First Friday’ speaker outlines housing opportunities for Kansas communities

Guzman notes success in building moderate income housing in Lyons

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Audree Guzman once saw an empty lot in Lyons, Kan. as opportunity knocking.

The former city manager knew that one challenge in the town of 3,500 was providing moderate income housing for its residents, or for those considering a move to the town – especially teachers for the local school district.

“The school was located a couple blocks from where we were (considering) a housing development,” said Guzman, now the city manager in Valley Falls, Kan. “So we received a lot of interest from teachers, principals and all those people coming into the school.”

Guzman was the featured speaker during K-State Research and Extension’s monthly online series, First Friday e-Calls, which helps to nurture small businesses and inspire entrepreneurship in Kansas.

In May, Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly signed a pair of housing bills into law, representing a major effort in the state to support statewide housing development. Included in more than $60 million from the state’s coffers is a program to boost the Moderate Income Housing (MIH) program, which supports development of multi-family rental units and single-family, for-purchase homes in communities with populations less than 60,000 people.

Inasmuch as the program aims to spur growth of housing for those in moderate income levels, the program has a success story in Lyons, according to Guzman.

Capitalizing on $25,000 grants through the Kansas Housing Resource Corporation’s MIH program, officials in Lyons have successfully built 16 new homes – with a dozen more planned.

“Overall, it was an amazing project, especially the way that we were able to put together so many resources – kind of a like a puzzle – to make things work,” Guzman said.
In addition to the KHRC grants, the ‘pieces’ included:

- Free environment assessments from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment’s brownfields program.
- Tax rebates to property owners making improvements that raise a home’s appraised value, through the Neighborhood Revitalization Program.
- Capitalizing on the Rural Housing Incentive District, which allowed a city to use tax dollars to invest in infrastructure.
- Forming a Land Bank, which is created by public authorities or nonprofit organizations to acquire, hold, manage and sometimes redevelop property in order to return those properties to productive use.

Guzman said the City of Lyons also agreed to waive specials (assessments charged against property for improvements to the immediate area) in the new development, including building permits and utilities. The City’s help meant that the new home owners “were starting with about $50,000 in equity” once they moved into the home.

Jason Fizell, the housing development liaison with the KHRC, said communities in Kansas can now apply for grants up to $650,000 to support development of moderate income housing. The grants are offered three times a year; the next deadline is the end of September.

More information on moderate income housing opportunities in Kansas is available online from Kansas Housing.

Guzman’s full Sept. 2 presentation and other First Friday presentations are available online from K-State Research and Extension.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
K-State Research and Extension First Friday e-Calls, www.ksre.ks-state.edu/community/business/entrepreneurship

Kansas Housing (moderate income housing), https://kshousingcorp.org/category/programs/moderate-income-housing

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