

House Appropriations Committee
Representative Troy Waymaster, Chairman
Comments by Joann Knight, Dodge City/Ford County Development Corporation
Support of Rural Housing
March 15, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to allow me to present our needs and opportunities for housing and community development in Ford County and Western Kansas. Dodge City has been experiencing a housing shortage for years. Our organization and city made a concerted effort in 2008 to focus on housing as a priority in order to continue our economic development efforts.

We have created our own 501c3, the Community Housing Association of Dodge City (CHAD) and utilized many programs including the Rural Housing Incentive Program (RHID), Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP), Moderate Income Housing Program (MIH), and several of the United States Department of Ag (USDA) programs. We have worked very closely with the Kansas Housing Resource Corporation and tremendously appreciate the assistance they provide.

We have also created a program to build new housing every year with students in both our high school and community college building trades program and have been successful at getting new construction workers in our community to help fill the workforce shortage. Contractors completed approximately 100 units of housing in 2021 and are slated to build approximately 200 more this year. This is still not enough!

We continue to experience a shortage in housing as our existing businesses grow and new economic development projects are announced. Most recently Hilmar Cheese Company has announced one of the largest economic development projects in the State of Kansas. They plan to build a world class cheese plant with an investment value of nearly \$600 million and dairy investments over \$500 million (over \$1 billion total). The plant will employ over 250 persons with wages averaging over \$63,000. To support the cheese plant, the region will gain 5-10 dairies. These dairies will employ nearly 750 persons and have average wages of nearly \$55,000. It is estimated that the annual payroll will be over \$57 million annually. The economic benefits will be significant by increasing commodity sales, demand for suppliers, construction workers, truck drivers, and expansion of existing businesses.

Hilmar brings with this project tremendous opportunity for several communities in Southwest Kansas to increase their population and economic base as well, which in turn greatly benefits the entire state. The proposal that you have been presented would greatly help assist in making an investment in rural housing and be a catalyst for rural growth.

Thank you for your time.
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