



2025 QUARTER 1 NEWSLETTER

NCRPC NEWS

An update from the North Central Regional Planning Commission

Home Buyers in Clay, Marshall Counties Benefit from Home Ownership Programs

Programs Now Completed in all NCRPC Service Area Counties

Financial incentives in the form of down payment and closing cost assistance were available to eligible home buyers in Clay and Marshall Counties from May to December 2024. The Pilot Home Ownership Programs in these locations assisted in home purchases totaling over \$2.7 million, with the pilot programs contributing \$162,500.

The North Central Regional Planning Commission (NCRPC), Beloit, Kansas, administered the programs. Four Rivers Housing Opportunities, Inc., a non-profit managed by the NCRPC, provided funding for the initiative. Local partners

who contributed to the Clay County Home Ownership Pilot Program included Clay County, Grow Clay County, and United Bank & Trust. For the Marshall County Home Ownership Pilot Program, additional local contributors included Citizens State Bank of Marysville, First Commerce Bank, First Heritage Bank, Vermillion; First National Bank, Frankfort; Guise-Weber Foundation, Marshall County Partnership for Growth, Marysville Community Foundation, R.L. & Elsa Helvering Trust, State Bank of Bern, Axtell; United Bank & Trust, and Western National Bank, Summerfield.



“We appreciated the partnerships and the local support that made these programs possible,” said NCRPC Housing Director Keegan Bailey. “Strengthening rural housing is a key to success for our communities, and this program was one tool to help achieve that.”

First-time home buyers represented 48% of the program participants. The program provided buyers with critical financial resources amid rising material and housing costs.

“The feedback from participants indicated that the down payment assistance was a significant factor in helping them afford a home, and, in some cases, allowed them to make upgrades sooner than originally planned,” Bailey said.

The primary motivations for home buyers accessing the pilot program included job factors, moving closer to

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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

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 www.ncrpc.org

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

EVENTS & MORE

Executive Board Meeting
April 24, 2025, 2 p.m.

Did you miss the 2024 Annual Report? Find it online:
» www.ncrpc.org/about/reports

Funding sources and deadlines:
» www.ncrpc.org/funding

Home Ownership, *From page 1*

family and friends, reduced commuting times, and a desire to experience a rural lifestyle or live in a rural community.



Since 2018, pilot home ownership programs have been completed in all 12 counties within the NCRPC primary service area. Collectively, these pilot programs have assisted in the purchase of 162 homes in the region with an approximate value of \$22.2 million. The results of these pilot programs will inform the development of a permanent regional relocation program, pending funding availability.

Leadership Transition Announced

Executive Director Resigns, Interim Director Appointed

The North Central Regional Planning Commission Executive Director, John Shea, recently stepped down at the end of March to accept a new position in California. He served as the director for the past three years.

The organization remains dedicated to its mission and committed to providing services to its clients and members throughout the transition.

"We were excited to have John join us three years ago and are sorry to see him move on but wish him the best in his next position," said Tom Claussen, Chair of the NCRPC Board. "John has done a great deal to advance the mission of the NCRPC and strengthen the organization. We know whoever succeeds John will continue his progressive and strategic approach."

The NCRPC Board held a special meeting on March 21 to discuss the leadership change, during which Shea expressed his gratitude to the group.

"I am so appreciative to have had the opportunity to serve North Central Kansas and to work alongside



John Shea

wonderful colleagues, board members, partners, and friends," said Shea. "It is with regret that I am leaving, but I now consider myself an honorary Kansan."



Deb Ohlde

The NCRPC Executive Board of Directors appointed Deb Ohlde as Interim Executive Director. Her official duties in that role began

on March 29 and she will lead the organization during the transition while the board conducts a search for a permanent director. A long-time NCRPC employee, Ohlde most recently has served as the Assistant Director of Strategic Initiatives since 2022.

Empty Homes, Full Potential: Rethinking Vacant Housing

By Keegan Bailey

Rural and urban communities have one commonality within their housing stock: vacant properties. There are many different reasons why structures can be vacant. Vacancies can occur due to foreclosures, inheritance or probate court, vacation-hunting or secondary homes, extensive work needed on the home, and simply beyond useful life. Why is this important? Frankly, each scenario takes away housing from the housing stock. The longer a house is left vacant, the more probable it is for repairs to go unnoticed and the deterioration of the home to occur. Vacation, hunting, or secondary

homes are still paying property taxes and bringing in some revenue a few months out of the year. But for seven to nine months, what revenue is being lost in

comparison to if someone lived there full time? Is this where cities should begin to have a higher flat utility rate for those homes that are identified as second homes? Vacant homes also have an increased need for security to



Keegan Bailey

avoid vandalism, trespassing, and maintenance. Should cities begin to look into structural integrity inspections, with more emphasis on health and code enforcement? With any new way of addressing housing needs, there could be resistance, criticism, and even an increase in legal/enforcement action. The biggest question that would need to be answered is how can NCRPC begin to help address the vacant housing issues along with the communities that we serve?

