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To the Appleton Planning Commission:

CITY OF APPLETON
COMMUNITY/ECON DEVELOPMENT

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

First, I want to compliment you on the effort and thought that has gone into the plan, especially the way the city is working regionally with neighboring communities, counties, as well as the nonprofits and service agencies to meet and solve the problems our residents face.

I also appreciate the effort you, and other communities and nonprofits are doing to nurture and rebuild neighborhoods. Active, open neighborhoods add to our mutual safety and personal sense of worth and purpose through real friendships. Mentoring, coaching and teaching how to build and enjoy good neighbors addresses significant human needs throughout the city.

The Comprehensive Plan shows how the whole Fox Cities and Oshkosh work well in continuing to make this one of the finest set of communities to live in – in America, and in fact the entire world.

However, while we are managing well, many of our community problems, I feel there is a neglected group of people in Appleton and the Fox River Valley.

The plan points out on Page 52 of Chapter 5 that we have 871 subsidized houses through Chapter 8 and several other housing assistance programs. On page 53, it points out that 686 on the waiting list for housing vouchers and 59% of those, 404 households are families with dependent children in Appleton. If we were to extend that 59% to cover the ratio of Appleton's population to the combined populations of Winnebago, Calumet and Outagamie counties, that would indicate we are talking about 2181 families are in need of assisted housing. The Rush project indicates that 4300 households are in housing where rents take over 30% of the household income. Rush indicates that there is an

undersupply of Affordable housing. This undersupply is a cause for two things:

1. Homelessness
2. Insecure housing

I feel that homelessness is pretty well addressed in the community by existing agencies.

Insecure housing needs to be addressed.

There is a lot of stress in an insecure home. For example:

If your welfare check is \$560.00/month and you get \$194.00 in food stamps and your rent is \$500.00 for you and two elementary age school children, how can you survive after paying for utilities on simply food stamps and food pantries? Most people could not.

What kinds of things are those with insecure housing facing?

1. Is your apartment or house in good repair? How can you fix things that break?
2. What happens if you are sick, or worse, hospitalized?
3. Are you a minority?
4. Is there abuse in your household?
5. Are you behind in the rent? Have you been evicted?
6. Do you have friends, neighbors or relatives to help?
7. Does anyone in your household have a criminal record?
8. Are the kids succeeding in school? Do they have the same friends at school and in the neighborhood over the past two years?
9. Can you get decent employment – and take good care of the kids?
10. How many times have you applied for a “good” job? A nice apartment?

And the list goes on.

Since I read Mathew Desmond’s book, *Evicted*, I have been attempting to create a community conversation on this issue.

I have handed out over 500 books to people in nonprofits, community agencies and a variety of public officials. Each time I have handed a book out, I charge nothing, but I request that you read the book together in groups of four or more. I show people that the book is divided into four parts.

The first 100 pages discusses the problems 8 individuals living in Milwaukee's north side slum and the Trailer Parks to the south, near the airport. I suggest that after reading the rent section that their group of four meet for coffee and discuss the rent issues together.

The second section is also about 100 pages on Out or evictions. I suggest a second meeting over coffee.

The third section is on what happens After or what happens after these 8 people have been evicted. I suggest a third meeting over coffee discussing this 100 page section.

Finally, I suggest reading the conclusion and discussing Desmond's suggestions and each of your own suggestions over a fourth cup of coffee.

Evicted is an unusual book. Mathew Desmond did his research by living nine months in the Northside Slum and 6 months in the South trailer parks slum area. Desmond was a graduate student in Sociology at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. His thesis must have been good because he is now a Professor at Harvard University.

What he has done is write a popularized version of his Thesis which is now on the New York Times best seller list. The book has 62 pages of footnotes which document every statistic in the book. These are important to read.

The reason this book has engaged me is I have been an interested but distant observer of the Milwaukee Slums ever since my teaching days in the late 60's in Waukesha. Ever since Father Groppi's 200 straight days

of demonstration on the streets of Milwaukee, the slums have only gotten bigger and badder and worsen. – I was an English teacher.

Reading this book gave me a vivid description at why the slums in Milwaukee are deteriorating and what the problems that the residents face are.

I see 2000 to 4000 families facing the same types of issues in the Fox Cities. Our issues are nowhere near to the extent of Milwaukee's, but the hardships of living outside of the prosperity of the Fox Cities are tough on families and especially kids in our neighborhoods and schools.

How can we overlook something so fundamental as this amount of poverty in the Fox Valley?

The private rental market is where most of our really poor people are.

2000 to 4000 families with children – say two kids per family means:

6000 to 12,000 people are living in houses where they pay more than 30% of their income on housing in our 3 counties.

There is an enormous amount of pain and poverty in our communities.

I am a great fan of the way public and parochial schools manage the kids from insecure Fox Valley homes.

Housing insecurity is not only very tough on Moms and/or Dads, but it is very difficult on kids. One area school official noted that seven moves during the 12 school years causes an increase in mental health issues and the ability to hold a job as adults. The kids don't develop long term friends either at school or in neighborhoods. They are vulnerable to bullying, gangs influence, and drug and alcohol abuse. Learning is difficult when kids move from school district to school district. New kids and new kids with learning issues often interrupt the continuity of their new classrooms.

I worry about how 4000 to 8000 kids are going to succeed as adults. Frankly, I feel this is the most critical issue facing Appleton and our surrounding communities.

I think we can do better for these families.