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TO: Lawrence Steering Committee for City-Wide Cultural Plan

FROM:

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RE: Our Guiding Vision of the Spirit and Character of Lawrence

Walking Toward a Bolder Future

Lawrence is a proud, diverse, resilient, intellectually curious and weirdly interesting community. Lawrence takes great pride in the quality and level of its citizen engagement as it shapes its future while honoring its illustrious past and celebrating its ongoing accomplishments. This is a community that truly believes that it takes a village to sustain an interesting, honest and compassionate community. The citizens of Lawrence are committed to maintaining their unique ethical fortitude and the rich social, cultural, and recreational amenities it provides residents and visitors.

People of Lawrence are passionate about their eclectic, opinion-rich community that has stayed true to its local roots. Fighting off various attempts to bring big box stores or chains downtown, it has built a varied and unique local culture that draws people to visit, live and do business. Lawrence weaves together local enterprises, a rich tradition of higher education, and its fascinating historical background. The community sits within the larger fabric of metropolitan Kansas City 40 minutes down the road and within a state political environment that challenges Lawrence's values. Lawrencians have grit, determination and heart.

Now, with the Horizon 2020 plan being shaped along with other planning efforts underway, Lawrence is positioning itself for a future that is sustainable for its people, its industry, its cultural ethos, and its economic prosperity. The community is both identifying the important dots that represent who it is as well as working to connect those dots in a fashion that keeps its character alive in a place that resonates with its unique spirit.

Guided by a Rich and Layered History

History is deeply embedded in Lawrence's present and will be in its future. The Lawrence of today co-exists with the complicated and sometimes contentious Lawrence of the past. As part of a rich agricultural area, the community's history is present in memory as well as in physical structures, the stone with which buildings are

made, and in the names of streets and places of significance. *Embattled Lawrence* (by Dennis Domer and Barbara Watkins, 2001) is but one of many historical books about the community, a title chosen to represent the struggles experienced by residents from pre-history, to the 1850s and 60s, to more recent battles over development and preservation. Through the millennia of known settlement, Lawrence fought its way into existence and continues to fight for what is best and just.

The Kansas River figures prominently in the foundations of Lawrence yet in the modern era it hasn't dominated life like in so many other river cities. The age of the river is amplified by fossils found on its banks and bed during low water. It supplied fish and transportation for earlier residents but in the past 150 years steamboats and other vessels discovered it's too unpredictable for navigation. The dam at Lawrence is now the only waterpower source in the state of Kansas, yet the river has not been fully embraced as have so many other waterfronts in American cities. Only recently have trail systems developed to bring it into wider consciousness as a major asset.

Informed by an Engaged, Participative and Intellectually Active Citizenry

Lawrence is a very active community. There are lots of opportunities to take part in a wide variety of events and organizations. The people of Lawrence like being visitors in their own hometown, enjoying basketball, creative and cultural activities, parades, festivals, farmers markets, local pubs and restaurants, artisan foods and brews. Folks actively participate in personal growth opportunities, demonstrating a commitment to lifelong learning. City government meetings now occur weekly because there is so much interest in participating in the process of making community 'work'. Curiosity is a highly prized and very active attribute in Lawrence, and it is rewarded with a respect for engagement. Fitness is a serious pursuit for many and more so as a social, group, or team activity than in most cities. Running groups, biking groups, kickball teams, and a variety of races were cited. Development of social capital comes in many forms in Lawrence.

Residents of Lawrence in the 19th and 20th centuries fought for the unique character of Lawrence and today's Lawrence is not about to let them down. An activist element is present and accounted for. There is strong involvement in organizing for the greater good. People strongly form ideas and opinions and aren't afraid to share them, but commit to working things out in the long run. In Lawrence, you can disagree vehemently and remain steadfast friends. As someone quoted, "we have two important P's that go together – participation and process". Lawrence is a highly participative community that values a respectful process, even if that means protracted or time-challenged decisions.

The transient nature of most of the populations of the University of Kansas (KU), Haskell Indian Nations University and other higher education facilities means that there is always new blood circulating throughout Lawrence – students, staff and faculty. There is a constant revitalization of ways of thinking, world views, political perspectives, life experiences and that adds to the richness of people who live, work

and play in Lawrence. Intellectual pursuits and general intellectual curiosity are highly valued.

KU has a strong influence on the entire community. Many believe that the 'town-gown' relationship is a healthy one and others continue to strive to the relationship. From the first classes at the University in 1866, students became well integrated into the community. Many in recent decades prefer to remain in Lawrence after graduation. The fact that no on-campus housing was built for students until 1923 may have contributed to establishing that culture. KU alumni are a well-regarded asset for the Lawrence area. The KU community is global and highly educated. It brings a multi-national and multi-disciplined connectedness into the area.

The Haskell University of today is the result of additional battles – tireless efforts of the American Indian community to create an institution that is about sharing tradition and knowledge across tribal communities and with the rest of the world. It is no longer the “training school” for Native people as it was founded by the U.S. government in 1884. The cultural and intellectual richness of Haskell, and the desire for greater connections and exchanges of knowledge, add to the overall wealth of experience available to the people of Lawrence.

Not to be underrated congruent with the intellectual prowess of KU, the devotion to KU basketball borders on the insane. Local, alumnae, and national devotion to the Jayhawks is legendary and each home game brings thousands of people to Lawrence. Connecting these participants to other Lawrence activities, such as staying overnight to enjoy a fine local dining experience or participate in a creative activity is seen by many to be a potential significant growth opportunity.

