

First Impressions

Great Bend, KS

K-State Research and Extension



- Great Bend asked for First Impressions, El Dorado agreed to be its partner; about a 2-hour drive.
- Volunteers in both communities were trained and photos were taken.
- Four visitors from El Dorado visited Great Bend in September and October.
- Results presented on 01/19/2024.
- Great Bend uses the results for further discussion and action plans.

Why: First Impressions?

- **Feedback:**

How does a first-time visitor view my town?

- Evaluate successes.
- Set goals and priorities for next steps.

- **If you don't agree with the observation:**

- ***Be curious,*** Why does the visitor see it this way?
- Is the observation worth considering?
- What can we do to change it– or the perception?

Curiosity: A strong desire to know or learn something.

-Oxford Living Dictionary

Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, U of MN

We need to change the narrative about rural.

- Rural is *changing*, not dying.
- Brain Gain (30-49 year olds moving to rural) is a “new trend” that has been happening since the 70’s.
- People research a number of places before they move to a rural town.
- Rural is in the middle of ***everywhere***. You live one place, work another and play another. With transportation and internet, it’s all accessible to you.

Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, U of MN

- 46% of Kansas households moved between 1995-1999
- In a survey of newcomers to rural areas, the reasons they come are:
 - Simpler pace of life
 - Safety and security
 - Affordable housing
 - Outdoor recreation
 - Quality schools
 - ***“A job” isn’t in the top 10 reasons.***
- Communities can work together to attract newcomers and create quality of life for everyone.

- “In small towns everyone knows each other.” *false*
- *Get to know each other*, invite them to a newcomers’ meal.
- If you bring 7 people to a 700-citizen town every year in 10 years, you’ll have a 10% increase. It matters! It is a challenge with housing, but it is achievable.
- We are our own worst enemies. We have to monitor our customer service and what we say. It matters.
- Don’t say, “You have to live here twenty years to be an insider.” And don’t act like it either.

- 75% of rural homeowners are Baby Boomers and older. 30% are over 75.
- Housing will be freed up as the baby boomers retire and move closer to medical services.
- Rural communities need retirement housing (not nursing facilities, but maintenance free) to retain seniors.- *Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, University of Minnesota*



*Ben Winchester was our guest on the
First Friday Call.*

See the recording at:

<https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/business/entrepreneurship/>

- 2022 KS Certified Population: 14,489 ↓ **9.4 % since 2010**
(~1.6% if using 2020 to 2022 data)
- 2020 U.S. Census: 14,733
- 2010 U.S. Census: 15,995
- Median household income: \$53,885 **\$68,925**
- High school or GED 85% **91.6%**
- At least a B.S. Degree 22.2% **34.4%**
- Median Age: 36.5 years **37.6 years**
- Persons 65 and Over 18.6% **17.2%**

Blue: Kansas Comparison Data

- Moved since Last Year
(2021/2022):

19.8%

14.6%

Consider the margin of error. For example, the Census lists 11,611 lived in the same house, but give a +/- 520 margin of error for that total.

- Poverty rate

(% of people below poverty line)

