



# KC TENANTS PEOPLE'S HOUSING PLATFORM

## THE PROBLEMS

**AFFORDABILITY:** Almost half of our city are renters. In Kansas City, a worker earning minimum wage would have to work over 92 hours a week, or 2.3 full time jobs, in order to afford a two-bedroom.<sup>1</sup> Evictions on the basis of rent non-payment are at an all-time high.<sup>2</sup> As rents rise, demand for truly affordable housing far outpaces the supply. We are all living one emergency away from an eviction. That's not right.

**EVICITION:** 42 evictions are filed per day in Jackson County. Landlords win 99.8% of evictions in court. Race is the biggest predictor of whether or not you'll be evicted in Kansas City. Evictions on our records make it harder still to rent a decent home; we are trapped in homelessness or unsafe circumstances. Evictions make our kids change or miss school. Evictions are both a cause and a condition of poverty. That's not right.

**ACCESS:** Over 13,600 people are on the waiting list for years to receive federal housing assistance in Kansas City, waiting for either Section 8 or public housing.<sup>3</sup> 88% of us on the list are extremely low income. Many landlords also don't accept Section 8 vouchers, even if we have them. We can't afford fair market rent, but there's no public assistance for us, leaving us to rent from slumlords. That's not right.

**HEALTH:** Our apartments are filled with mold. Sewage leaks out of our pipes. Gaps above and beneath our doors let in the cold. Bugs infest our homes. Too often, when we call for inspection, our justice isn't served. Our landlords aren't held accountable. Housing insecurity can separate us from health care providers, and impacts our mental health. Our housing is making us sick. It's making our kids sick. That's not right.

**ABUSIVE AND UNACCOUNTABLE LANDLORDS:** We all have experiences with landlords who have threatened us, harassed us, or exploited our vulnerabilities. Many of us have rented from landlords who obscure their identities with LLCs and run their properties like corporations, without regard for our lives, nor accountability to our city.<sup>4</sup> There's almost no enforced landlord regulation. Instead, they are treated as though they're above the law. That's not right.

**SPECULATION AND VACANCY:** Our city is being bought and sold by out-of-state investors and private equity outfits based in New York, California, and even China. These speculators are horrible neighbors, bad landlords, and-along with luxury developers downtown-they falsely inflate prices and sit on vacant properties. That's not right.

**DEMOLITION:** Our city has spent \$10 million to demolish buildings deemed dangerous, a list of about 800 properties.<sup>5</sup> Why are we investing our money in demolition instead of preservation? That's not right.

**HOMELESSNESS:** Over 1,798 people experience homelessness in Kansas City on a given night.<sup>6</sup> The numbers we have to represent homelessness don't account for the thousands of us who are between shelters and hotels, cars and friends' couches. More of us are chronically homeless, and we're mostly invisible to the rest of KC. That's not right.

**GENTRIFICATION AND DISPLACEMENT:** Our families are being uprooted and moved further from schools, jobs, and transportation as our neighborhoods gentrify. Even worse, Kansas City lures developers to downtown and our neighborhoods with tax breaks that we the people pay for and that cost our schools money that we don't have to spend. These decisions are made behind closed doors, and through barely-secret pay-to-play deals. That's not right.

**RACIAL INEQUITY:** Kansas City is haunted by a history of racial segregation, restrictive covenants, redlining, predatory lending, and disinvestment. KC disseminated racist housing practices across the country. Kansas City's communities of color, especially Black communities, experience disproportionate impacts of each of these problems. That's not right.

We face an undeniable moral crisis. None of this is right, and it's not inevitable. **Kansas City must do better.**

<sup>1</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition. Out of Reach. 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Kansas City Eviction Project. Eviction in Kansas City: An Analysis of 2017 Eviction Filings in Jackson County, MO. June 2017.

<sup>3</sup> KSHB Kansas City. More than 13,000 waiting for affordable housing in Kansas City. January 31, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> The New York Times. Anonymous Owner, L.L.C.: Why It Has Become So Easy to Hide in the Housing Market. April 30, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> KSHB Kansas City. \$10M Plan to Get Rid of Dangerous Buildings. February 11, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Greater Kansas City Coalition to End Homelessness. Point in Time Count. 2018.