Challenged by Place

There are challenges with the historic role of place in Lawrence. As in most communities, there is a geographic division of sensibilities and loyalties. Original residents from indigenous tribes were pushed out and replaced by many eastern tribes in the early 1800s. They were displaced again, pushed south to Oklahoma. Emigrants from Massachusetts who came to help build a Free State were challenged by neighbors with opposing views, but they fought to stay. In the current era, students coming to Haskell and KU sometimes feel welcomed, sometimes not. East Lawrence retains a different mindset and economic platform than West Lawrence. The railroad and floodplains of the Kansas River form a boundary for East Lawrence and much of the newer development has gone west. North Lawrence, once an independent municipality, was annexed by Lawrence. People, places, and enterprises remain dynamic and in motion.

The Free State designation and spirit, proudly worn for 150 years, brings challenges as well. Not all American Indians and African Americans in Lawrence feel fully included and empowered to this day. Liberal, inclusive rhetoric can seem tired, if not hollow. Struggles to achieve the communities stated values are not over.

There can sometimes be challenges with location of cultural amenities too. On the one hand, more cultural activities on the west side of Lawrence has given more accessibility and participation from those residents while on the other hand, some people are committed to downtown being the center of cultural and creative activity. Development and change downtown and on the 9th Street Corridor represent one current challenge. Haskell and KU both maintain their respective campuses outside central business and residential districts, and notwithstanding efforts to connect ‘town and gown’, they remaining largely self-contained.

“Not Just Anywhere USA”: A Distinctive Pride

Lawrence purposefully prides itself on being ‘weird’ and is not giving up that title to Portland or Austin anytime soon! Permission to be ‘weird’ and to accept and enjoy the weirdness about each other – is a mark of accomplishment. Embracing differences is such that being open with each other and seeking common ground is considered a community art form. Some have said they ‘live together in parallel with differences’. Lawrence is very comfortable with diversity and yet the ethnic and racial connections are not nearly as demonstrable as how well the diverse economic, professional and philosophical approaches live together. Many people in Lawrence believe with a sincere heart that there are opportunities to be better integrated, and to be more holistically unified. Even with the underlying commitment to tolerance and acceptance, many admit they just don’t know how to go about better integrating Lawrence.

The diversity of ways people in Lawrence express themselves reveals the richness of the community’s cultural and creative life. For a community the size of Lawrence, the number and quality of creative activities and organizations is astounding. From the historically rich artist community centered in East Lawrence connecting with the newly developing Warehouse District to the downtown renaissance including Lawrence Arts Center, Liberty Hall, the new Library, and renovated Carnegie building to the beautifully cultural campus of Haskell and KU and to the increased cultural offerings in West Lawrence with Theatre Lawrence, the community of Lawrence is a rich and varied cultural mecca for the region.

Pride is also reflected in the visible support of a strong LGBT community – both on and off campus. The culture of Lawrence is one that fosters openly expressing who you are and provides a unique surround of support. Having said that, there is an identifiable push-pull between the old and young, the big vision and the grassroots. The very grit that pushed back on big box development encroaching on downtown can also display itself pushing back when something comes along that calls for out of the box thinking, a different vision. The current development of the 9th Street Corridor is an example of a cultural process that has folks ‘positioning’ between preserving heritage, history and ways of life, developing the next generation of creative businesses, and bringing more people to live in the eminently walkable and active downtown. Based on its historical patterns, there is an inherent tension between what is and what could be

in Lawrence. As new economic opportunities are sought to ensure a sustainable community, this tension will have a tendency to magnify. A fair and well-considered process as well as creative solutions require more time and extraordinary efforts for all parties to sit at the same table.

It seems that many have long memories and are challenged to relinquish their point of view. In order to move the community forward, resolving differences with animated civility will need clarity of expectations and a willingness to accept the will of the people when a consensus is clear.

Living with Intention

Lawrence is a community that lives with intention. It knows there is value in being close to Kansas City but it is clear about carving out its unique small town experience. No one needs to be anonymous in Lawrence and yet there are always more people to get to know. The community provides endless opportunities to refresh residents' thinking, revitalize the spirit and re-calibrate views.

Lawrence is a compassionate, nurturing community. It is a great place for families and kids. It's a community that cares deeply about others. Like other cities, it accommodates homeless and mentally ill. However, like few others, it responds in a caring and inclusive way. As the community as a whole struggles to find solutions, individuals step up to help and to advocate. Lawrence pays attention to voices not just check books – the community is less governed by the pocket book, although as economic challenges increase the tension between check book and voice intensifies. The people of Lawrence listen and share stories.

People living in Lawrence support each other. Artists watch out for each other; the community has a priority commitment to making the community a safe and interesting place for young people to find a home and for seniors to retire; and people are deeply committed to the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

Lawrence is also planning its future with intention. The focus of the Chamber of Commerce and economic development efforts looks to nurture homegrown business, to support entrepreneurs, and to work in partnership. The long range planning activities; the creative placemaking initiatives of 9th Street Corridor and Free State Festival; the development of the Warehouse District; the Busker Festival; the growth of the Freedom Frontier National Heritage Area; development in West Lawrence; new leadership of Visit Lawrence and the Chamber, along with other developments are spearheading a new era of purposeful growth and change.

There is no place like Lawrence and the good folks of Lawrence are deeply committed to keeping it that way!