoning promotes citizen participation. It's time to focus on workable solutions.

The 2021 Johnson County Housing Study was a worthy undertaking. It was long overdue. It represents the most comprehensive assessment of housing needs and means to housing affordability in our region's history. The big question for Prairie Village is what part can we play in the big picture of realistic participation? The issue of housing affordability has challenged cities, design professionals and developers/builders for decades. It is not a new phenomenon, and as such, our City cannot overreact with trendy zoning and planning ideas. It must respond with rational and appropriate solutions tailored to our capabilities, limitations and most importantly, the expressed desires of our residents.

The 2020 Census indicates a total of 10,400 housing units in Prairie Village, and a density of nearly 3,600 people per square mile. It is one of the densest cities in Johnson County. Prairie Village rental rates begin at \$850.00/month for one-bedroom apartments and \$1,100.00/month for two-bedroom apartments. There are over 550 one and two-bedroom apartments that rent at or under \$1,400.00/month. Based on the 2020 Prairie Village area median income, these apartments are priced well-below the threshold for attainability. In fact, the average monthly rent for all Prairie Village apartments is \$1,612.00. Even this average equates to a required annual income of below the Prairie Village AMI. Recently, Realtor.com posted twenty apartments and single-family homes for rent in Prairie Village, with home rentals starting at \$1,600.00/month. This indicates that AMI-adjusted attainable apartment and single-family housing options are currently available in our community. Of note, the Prairie Village AMI is about 4% less than that of Johnson County, and these numbers are subject to change.

In 2022, Olathe added 970 acres to its land area. DeSoto annexed 6,400 acres to accommodate anticipated employment at the new Panasonic plant. Overland Park has approved nearly Five Billion in mixed use development, which includes thousands of multi-family units. Other Johnson County cities are also growing rapidly, as are cities in Jackson, Cass and Platte counties. These high-growth cities have the capability to move the needle on attainable housing, for what the UCS study defines as a regional issue.

And while available land allows these cities to best provide comprehensive housing solutions, ensuing growth creates the problems of traffic congestion, high-rise construction, inadequate infrastructure, crime, burdened city services and over-crowded schools. It may be easy to take for granted what we have in Prairie Village, but we shouldn't. We are unique. We live in a community worth nurturing, and we can continue to provide attainable housing solutions without losing what makes us special. There is simply no compelling reason to invite the potential problems associated with more density.

Nor is there a compelling reason for Prairie Village to ever consider By-Right zoning. The loss of property rights should never be tolerated in our zoning regulations. Removing impediments to entitlement will not create more affordable land, nor will it overcome the lack of significant development opportunity. We all remember that only a few years ago, a group of concerned neighbors were strongly opposed to the first proposal for Mission Chateau. The use was not the issue, but rather the size and scale of the plan. And never was that opposition based on attempts to discriminate or exclude. Determined opposition prevailed only because of their

right to legal notice, their right to a public hearing, their right to oppose a submitted plan and their right to file a protest petition. These rights were responsible for a better development for the immediate neighborhood and the City. Just ask Mayor Mikkelsen. He attended our meetings, supported our cause and stood with us through the process. Stakeholder's rights are a community's voice that should never be silenced.

My family has developed attainable housing for over thirty years. Regardless of the city, one of the first questions asked during pre-app meetings with city staff is, "Have you met with your neighbors?" There is a reason for this, and developers understand and accept this requirement/responsibility, as well as the risks associated with due diligence costs. Developers must have "skin in the game", they must be incentivised to promote a worthy plan and work towards compromise with those impacted. Removing these impediments, as By-Right calls them, and the due-process rights of citizens, grants far too much process control to a city council. Our entitlement system is not broken, and By-Right zoning is unnecessary.

No one denies Prairie Village must do its part to contribute to attainable housing. We believe we are. We also believe the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendation to enhance repair grants for those who wish to improve their existing home and stay in Prairie Village is a justified incentive that maintains attainable housing stock. In fact, the UCS study identifies eleven measures for success, of which six are helped or achieved by repair grants. Prairie Village United continues to encourage our City Council to engage with apartment community owners and offer similar grants in exchange for decreased rental rates, qualifying more units as attainable. There will be opportunities that arise, where the City could pursue the development of obsolete church and/or school sites. And while underused commercial parking lots are also potential areas for redevelopment to multifamily use, Prairie Village should avoid the temptation of high-rise construction. What may work in Overland Park is not the answer for Prairie Village. Regardless, we don't believe any new development should be allowed without the rightful input of affected property owners.

Prairie Village already has the means and methods to monitor and enhance our attainable housing. For eight decades our zoning regulations have worked. There is simply no compelling reason to change now, and there is no evidence that By-Right zoning, ADU's or undermining existing R-1 or R-2 neighborhoods is necessary or will achieve any real results. The erosion of workable, proven zoning regulations is not the answer. Growing cities with an abundance of available land are the logical nexus for meeting attainable housing demand, now and in the future. We can and will do our part, and we will always be a welcoming community. We just cannot abandon what makes us so desirable, and Zillow's number one searched city.

Thank you and best regards,

Todd and Jan Bleakley