## THE SOLUTIONS

KC Tenants want to see the next Mayor and City Council enact a housing strategy that:

**IS VISIONARY AND COMPREHENSIVE:** What would it take to guarantee that every person in Kansas City had access to a truly and permanently affordable, accessible, and safe home? When the next Mayor and Council imagine solutions to our housing crisis, they should begin with this question, and enact a comprehensive strategy to guarantee a safe, accessible, and truly affordable home for everyone in KC.

**IS A RACIAL JUSTICE INTERVENTION:** While each progressive housing policy can be thought of as a racial justice intervention, we must also craft policies with explicit racial justice outcomes. Kansas City must pursue reparations for decades of racist policy, and we must adopt a racial justice impact assessment for each housing policy.

**PRIORITIZES PEOPLE OVER PROFIT:** Any conversation about housing in Kansas City must prioritize people and our needs. It can't start with incentives for developers and landlords. Money must not dictate our housing policy.

**IS ADEQUATELY FUNDED:** Kansas City has proposed spending just 5% of the city budget on housing policy and programs in 2019.<sup>7</sup> Recent proposals have called for more, but the numbers being discussed still wouldn't cut it. Housing plays a fundamental role in our communities. It warrants becoming the next Mayor's marquee project, and it will require a corresponding investment of political capital and financial capital, in the order of billions.

**FACILITATES COMMUNITY CONTROL:** A citywide housing strategy must not come at the expense of neighborhood-specific policies. Our neighborhoods that have suffered the most from decades of neglect, gentrification, uneven investment, and displacement should receive particular focus, and the leadership within those neighborhoods should be empowered to make decisions about what we need.

We demand that each candidate for Mayor and City Council publicly address our specific proposals:

**TENANT PROTECTIONS:** To protect tenants from discrimination or exploitation in the rental market, Kansas City must enshrine our rights into law and provide the funding to adequately enforce them.

- **Tenant Bill of Rights:** Kansas City needs a comprehensive tenant bill of rights, enshrining the rights to decent housing, to organize, relocation assistance in the event of a forced move, right to counsel in a landlord-tenant matter, protection from retaliation, first refusal of sale, and more. Such a bill must also protect tenants against signing exploitative leases and rent-to-own agreements, and it must provide adequate funding to enforce these rights. Landlords must be required to provide the Bill of Rights to their tenants upon the beginning of tenancy.
- **Emergency Relief:** Kansas City must work with counties through the region to issue eviction moratoriums during extreme weather. Moratoriums could also decrease the most destabilizing evictions, like those during the school year. Kansas City must establish a citywide emergency rental assistance program to stop evictions caused by illness, job loss, and other emergencies. This program should be open to anyone in need, especially people owing less than a month's rent.
- **Eviction Remediation:** Tenants need options after an eviction. Kansas City can establish a program to scrub eviction records after a certain period of time, or after a remediation course. Kansas City must also establish a list of reputable landlords to whom to refer evicted tenants.
- **Ban the Box:** Finding housing with a criminal record or after serving time in prison is often difficult if not impossible. People of color, disproportionately impacted by America's incarceration system, feel the residual impacts in the rental market the most. Kansas City has passed a "ban the box" measure and must ensure that it is enforced in the rental market.

**PUBLIC FUNDING AND SUPPLY:** To ensure a place for poor people, communities of color, and workers in Kansas City, we need to fund housing policy and programs through organized public investment.

- **Housing Trust Fund:** \$75 million is not enough. 5,000 affordable units will not be enough. Recent research shows a shortage of at least 21,852 housing units with rents less than \$500 a month. That shortage is only growing. Other cities are committing much more to their Trust Funds, and we need to follow suit. Washington D.C. has committed \$100 million annually.<sup>8</sup> A Fund must be capitalized with the goal of *solving for* homelessness and *solving for* the demand for truly affordable units within the next decade. We need a yearly commitment from the City's general fund, as well as leveraged tax dollars to fund the bold housing interventions that we desperately need in Kansas City. The Fund should prioritize long-term affordability, rehabilitative programs for people with prior evictions, and community control.

<sup>7</sup> KCMO Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Fiscal Year 2019-20 Submitted Budget. February 2019.

