



Tennessee Town Neighborhood Improvement Association

1195 SW Buchanan

Topeka, KS 66604

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June 19, 2016

W. Rodney McMullen, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Kroger Co.
Jessica C. Adelman, Group Vice President, Corporate Affairs, Kroger Co.
Brian Folmer, Kansas Real Estate Manager, Kroger Co.
1014 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45202-1100

Dear Mr. McMullen, Ms. Adelman and Mr. Folmer:

This letter comes to you all with a great deal of concern. The undersigned represent the Tennessee Town Neighborhood Improvement Association, a low- to moderate-income neighborhood located in Topeka, Kansas. Tennessee Town is the neighborhood in which the recently closed Dillon's Store #58 is located. After 40 years of being a neighborhood anchor the Dillon's corporation, with only two weeks notice, closed said location on February 13 of this year. This corporate decision has made Tennessee Town revitalization efforts more difficult, removed the option of healthy food options in proximity to their homes from its residents; made residents who walked to the store find other more expensive and less convenient options; removed jobs from the neighborhood, and created a food desert in the center of the capital city of Kansas, among other harms.

The Tennessee Town NIA is very concerned about what will happen to the former Dillon's at 1400 SW Huntoon, particularly as it has sat vacant for four months and has forced neighborhood residents, as well as those living in other Central Topeka neighborhoods, to find other, less convenient, alternatives for food, medicine, and financial services. We're also concerned about what will happen to the adjacent property, which contains the Aaron Douglas Art Park and mural and annually hosts the Aaron Douglas Art Fair, which has become an important and popular city event since its inception 10 years ago.

We want this to change. Tennessee Town residents will be most affected by a building that remains vacant and becomes an eyesore for each month that it remains vacant. Tennessee Town residents will be most affected by being excluded from what happens in our own neighborhood.

Kroger apparently has made its decision to leave Central Topeka. What we want is a chance to find a suitable replacement so that the many residents of Tennessee Town and Central Topeka can make whole again their daily lives. What we want is for Kroger to give us that chance, either through a new incarnation involving Kroger or through another grocer.

We realize that with the closure of Dillon's Store #58 the statements and actions made in response to the closure seemed to make a de facto declaration that traditional grocery store models might not work at that location. *We absolutely believe that a store can thrive there.* That said, innovation may be needed to come up with a model and a fresh approach that will not only fully and in a healthy way serve the immediate greater neighborhood, but also will draw from elsewhere and serve as a sound, moneymaking investment for its owner. What we want is Kroger to work with us, directly or in supporting our efforts to reach out to others, to give us a chance.

The City of Topeka also is on board regarding finding a suitable replacement. At the first community meeting held on the Dillon's closure on January 31 of this year, Mayor Larry Wolgast and various city council members said doing so would be a city priority. Two hundred people attended that meeting and also committed themselves to finding a suitable replacement. What we all want is for Kroger to give us all that chance.

Two citizens' committees grew out of the two Dillon's' closure community meetings that were held. One of those committees, on which the three Tennessee Town NIA officers serve, is the long-range planning committee. That committee has been and continues to investigate suitable replacements to occupy 1400 SW Huntoon and once again serve Tennessee Town and Central Topeka. What we want is for Kroger to give this committee a chance to pursue suitable replacements in earnest.

The Tennessee Town NIA, founded in 1976 around the same time Dillon's opened its store at 1400 SW Huntoon, has been working in earnest on revitalization efforts for almost 20 years. The following improvements all have occurred since 2001 or will occur within the next few years. For more information, please go to the NIA's website at tenntown-nia.weebly.com:

1. Decorative lighting on SW Washburn and Lane Sts. along the west and east sides of the former Huntoon Dillon's.
2. Aaron Douglas Art Park at SW 12th and Lane Sts. directly northeast of the former Huntoon Dillon's.
3. Tennessee Town Mural on the south wall of WCW Property Management, 1238 SW Lane, directly east and across Lane St. from the former Huntoon Dillon's.
4. Acquisition of properties at 1192 and 1194 SW Lane and the upcoming demolition of 1194 SW Lane to enable the upcoming expansion of the Lane Garden park at SW 12th and Lane Sts., diagonally across the street from the Aaron Douglas Art Park and 1 block north of the former Huntoon Dillon's.
5. The King's Court Basketball and Playground Complex at SW Lincoln and Munson Sts., 3 blocks northeast of the former Huntoon Dillon's. For the past 9 years the Tennessee Town Basketball tournament has been hosted here in August, which draws players and recognition from the entire city. The complex recently was improved with new playground equipment matting and a fence at its western boundary.
6. The establishment of the International Academy school at Faith Temple Church, 1162 SW Lincoln (3 blocks northeast of the former Huntoon Dillon's) and the upcoming construction of a building to house the Academy at 1195 SW Lincoln (2 blocks northeast of the former Huntoon Dillon's).
7. The expansion of the Tennessee Town Plaza Apartments for our senior and physically challenged neighbors in the second 1100 block of SW Lincoln, 2 blocks northeast of the former Huntoon Dillon's. The Tennessee Town Plaza Apartments has been one of the Topeka Housing Authority's most successful complexes since its inception in the early 1980s.
8. 9 single-family houses through partnerships with the City of Topeka and Habitat for Humanity in the first 1200 block of SW Lincoln, 1 block east of the former Huntoon Dillon's. The addition of those homes completely turned around what once was the neighborhood's worst block.
9. The upcoming placement of 2 additional Habitat homes through a property donation from Shiloh Church in the first 1200 block of SW Buchanan, 2 blocks east of the former Huntoon Dillon's.
10. The 11-unit Asbury-Mt. Olive Apartments built just north of Asbury-Mt. Olive Church (1196 SW Buchanan) in the 2nd 1100 block of SW Buchanan, 3 blocks northeast of the former Huntoon Dillon's.
11. Cornerstone of Topeka, Inc., a Tennessee Town stakeholder and tenant at the historic Buchanan Center (1195 SW Buchanan), construction and occupancy of a new house at 1231 SW Clay as part of its program that matches those transitioning from homelessness to homeownership, 3 blocks east of the former Huntoon Dillon's.
12. Upcoming minor exterior housing rehabilitation initiative to focus on making minor improvements (i.e. painting, porches, walkways, yard improvements) to owner- and tenant-occupied housing located in the 1000 and 1100 blocks of SW Washburn and Lane Sts., encompassing the 3 blocks directly north of the former Huntoon Dillon's.

Having a grocery store presence at 1400 SW Huntoon is vital to our continuing efforts to make Tennessee Town a welcoming neighborhood for individuals and families as well as having a conveniently located and locally supported food destination for Tennessee Town and all of Central Topeka.

There was a grocery store presence at 1400 SW Huntoon decades before Dillon's located there as Dibble's preceded Dillon's in what was then called Elmhurst Plaza. Some of us had or have relatives who worked at Dibble's. We all shopped at Dibble's. Once Dibble's closed Dillon's occupied the space for 40 years. We considered Dillon's to be an important neighborhood partner and always extended an invitation to the store manager that she or he were welcome to join our neighborhood's revitalization efforts. Having a grocery store at that location has been as much a part of the lives of Tennessee Town and Central Topeka residents as having family has been. What we want is for Kroger to give us the chance to make our family whole again.

At the May 9 Tennessee Town NIA general membership meeting the body voted to draft and send this letter to the Kroger Corporation, Topeka's governing body and Topeka City Manager Jim Colson.

We stand ready to be involved. We stand ready to make a difference not only for Tennessee Town but for all of Central Topeka. We stand and await your response.

Please let us know if you have any questions moving forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Michael Bell

Patrick DeLapp

Sandra Lassiter

Michael Bell

Patrick DeLapp

Sandra Lassiter

Tennessee Town NIA President

Tennessee Town NIA Vice-President

Tennessee Town NIA Secretary-Treasurer

cc: Topeka Mayor Larry Wolgast
Topeka City Council Members Karen Hiller, Sandra Clear, Sylvia Ortiz, Tony Emerson, Michelle de la Isla, Brendan Jensen, Elaine Schwartz, Jeff Coen, and Richard Harmon
Topeka City Manager Jim Colson
Brett Martin, Megan James, Central Strong Topeka