16.3%

12%

Race/Ethnicity

White: 71%

Black: 1.5%

Asian: 0.2%

Other: 0.1%

Not Hispanic or Latino:
76.4%

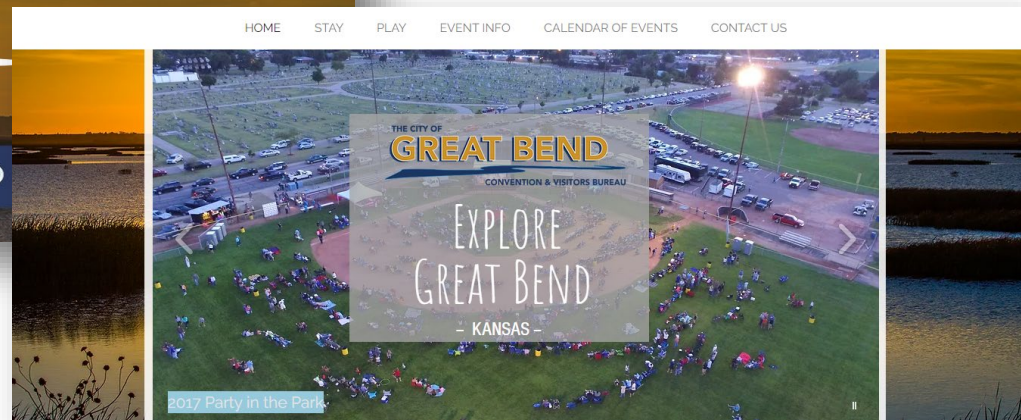
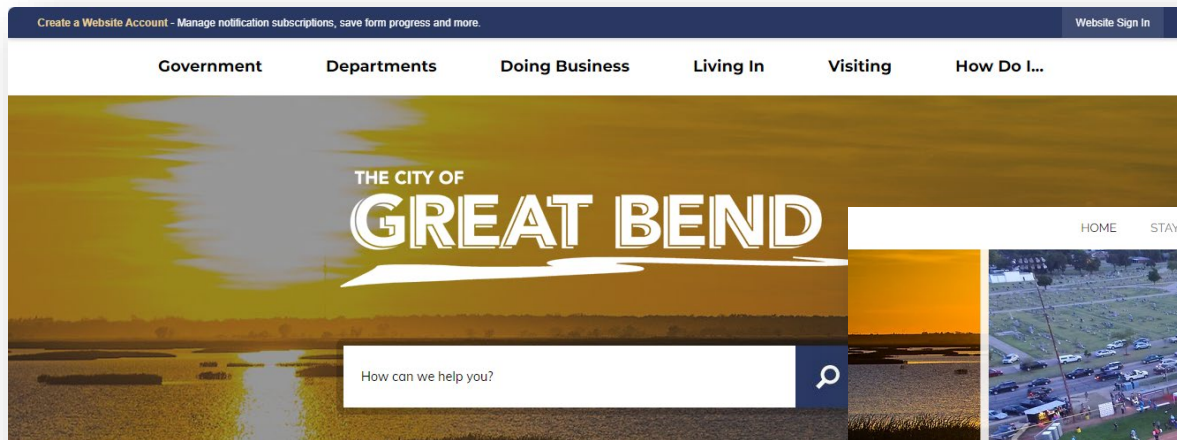
American Indian: 0.6%

Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific
Islander: 0%

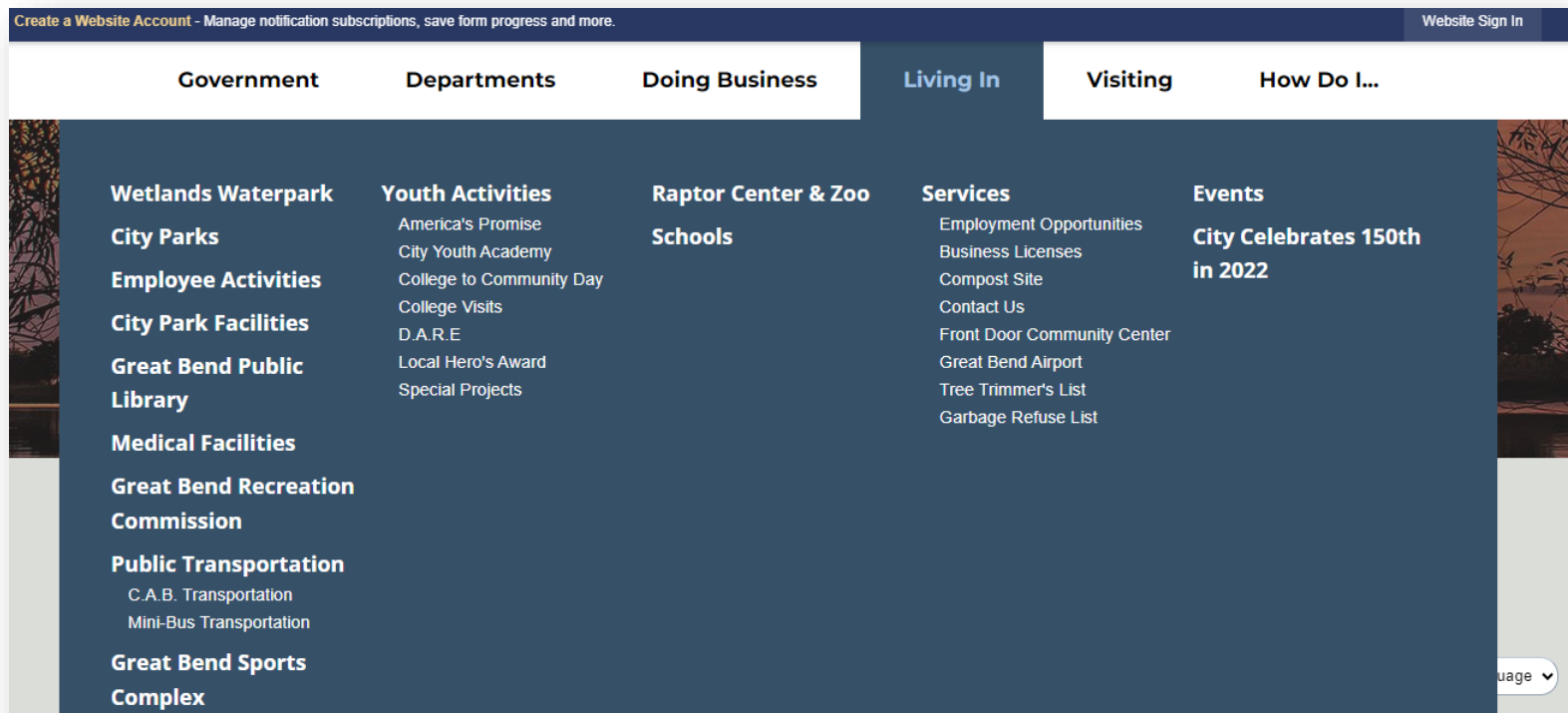
Two or more races: 2.9 %

Hispanic or Latino: 23.6%

- Information about Great Bend was very easy to find online.
- Official city website and the Convention and Visitors Bureau website had useful information.
- The CVB site has listings for shopping, eating, and links to articles by travel writers.



- The official city website had plenty of information on things to do whether you're a resident or visitor.
- Both sites were easy to navigate on computer and mobile devices.



“Five-Minute” Impression

- One visitor described their first impression as exactly what they expected. Clean with good streets and a lot to look at.
- Much of what was seen was well maintained and inviting.



“Five-Minute” Impression

- Directional signage was not immediately obvious to those driving, but passengers were able to focus on looking for them more.
- Coming in from the east you could tell the community was very involved with the schools in town. A large sign noted the sports and awards received.



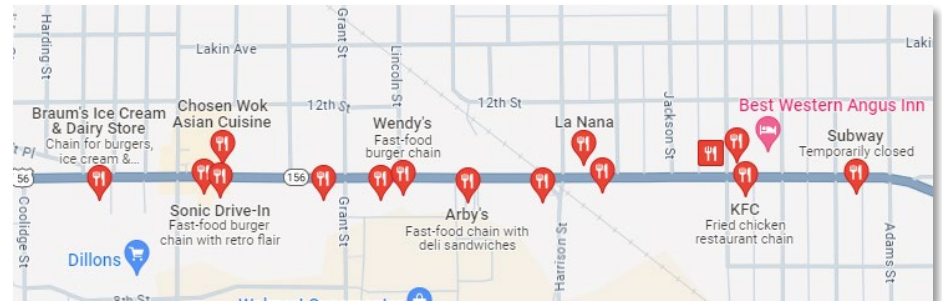
“Five-Minute” Impression

- The city had a very industrial feel to it coming in from all entrances. For some this didn't feel very welcoming.
- Visitors also noted an agricultural feel going along with the industrial which wasn't unexpected.
- Signage pointing visitors to the downtown shopping district would have been nice.