<sup>8</sup> DC Department of Housing and Community Development. Housing Production and Trust Fund. 2018.

- **Public Purchase:** Kansas City can impede displacement by purchasing affordable housing stock before speculation or demolition. Public financing can support cooperative ownership models, like community land trusts or limited-equity co-ops, that promote self-determination and long-term affordability for low-income residents.<sup>9</sup> Public purchase offers an opportunity to invest in weatherization, renewable energy, and green materials.
- **Public Housing:** Chronic underfunding and public stigma have left public housing in a perilous state. Kansas City can and should invest in existing public housing stock and in its expansion, as other cities have done.<sup>10</sup> Also, Hundreds of Kansas City federally-subsidized apartments will soon lose their rent restrictions as affordability terms expire. Kansas City must step in to pay for extended rent restriction terms.
- **Rental Rehabilitation Loan Program:** City Hall has leveraged Community Reinvestment Act funds to rehabilitate owner-occupied housing. Kansas City should create a loan pool, with its own funds and capital from local banks, for rental rehabilitation and enforce a long term affordability standard for all rental units funded through the program.

**MARKET REGULATION:** To reduce the negative impacts of development and real estate speculation, Kansas City must regulate the housing market.

- **Citywide Community Benefits Agreement (CBA):** CBAs secure housing and worker benefits, but the process can take a long time and drain resources of community organizations. Detroit passed a citywide CBA in 2016.<sup>11</sup> Kansas City should adopt a citywide CBA ordinance that would apply to any development over \$15 million.
- **Net Gain Requirement:** Kansas City should adopt a “net gain” requirement that mandates one-to-two or even one-to-three replacement of affordable units lost by development. Community oversight committees should determine what type of replacement housing (i.e. family housing, SROs, wheelchair accessible units) get built and where, in order to ensure that this policy meets the most pressing community needs.
- **LLC Registration and Corporate Landlord Regulation:** Kansas City should enforce existing LLC registration requirements to hold owners accountable to fulfilling their obligations to their tenants and neighbors. Even better, Kansas City should levy anti-speculation taxes to discourage the practice and to supplement the Housing Trust Fund and support local, community-controlled affordable housing.<sup>12</sup>
- **Rent Control:** Rent control is currently preempted by Missouri state law, as it is in many other states. Kansas City leaders should advocate to lift the statewide ban and should explore municipal rent control options.

**STRUCTURAL REFORM:** To address imbalance of power in decision-making about housing policy, Kansas City must account for conflicts of interest.

- **Developer Dollars Ban:** Developers, realtors, landlords, and their attorneys buy undue influence in municipal elections and local policymaking. This pay-to-play system buys them contracts, favorable zoning agreements, tax breaks, and more. Kansas City must ban campaign contributors from dealing with zoning boards and planning committees for at least four years after a contribution. Mayoral and City Council candidates should reject developer, landlord, and real estate contributions in 2019.
- **Community Organizing:** Community organizing builds power among the people closest to the problem and therefore closest to the solutions. Kansas City and all candidates for public office should support local organizing efforts and ensure that affected communities influence housing policy, beyond one-off community engagement sessions. Nothing about us without us.

**We expect that all candidates for Mayor and City Council issue a public response to our platform.** We want to see your commitment to our People’s Housing Platform and KC Tenants.

## KC TENANTS

Kansas City Tenants (KC Tenants) is a new organization led by a multiracial base of tenants in Kansas City. We know that poor people and communities of color will not be able to live in KC if we fail to imagine and win systemic change. KC Tenants are organizing to ensure that everyone in KC has a safe, accessible, and truly affordable home. Our theory of change is that the people closest to the problems are closest to the solutions. This platform is the product of 750+ conversations with renters in KC, three community workshops, and edits from local lawyers, professors, and advocates.

Contact us on our website [kctenants.org](http://kctenants.org) or email [tara@kctenants.org](mailto:tara@kctenants.org).

<sup>9</sup> Shelterforce. Will Limited-Equity Cooperatives Make a Comeback? April 25, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Wall Street Journal. New York City Housing Authority is Repairing Apartments, Mayor Says. September 4, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> City of Detroit. What is Community Benefits Ordinance? 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Haas Institute. Anti-Speculation Tax. 2015.