

September 26, 2016

Dear City Commissioners,

I co-own the "key contributing" property in the proposed Johnson Block Historic District. Please consider this letter my formal objection to the creation of the district.

My wife and I take pride in owning and maintaining our old house, and it's evident from a quick drive up and down the 800 block of Missouri and Arkansas Streets that our neighbors feel the same pride in their homes.

On its surface, the creation of a new historic district might seem like an exciting honor. The neighborhood would receive a new title, and that could make residents feel more connected to neighbors, to history.

However, digging a little deeper, the historic district designation brings added scrutiny by the city and by a city-appointed advisory board. This is above and beyond what is required of us and nearly all other Lawrence homeowners.

So what does this historic district designation do for us? It doesn't prevent objectionable structures from being built (ie, The Oread Hotel, including its mobile phone towers, in the environs of the Hancock Historic District), nor does it guarantee that structures will be preserved as intended (ie, Varsity House). It's a title and a burden.

I oppose the creation of this new historic district for two primary reasons.

First, I feel that the reasons for nomination are weak. It's the celebration of a block of land developed by a speculator over the course of 20 years, and its primary characteristic is a defined, mandatory setback between each house and the street. Sure, there are some wonderful old homes here, but their general ages and styles do not make them especially unique.

Second, I don't think it's fair to enact special rules and regulations that dictate what I or my fellow district neighbors can do to our properties. The average Lawrence homeowner doesn't have to follow this burdensome process. If the city is truly interested in historic preservation, it could better advance the idea by offering incentives, like property tax breaks, to offset the homeowners' burden.

There is no compelling reason to form this historic district. We're given only an honorary title, derived from questionable reasoning, which requires us to spend additional time and money to win approval from the city, for which we receive no real incentives. The obligations outweigh the benefits.

I ask that each of you vote against the proposal to create the Johnson Block Historic District.

Sincerely,



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