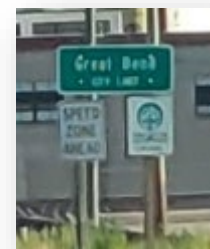
“Five-Minute” Impression

- The Santa Fe Trail park appeared to be nice during the drive by. Couldn't see the metal artwork coming from the east but could see it from the west. It appeared as if there was only one picnic area noticed when passing by which seemed odd for such a large park.
- There are a lot of fast food options on the west end of 10th.
- The marquee sign at the water park was noticed but was not on at the time of the visits.



“Five-Minute” Impression

- Visitors did notice the large Great Bend lettering coming in from the south. They thought this was cool.
- No welcome signage noted coming from the east. Did notice the standard city limits sign coming in from the west.
- The Great Bend sign observed coming in from the north was a favorite. Visitors really liked that.
- They also noted the Great Bend letters in front of the restaurant were bright, fun, and inviting.



Downtown Business Area



- Some visitors struggled to find the downtown business area and had to stop to ask. Signage wasn't easily apparent but was eventually seen on top of the light poles.
- Once downtown, visitors thought it was great! The buildings were in really nice shape with some getting face lifts.
- Beautiful murals were observed on many of the older buildings. The "Amelia Earhart" mural was a noted favorite of some.



Downtown Business Area

- Life-sized sculptures were also very popular.
- The courthouse was closed for construction but visitors were still able to enjoy the Jack Kilby statue. They also noted they could see the bandshell and water park area that was used for ice skating in the winter and cooling off kids in the summer.



Downtown Business Area

- Visitors saw that some businesses had bird houses they decorated. Some were keeping them fresh and some were deteriorating.
- Sidewalks were mostly good. It was a comfortable, easy walk through downtown.
- The crosswalks were fast so people didn't have to wait long to get to the other side of the street.



Downtown Business Area



- A lot of shade provided by business awnings and business signs were easy to read.
- Maps at the businesses that indicate other businesses, the courthouse plaza, and other things to see might be a nice addition here, or some sort of QR code people could scan to bring up a map on their phone to help navigate and discover things.
- A lot of unique architecture here that was older. The old and restored buildings were enjoyable to see.

Downtown Business Area

- Multiple visitors mentioned a large mix of businesses – something for everyone.
- Types of businesses observed: gifts, restaurants, second hand stores, clothing, the Family Crisis Center, and a beauty shop.
- Visitors heard about the Family Crisis Center's "Break the Silence" fall festival while visiting another business.



Downtown Business Area

- The old Crest Cinema appeared to be original and had been re-purposed for events with a new Cinema 6 across the street.
- Creator's Beauty was a cute corner yard art area.
- The displays in vacant storefronts were appreciated as it made it feel like the buildings were full.



Downtown Business Area

- Visitors felt like they were greeted by friendly people at most of the shops they went to. Everyone was helpful and answered questions about the city.
- The Bargain Barn was noted to be very nice. Staff explained the business model and their variety of merchandise, plus they recommended visitors go to the Rosewood Wine Cellar.

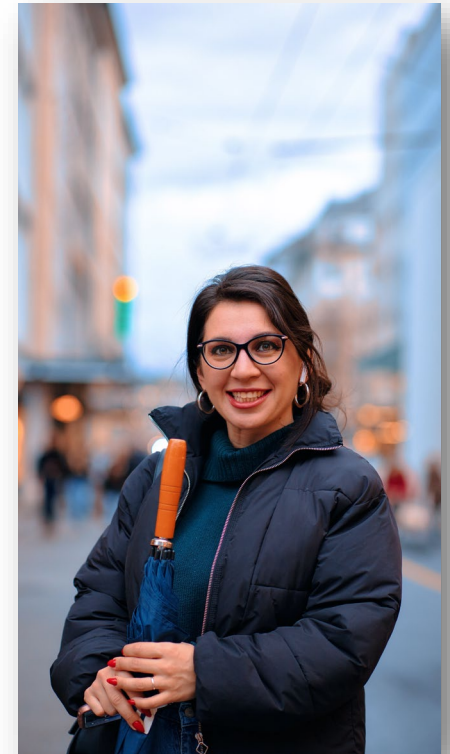


Downtown Business Area

- Forest Avenue Antiques also had great customer service. They recommended visitors eat at Great Bend Coffee and even shared a menu.
- Upon arriving at Great Bend Coffee, visitors asked a patron how to order – the patron was friendly and explained the process. This place looked to be popular for groups as there were multiple people having lunch and playing games.



