



2023 QUARTER 2 NEWSLETTER

NCRPC NEWS

An update from the North Central Regional Planning Commission

Rural Voices Contest Winners Announced

Two seniors selected to receive scholarships for top entries reflecting on rural Kansas

Two high school seniors in North Central Kansas were recognized with the John R. Cyr Rural Voices Award for submitting the top entries in the 2023 Rural Voices Youth Contest. The NCRPC has sponsored the contest since 2006.

Jane Letourneau, St. John's Catholic High School, and Kady Toole, Washington County High School, submitted the winning entries in this year's contest. Both Letourneau and Toole received a \$1,000 scholarship.

Students had the option to submit an original essay or video reflective of this year's contest theme of "Rural Kansas...Working Together." High school seniors in the 12-county NCRPC service area were eligible to participate.



"The NCRPC is pleased to honor this year's recipients of the John R. Cyr Rural Voices Award," said NCRPC Executive Director John Shea. "Jane and Kady exemplify the best of youth in rural Kansas and represent a bright future for our region."

Details for the next contest will be announced in the Fall and the entry deadline will be February 1, 2024. To view the winning entries or to learn more about the contest, visit www.ncrpc.org/ruralvoices.

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ABOUT US

Our primary service area includes 12 counties and 83 cities in North Central Kansas.

OUR MISSION


Advancing rural Kansas through comprehensive planning and development services.

CONTACT US

North Central Regional Planning Commission
109 N. Mill, PO Box 565
Beloit, KS 67420 | 785-738-2218

 facebook.com/ncrpcbeloit

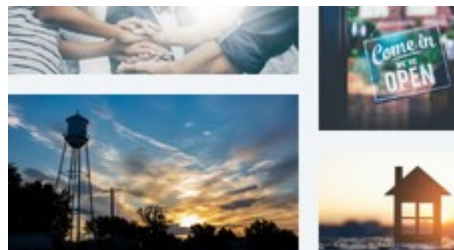
 www.ncrpc.org

 If you have a story idea or would like to update your address, email us at: communications@ncrpc.org

Community Connection Recording Available

Virtual session focused on funding sources, opportunities

A recording is now available of a virtual education session that focused on available grants and funding sources and how NCRPC can help access those funding sources. If you serve on the board of a local government or nonprofit organization, this a great introduction or refresher to resources that are available to assist



in achieving your community and organization goals. View the session or learn more at www.ncrpc.org/communityconnection.

Project Spotlight: Vermillion Water Project

Residents Enjoying Clean Water with Completion of First Phase of Project

While many take access to clean water for granted, residents in the small town of Vermillion, Kansas, located in eastern Marshall County, are celebrating the recent connection of a new source of water supply.

The original water source and systems circa 1934 were plagued with increasing concerns in recent years. The City of Vermillion (population 80) had a water well source with high concentrations of iron and manganese. To mitigate the issues, the system was flushed regularly to try to rid it of the odorous colored water. Some residents even adjusted laundry around the flushing schedule to ensure that their white laundry stayed white. More importantly, the water quality was poor and the EPA deemed it unfit for infants to drink.

The city did what it could to maintain and improve the water system and increased water rates incrementally several times. The needs, however, were great. Eventually the city turned to outside funding sources beginning with a USDA SEARCH grant to complete preliminary testing for new well sites. The city then decided to take a two phased approach to address its water needs. For Phase 1, the city was awarded \$252,000 through the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, which is administered by the Kansas Department of Commerce. The City of Vermillion secured additional funds through a combination of a USDA Rural Development loan of \$415,000 and grant of \$1,890,000.

"Improving the water quality is a critical need for a community — and it was impacting Vermillion's growth overall," said Amanda Horn, NCRPC Community Development Representative.

A new well has been the primary focus of Phase 1 and the new source of supply is now connected in

Vermillion. A new hydracone water tower is nearing completion. This first phase will also include tearing down and disposing of the old water tower.

The NCRPC, with Horn as the project lead, provided planning assistance, grant writing and project administration. Other non-funding key partners involved with the project — all from Kansas — were engineers CES Group, Inc. of Marysville, and contractors J&K Contracting of Junction City, Jadwin Construction of Hiawatha, Gerard Tank and Steel of Concordia, and Terrane Resources of Stafford.

"I call Vermillion my "miracle" city. They are an example to any small town that big things are possible."

Amanda Horn, NCRPC Community Development Representative

The project has not been without challenges. Original cost estimates for the project were pre-COVID, but the cost skyrocketed with the surge in prices and material availability issues. This could have jeopardized the project, but partners worked together to find solutions to keep things moving forward.

"Huge credit goes to everyone who has assisted with this project," Horn said. "I feel like each entity has gone the extra mile for the town in order to make things work."

There is more work to be done and a second phase is planned, but first residents are celebrating the recent connection of the new source of water supply. "I washed a load of white clothes the other day and they came out looking as white as they did going in," one resident commented. "I never



Top Photo: A two-phase project in the City of Vermillion is working to resolve many water issues, including the presence of sludge filled/corroded pipes. (Courtesy Photo)

Bottom Photo: A comparison of water being flushed before (left) the new water source supply and after (right). (Courtesy Photo)

used to buy white clothes because they would come out yellow."

