



March 14, 2019

Senator Rick Wilborn, Chairman  
Senate Judiciary Committee

Dear Senator Wilborn:

The City of Wichita is experiencing a plague of copper thefts across our community. City facilities and major walking corridors are being attacked more than any other area. This is at a conservative cost of over \$400,000 in materials and over \$200,000 in contractor repairs, which is tax payer's dollars and has rendered many of our lighting systems and safety measures for lighting useless due to the cost of repairs. We have received many complaints from our citizens and we are using many resources to solve this issues such as police time, staff time and responding to our citizens. These are all unbudgeted resources which takes away from other needed services.

Due to the lack of control over the scrap yards and lack of accountability in securing information from those recycling the copper material, we have seen a huge increase and more brazen actions in the theft of the copper. Thieves know that they can recycle the copper without any consequences.

The City is actively focused on this issue and multiple departments are expending resources to solve this issue. At this point in time the City is focused on a 3 pronged response to copper theft and citizen engagement is critical to the success of the project. The City's initial response was to go out to afflicted areas and repair stolen and damaged assets and install tamper resistant hardware to reduce the rate of theft. However, this had only a minor impact on the rate of thefts.

At this point in time the City is focused on two additional responses. The first is a public awareness campaign targeted to expose the rate, scale, and harm to our residents that is occurring with copper theft. The second is more ambitious and involves contracting a local company to develop embedded technology into City owned assets that will alert local law enforcement when junction boxes, lighting, and other city owned assets are broken into as copper theft is occurring. City staff is working with private business owners that have been negatively affected by these thefts as well. Creating a

public/private partnership in defense of assets will have a positive impact for all citizens of Wichita.

We are aware of citizen concern regarding corridors and facilities that have been harmed through copper theft. We are actively moving towards a resolution on the issues created through copper theft. Unfortunately, we need to be responsible and repair and replace the copper in these locations when we can be certain that theft will not rapidly occur again; bringing further harm to our citizens. The City will be testing new technology in the coming weeks and as we are able to verify the security of these assets we will be repairing the damage wrought.

However a tool that will help us address this issue is that of regulation on metal recycling. If these thieves know that the recycling centers and scrap yards will track, record and identify those that use this service the reduction of theft will occur. We need the support from the state to help local governments protect their assets and protect tax payer dollars.

Regards,



Troy Houtman, CPRE, Director  
Wichita Park & Recreation Department