- Other people encountered downtown also recommended visitors go to Great Bend Coffee – several recommendations in total.
- One person encountered downtown even asked if visitors needed help finding anything. People were very enthusiastic about suggesting other stores and restaurants to visit.



Public Amenities Downtown

- Benches and trash bins were seen.
- Flower pots were also noted. Most were nice but some were sorely in need of water and looked raggedy.
- No public restrooms or wi-fi access downtown. Later in the visit some noted wi-fi at the water park.
- A lot of seating and picnic tables at the band shell on the courthouse lawn – this was beautiful!



Downtown Parking and More



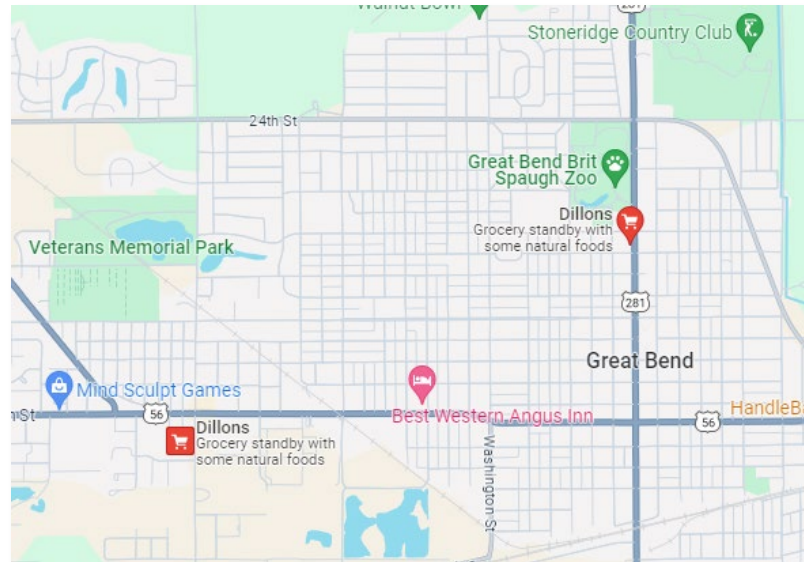
- Parking was adequate and easy to find.
- A mix of angled and parallel parking.
- Sidewalk brick inlays were nice in most parts but were a little uneven in other areas. Visitors felt more on the west side of the street, but didn't remember if it was the block with The Buckle or The Beauty Bar – one of those two areas.
- Some said it was easy to walk around and drop off things they bought at their cars so they could go visit other stores.

- The courthouse lawn was well manicured and visitors appreciated the fall season decorations, including the pumpkins.
- Though some of the flowers downtown needed help – there were a lot of flowers and that wasn't expected since it was so hot and dry prior to the visits.



Other Retail Shopping Areas

- There is a large mall-type shopping area on the west side of town and on the busy east/west street, Hwy 56, many big box or chain stores seen.
- Everything was in close proximity to other stores with easy access. All appeared to be well maintained.
- Easy enough to access the retail areas outside of downtown. Standard shopping center options observed.
- Visitors were surprised to see two Dillons stores.



- *A drive-by is not how industry will find you, check with your local Eco Devo director to make sure your site is listed on LocationOne @ Kansas Department of Commerce.*

Observation:

- “Entrepreneurs who choose to start their small businesses are responsible for 63 percent of net new jobs created in the United States every year.”
- *Global marketing makes your town accessible to purchases all over the world.*