Keegan Bailey has been the Housing Director at NCRPC since 2020 and has been with the organization since 2015. She can be contacted at housing@ncrpc.org.

NCRPC Establishes Endowment Fund

Fund to Focus on Science Education, Arts

The NCRPC is excited to announce the establishment of a new endowment fund dedicated to supporting science education and the arts in the area.

The initial contribution to this fund was donated by North Central Kansas Community Network Co., an affiliate of the NCRPC, in recognition of long-time employee Todd Tuttle. Todd currently serves as Technical Consultant to NCKCN. He joined the organization in 1999 and has held various positions throughout his tenure, including Systems Manager of NCKCN and Assistant Director of NCRPC.

“Creating an endowment has always been a personal goal of mine because I see the potential it has for positive impact and long-term sustainability,” says Tuttle. “Our fund is just beginning, but this is an important first step, and I am excited to see the impact it can have in our region.”

As the fund grows, the goal is to foster an active role in the fields of science and the arts in the area.



Possible initiatives may include internships/mentorship opportunities in astronomy, financial assistance for local classrooms to support education in these fields, and more.

The NCRPC has partnered with the Solomon Valley Community Foundation to manage the endowment and is participating in the their Give to Grow event on April 30. This event offers a matching incentive to build capacity and endowments for participating nonprofits. Any contributions made to the NCRPC Fund on that day will be matched up to 100 percent, pending funding availability. To participate, visit www.givetogrowmc.com.

MEET the TEAM: Riley Silsby

We are excited to announce that Riley Silsby has joined the NCRPC as a community development representative. In this role, Riley will assist member cities, counties, and area non-profits with various community initiatives, including project development and administration.

Riley grew up near Auburn, Kansas, and graduated from Washburn Rural High School.

She will graduate from Kansas State University in May with a



Riley Silsby

Bachelor of Science in Real Estate and Community Development (RECD), along with a minor in community planning. Currently, Riley is working part-time until her graduation, after which she plans to relocate to Beloit, Kansas, on a full-time basis.

A fun fact about Riley is that her academic and career path was inspired after a simple search for “jobs that make the world a better place!”

When she is not busy with school or work, she enjoys reading, watching movies, cooking, and, when the opportunity arises, paddleboarding and hiking.

One of Riley’s current roles is managing project intake form inquiries (www.ncrpc.org/projectintakeform). If you have questions about it, email her at communitydevelopment@ncrpc.org.

Rural Voices Contest Winners Named

Two high school seniors from North Central Kansas have been named winners of the 2024-2025 Rural Voices Youth Contest, which the NCRPC has sponsored since



Alliana Thomasson

2006. Alliana Thomasson, a senior at Ellsworth Junior/Senior High School, and Nicholas Niewald, a senior at St. John's Catholic High School, in Beloit, submitted the winning entries for this year’s contest. Each recipient will receive a \$1,000 scholarship and the honorary John R. Cyr Rural Voices



Nicholas Niewald

Award, named after Cyr, who served as the NCRPC Executive Director for 22 years. The NCRPC invited high school seniors from the 12 counties in its

service area to submit an original essay or video expressing their perspectives on this year’s contest theme, “Rural Kansas...My Hometown.”

To view the winning entries or to learn more about the contest, visit www.ncrpc.org/ruralvoices.



North Central Regional Planning Commission

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Start-Up Business Provides Irrigation Sales, Service to Region

NCRPC Business Finance Program Assists Clifton, Kansas, Business

With many years of experience in related industries, co-owners Curtis LeClair and Eddie Chaput found that starting a new irrigation system business was a logical next step.

The ownership duo established Rain Tech Irrigation, LLC, a Reinke Center Pivot dealership, which opened in 2024. The business offers sales, installation, and service of both new and existing irrigation systems in North Central Kansas and South Central Nebraska. Curtis LeClair has owned and operated LeClair Seeds in Clifton for many years. Eddie Chaput previously worked for a Reinke dealership in Clay Center providing similar services. Chaput is the primary service provider for Rain Tech, and brings over 20 years of experience in electrical and irrigation systems to his position.

Rain Tech Irrigation is located at 121 Parallel Street in Clifton, Kansas, in a building constructed and owned by LeClair, near his existing seed business.

The start-up project included acquiring essential equipment, such as service trucks and a telehandler. These purchases were made possible through investments from the owners and assistance from Kaw Valley State Bank in Clifton, and the NCK Business Down Payment Assistance Loan Program offered by NCRPC.



Rain Tech Irrigation, LLC, opened in 2024 in Clifton, Kansas. The start-up business is part of the Reinke irrigation dealer network.

To learn more about the financing program used, contact NCRPC Business Finance Director Debra Peters at businessfinance@ncrpc.org or visit www.ncrpc.org/services/business. To learn more about Rain Tech Irrigation, you can find them on Facebook.