Economic growth creates demand for housing, says Dodge City official

First Friday speaker outlines programs to bolster housing in Kansas

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

MANHATTAN, Kan. – It’s simple math: When city officials recruit new businesses to their communities, those businesses often bring new employees to live. More people means the community also needs more housing.

If housing is not available? It may mean the business finds another community.

Mollea Wainscott understands that, so while the Dodge City area continues to grow economically, she knows she’ll be staying very busy.

“Our businesses can not expand and we can not recruit new businesses unless we have affordable housing,” said Wainscott, the assistant director of the Dodge City/Ford County Development Corporation.

Wainscott was the featured speaker during the Sept. 1 First Friday e-Call, a monthly online series hosted by K-State Research and Extension that helps to nurture small businesses and inspire entrepreneurship in Kansas. The online discussions, which routinely host dozens of Kansas citizens from the public and private sectors, are available free each month.

In the past dozen years, Wainscott said the Dodge City area has developed 600 new housing units, and currently has 600 more under construction – “and 400 in the pipeline over the next five years,” she said.

She said the region is responding to a recent assessment indicating that by the year 2030, Dodge City is going to need an additional 629 housing units – 315 that are owner-occupied, and 314 rental units.

One example of growth is the May 2021 announcement by the Hilmar Cheese Company that it would be building a cheese and whey processing plant south of Dodge City. The facility will be operational in 2024 and is expected to create 247 new jobs.
To meet current and future growth, Wainscott said, “it was clear to us that we needed to improve our existing housing stock.”

Wainscott said local leaders responded to a 2008 housing assessment in their region by creating the nonprofit Community Housing Association of Dodge City, known as CHAD.

“The program that we are probably most proud of under CHAD is the abandoned housing program,” Wainscott said. “We partner with Dodge City Community College’s Building Construction Technology program to construct a new house every year,” with additional support from the Kansas Housing Resource Corporation.

Wainscott said the Dodge City/Ford County Development Corporation has capitalized on various programs that help low- and moderate-income families get into or stay in their homes.

She said there are programs that target areas where homes have been abandoned and either renovate those homes, or build new ones. Grants or other funding is available to help current homeowners with renovations or updates that they otherwise might not be able to afford. A local paint store supports a program that helps low-income homeowners repaint their homes.

“We have also offered a Homebuyer Education class for our community,” said Wainscott, noting that 20-30 people typically attend these classes twice a year. “Local experts share their knowledge on how to buy a home.”

Wainscott said being open with potential businesses about the area’s housing shortages is a strategic decision for city officials.

“We have been able to overcome that by showing the work we’ve done and what we plan to do,” she said. “That’s helped us get over that hurdle.”

Wainscott’s full talk and other First Friday presentations are available online from K-State Research and Extension.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATION: Links used in this story
First Friday e-calls, www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/business/entrepreneurship

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Story by:
Pat Melgares
785-532-1160
melgares@ksu.edu