

To: Senate Commerce Committee

From: Joann Knight, Executive Director, Dodge City/Ford County Development Corporation

Date: February 4, 2021

Subject: Written Testimony regarding SB 90 - Rural Housing Incentive Districts

Dodge City, like most of rural Kansas, is in dire need of additional housing units. We completed our first housing study in April of 2008. Since then, we have had three additional housing studies completed. The latest study predicted we would need 862 units from 2018-2024.

Dodge City utilizes multiple incentives including the Neighborhood Revitalization Programs (NRP), Rural Housing Incentive Districts (RHID) and fee waivers based on income, rent price ranges and accessibility. The RHID has been the most impactful incentive. We have successfully developed over 600 units and have an additional 250+ in development agreements that we anticipate having completed in the next 5 years. We have touched every aspect of housing from single-family high market values to low income, as well as multifamily market value to low-income rentals.

Currently, the City of Dodge City is undergoing a streetscape project in the downtown area. The scope of the project will entail Front Street from Central Avenue to Third Avenue and up to the Gunsmoke intersections. Once the project is completed it will bring new life to the downtown area. Visitors and locals alike will get a sense of “coming to town” as they enter the downtown corridor. Our Main Street District entails approximately 16 blocks with several historic buildings.

Investors have recently completed a few upper story housing developments. Property owners have transformed under utilized space into housing and, in most cases they have the units rented before they are even completed. This has made other property owners realize the potential of their upper stories but the excessive cost in updating and meeting code requirements is a deterrent. We have also seen a rise in interest in larger vacant buildings in the downtown from prospects looking at creating multi-use space to create retail/co-working space in the street level and housing in the upper stories but they are also deterred when they encounter cost of upgrading and renovating.

I am a strong proponent of this bill. Allowing the RHID to renovate buildings and structures in our downtown would be a great benefit to our community providing an additional incentive and revenue source to potential investors and current property owners to renovate their upper stories. This bill would allow us to create more housing units and continue our mission of revitalizing Downtown Dodge City, utilizing the upper floors of our historic buildings, clean up vacant, blighted buildings and continue the efforts to give new life to the heart of our community. Providing this additional housing program will help us meet the demand for our workforce and encourage our businesses to continue to invest in Kansas.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our story. If I can be of any assistance regarding housing issues in the future for this committee, I stand ready to assist.

Sincerely,

Joann Knight
Executive Director
Dodge City/Ford County Development Corporation