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Neighborhood Planning and Development Committee
City Hall
414 E. 12th St
Kansas City, MO 64106-2702

Re: Ordinance # 250871 – Norman School Historic District

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Randy Hite, and I live at 3708 Pennsylvania Avenue in the Valentine neighborhood, just south of the proposed Norman School Historic District. My husband and I have lived in the neighborhood for 28 years.

I'm writing to express my strong support for the listing of the Norman School Historic District in the Kansas City Register of Historic Places.

Over the last several months, I've spoken with my neighbors who live within the proposed district about the benefits of local historic designation, and I've encouraged them to support this effort.

Our home is a three-story Kansas City Shirtwaist-style house with a red tile roof, built in 1907. We love living in a home that's over 100 years old. It's very similar to the homes in the Norman School Historic District, as they were built around the same time.

When I moved to the neighborhood, I joined the Valentine Neighborhood Association and have been an active member ever since. I learned about its history from fellow members, including how the Association was formed in the 1970s in response to the Kansas City Life Insurance Company's plan to demolish our historic homes using eminent domain.

Thankfully, the neighborhood stood up, fought back at City Hall, and saved our homes from that destruction. But after that, Kansas City Life started buying up properties, becoming a landlord, and occasionally demolishing homes in the neighborhood. The houses they owned were easy to spot—they were often the worst-looking ones on the block, due to poor maintenance and neglect.

A few years ago, Kansas City Life demolished the entire row of Knickerbocker Apartments—several historic six-plex buildings, lining Knickerbocker Place.

These apartments were built in 1909 and were considered luxury living at the time, with amenities like fireplaces and beautiful natural woodwork. They were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2003.

Then, just last October, Kansas City Life demolished 23 more historic structures between 33rd and 35th Streets, from Southwest Trafficway to Pennsylvania Avenue. That area is now nearly vacant.

Less than 2 weeks ago, Kansas City Life demolished 4 more buildings, one at 3525 Jefferson, and 3 buildings at 36th St and Summit, right on Southwest Trafficway. Two of those buildings were historic six-plex colonnade apartment buildings that Kansas City is famous for.

This recent wave of destruction is exactly why the Norman School Historic District is now seeking historic designation—to join the surrounding neighborhoods like Coleman Highlands, Roanoke, Volker, and Hyde Park, which already have this local historic protection.

The Norman School neighborhood has the same history and architectural character as its neighboring districts. The only difference between those neighborhoods and this one is simply timing—this district is just now asking for the recognition it has long deserved.

The property demolitions and vacant lots erode the integrity of this historic neighborhood, contributing to reduced property values, increased crime, and urban blight.

Providing our neighborhood with local historic designation would give us a tool to protect our neighborhood from further decline due to demolitions. It would also ensure that future development in the neighborhood aligns with our community values, and fits with the character and style of the historic buildings in the district.

The time to act to strengthen our historic neighborhood is now, and we are asking for your help to do it.

I respectfully urge the Committee to recommend adding the Norman School Historic District to the Kansas City Register of Historic Places.

Respectfully,

Randy Hite