State programs available to address housing shortages, officials say

Monthly program outlines challenges faced, resources available in Kansas

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Representatives of two state organizations said that current programs are making headway in addressing Kansas’ looming housing crisis.

“We know there are people who are unsheltered across the state and we know that many people are facing evictions,” said Ryan Vincent, the executive director of the Kansas Housing Resources Corporation, a nonprofit corporation that administers housing and community programs.

Vincent was a featured speaker Aug. 6 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.

He said that current statistics indicate that more than 1 in 3 Kansans – or, 35% -- currently rent their homes. Partly due to the COVID pandemic, 27,642 Kansas rental households are behind on payments as of July 2021, and approximately 14,629 of those households are at risk of eviction.

Vincent also noted that as of January 2021, landlords were facing a rent shortfall of between $133 to $185 million.

While the pandemic is one reason for current housing challenges, Vincent said Kansas has other issues to address, including a lack of safe, affordable and accessible housing. The state also faces a lack of what the National Association of Home Builders terms the “Five L’s:”

- Labor, including skilled contractors.
- Lots.
- Lending.
- Lumber (the price of lumber and materials keeps going up).
- Laws (which affect the availability of housing).
Vincent said the KHRC and other state groups have implemented a multi-pronged approach to address those issues, including programs that help those facing evictions, tax credits for residents in low income housing, assistance for moderate income housing, and even a first time homebuyer program.

As an example, the Kansas Eviction Prevention Program, funded through the U.S. government’s CARE Act and authorized by Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly, provided about $20 million in assistance to more than 11,000 households during a 60-day period in late 2020.

Kayla Savage, director of the Kansas Department of Commerce’s community development division, said her agency is in partnership with the KHRC to help with a trio of housing programs that provide incentives for rural housing districts, award community development block grants, and assist in efforts to renovate two- and three-story Main Street buildings.

Savage noted that the 2021 Kansas legislature provided a nice boost to the state’s communities when it passed SB90, which expanded the incentives for rural housing districts to include upper story housing projects in the central business districts in Kansas.

“We all know about buildings in our communities with great bones, or great structure, that are in need of upper story development,” Savage said. “That legislation will allow for vertical renovations, including a second or third story where we can develop housing that adds to traditional forms of housing in the community.”

A full listing of programs offered through KHRC, including descriptions of each, is available at https://kshousingcorp.org

Housing and community assistance programs from the Kansas Department of Commerce can be found at www.kansascommerce.gov/community-development

The time to address Kansas’ housing challenges has never been greater, Vincent said. “During the pandemic, we’ve used our homes for schooling, shopping, worship, community meetings and more,” he said. “Home has become the hub for everything. So when people are at risk of losing their home, they are at risk of losing everything that connects them to their outside world.”

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

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Kansas Housing Resources Corporation, https://kshousingcorp.org

Kansas Department of Housing (downtown development), https://www.kansascommerce.gov/community-development/downtown-development

K-State Research and Extension 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