Industrial Parks/Commercial

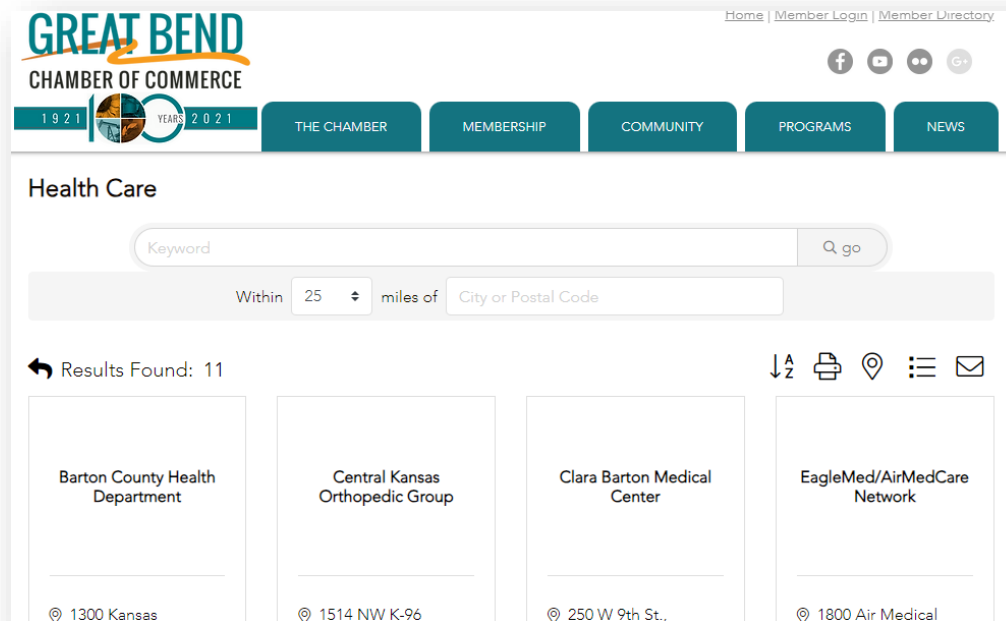
- Industrial/commercial areas existed at all entrances to the city. It looked like more could probably locate or expand in those areas.
- It didn't give a "warm fuzzy feeling" encountering the industrial areas when entering town.
- There appear to be a lot of businesses in those spaces.
- Others felt there was more concentration of industrial businesses on the west end of town and at the airport and thought there was some room to expand.



- An Urgent Care Xpress wellness facility was noticed. Also the University of Kansas Health Systems-Great Bend Campus was found. It was away from the main part of the city but had good signage to get people there.
- Clara Barton Clinic and other urgent care facilities were on the main road with easy access. They looked new and to be in good condition.
- The Chamber provided visitors with information about health care services in town.



- Visitors noted that there was also a comprehensive list of health-related facilities on the Chamber's website.
- It was learned that the Bargain Barn was supporting those with special needs in the community.
- During their visit, no one noticed any long-term care or assisted living facilities in town.



- Of the many neighborhoods observed, most appear to be middle-income level houses. All looked to be well maintained.
- Not many homes for sale.
- There are some newer homes located near the golf course.
- The Chamber noted that housing options are limited at the present time but they are able to set people up to meet with realtors if they are interested in moving to Great Bend.

- For rental properties, there was a large apartment building run by the Great Bend Housing Authority and it was identified to be income-based housing.
- No “for rent” signs were seen by visitors but the Chamber was able to provide a list of landlords.



- | | | Kansas |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|
| • Occupied Housing Units: | 5,774 | 1.15m |
| • Owner Occupied: | 59.3% | 65.3% |
| • Renter Occupied: | 40.7% | 34.7% |
| • Vacant Housing Units | 1,257 | 124k |
| | - For rent: 341 | |
| | - Rented, not occupied: 43 | |
| | - For sale: 132 | |
| | - Sold, not occupied: 115 | |
| | - Seasonal/recreational: 99 | |
| | - All other vacants: 527 | |
| • Average Household Size: | 2.5 | 2.48 |

Blue = Kansas Comparison Data

Data Source: Census.gov 2020 Census
& ACS Narrative Profile (Household Size) - retrieved on
11/29/23

Kansas

- Average Travel Time to Work: 13.8 mins 19.6 mins
- Households without a computer*: 512 (8.9%) 45k (3.8%)
- Households without an internet subscription: 985 (17.2%) 108k (9.2%)

* Includes smartphones, tablets, other wireless devices

- Kansas Housing Corporation is a resource to find out about housing grants and other tools for homeowners and renters.
- Also has some resources to address homelessness.