"Everyone has been wanting this for Vermillion for years," another resident said. "Good water is a must, and now we have it!"

Next up in Phase 2 is to focus on the distribution infrastructure to ensure the community can grow and prosper for the next 100 years.

"I call Vermillion my "miracle" city," said Horn. "They have gotten a lot right that not many cities could. They are an example to any small town that big things are possible."

There are many great things happening in North Central Kansas. Project Spotlight shares stories from communities around the region and how they solved challenges. To view more Project Spotlights, visit www.ncrpc.org/tag/project-spotlight.

Setting, Evaluating Goals Important to Community and Organization Success

Dreaming big, setting goals, making bold plans for the future — these actions all can play an important role in community or organization success.



NCRPC Strategic Development Advisor Deb

Ohlde facilitated a recent goal setting session with Republic County Economic Development board members. This was the second session that Ohlde had facilitated for the group.

“Making goals is one thing, but we really try to make them and utilize these goals,” said Jenny Russell, Republic County Economic Development (RCED) Director. “In the last year, RCED has taken the goals from these sessions and put them into our work plans to measure success each month.”

Routinely setting goals is beneficial for communities, local governments, and nonprofit organizations. Stepping back to review and update goals regularly is also needed.

“There is turnover in board members or elected officials, a new business comes to the area, staff retires, or a new community key issue crops up,” Ohlde said. “Things change and it is important to make sure everyone is on the same page and understands what the community or organization is working toward.”

While goal setting approaches may vary, consistency is key.

“I think a formal, longer session with some additional gathering of feedback such as through a survey or a community meeting should happen



Republic County Economic Development hosted a goal setting session on April 17, 2023 facilitated by NCRPC staff.

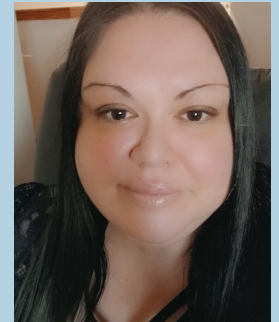
at least every three years,” Ohlde said. “In between time, the board should be reviewing and tweaking goals at least quarterly to make sure they haven’t strayed from their work plan and to make adjustments for new circumstances.”

Another bonus of goal setting is increased readiness for possible grant funding. As funding sources are rolling out fast with short turnaround times, having projects identified and moving forward is helpful.

Contact the NCRPC Community Development staff to learn more about goal setting meeting facilitation and other customized solutions to meet your project needs or visit www.ncrpc.org/services/community-development.

NCRPC Welcomes Matthews to Staff

We are pleased to announce that Amanda Matthews has joined the staff as Weatherization Assistant. In this role, Amanda will provide support for the weatherization assistance program administered by the NCRPC, which includes 41 counties in North Central and Northwest Kansas, and be a first point of contact for clients.



Amanda Matthews

Amanda is a lifelong resident of Beloit. Prior to joining the NCRPC, she worked in education and law enforcement. She recently received an associate degree in criminal justice and is currently working on a bachelor’s degree in the same field with an emphasis in criminal analysis and criminology. Amanda has a daughter, Ava, with whom she loves to spend time enjoying her sports, art projects, and the occasional science experiment. She also enjoys cooking and spending time with friends.

EVENTS & MORE

Upcoming Executive Board Meetings:

No June Meeting
Thursday, July 27, 2023
Thursday, August 31, 2023

Funding sources and deadlines:

» www.ncrpc.org/funding



North Central Regional Planning Commission

109 N. Mill | PO Box 565
Beloit, KS 67420 | www.ncrpc.org

Initiative Aims to Address Rural Housing Challenges

Pilot program offers financial assistance for moderate-income housing rehabilitation, demolition

A pilot program intended to strengthen housing in rural communities recently launched its second year. NCRPC is administering the program — called the NCRPC Housing Initiative — through a partnership with the Dane G. Hansen Foundation of Logan, Kansas.

The initiative includes financial assistance for moderate-income housing rehabilitation and demolition of dilapidated residential structures. The Demolition Pilot Program offers reimbursement grants of up to \$5,000 per property for removal and cleanup of structures. There are no income qualifications for the demolition program. The Moderate Income Housing Rehabilitation Pilot Program offers reimbursement grants of up to \$10,000 to homeowners in eligible



counties to complete minor housing upgrades. Households must meet moderate income guidelines outlined in the program application to be eligible to apply. Homeowners must also provide a 10% match and pay any costs above and beyond the grant.

The 2023 service locations include the following Kansas counties: Cheyenne, Decatur, Gove, Graham, Republic, and Rooks. Assistance is available to income eligible residents

on a first-come, first-served basis with funding limited per county.

“Housing is just like any other infrastructure in that without maintenance it becomes deteriorated,” said NCRPC Housing Director Keegan Bailey. “We are grateful for the support of the Dane G. Hansen Foundation helping to make the Housing Initiative possible.”

The first pilot programs for the NCRPC Housing Initiative launched in 2022 in Cloud, Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Russell, and Smith counties. The first-year funding helped make possible 70 rehabilitation projects and 57 demolitions across the six counties.

“We were thrilled with results of the first year of the initiative,” Bailey said.

For more information or to apply, visit www.ncrpc.org/housinginitiative.