<https://kshousingcorp.org/>



- When coming into town from the north, visitors observed a sign for the Central Kansas Christian Academy. They never saw the school, however.
- Park Elementary school was small but had a nice playground. The self portraits on the fence were nice.



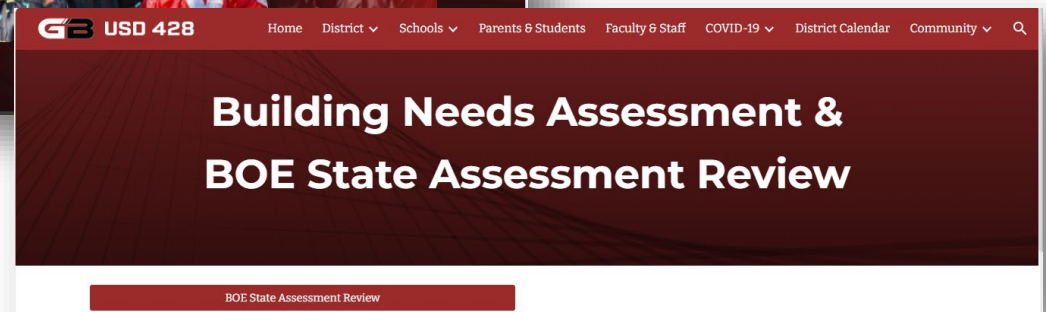
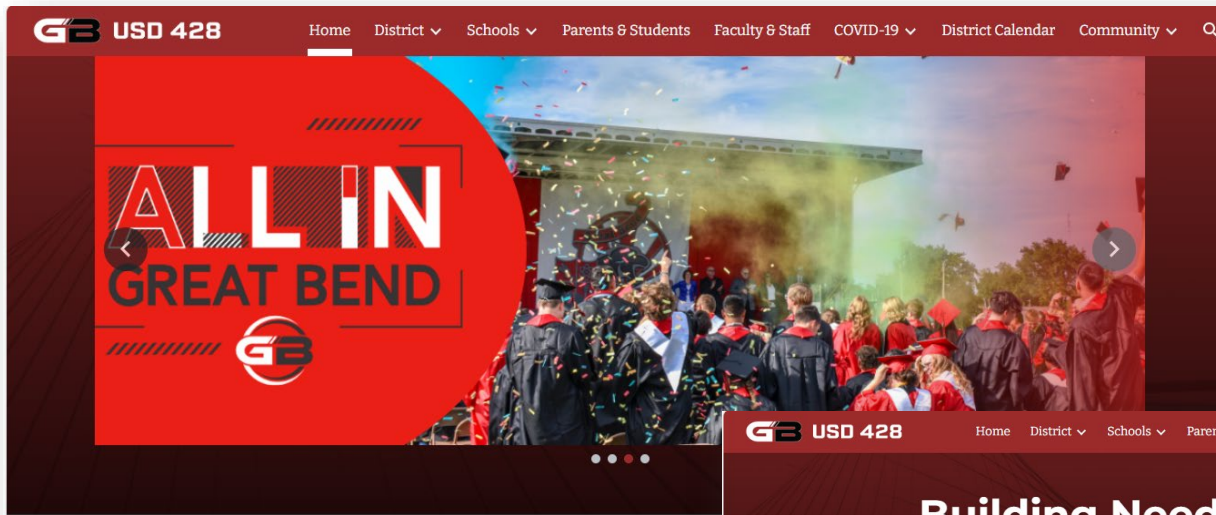
- The high school was located in a neighborhood and appeared to have full parking that was adequate. The Panthers Sports Complex was across the street. All appeared to be well maintained.
- Three elementary schools were seen, one middle school, and then the high school. An online search indicated there were five elementary schools, so some were missed in person.
- Schools were older buildings but looked to be in good shape and taken care of.



- Barton County Community College has an outreach center downtown.
- The amount of schools seems adequate for a community of this size.

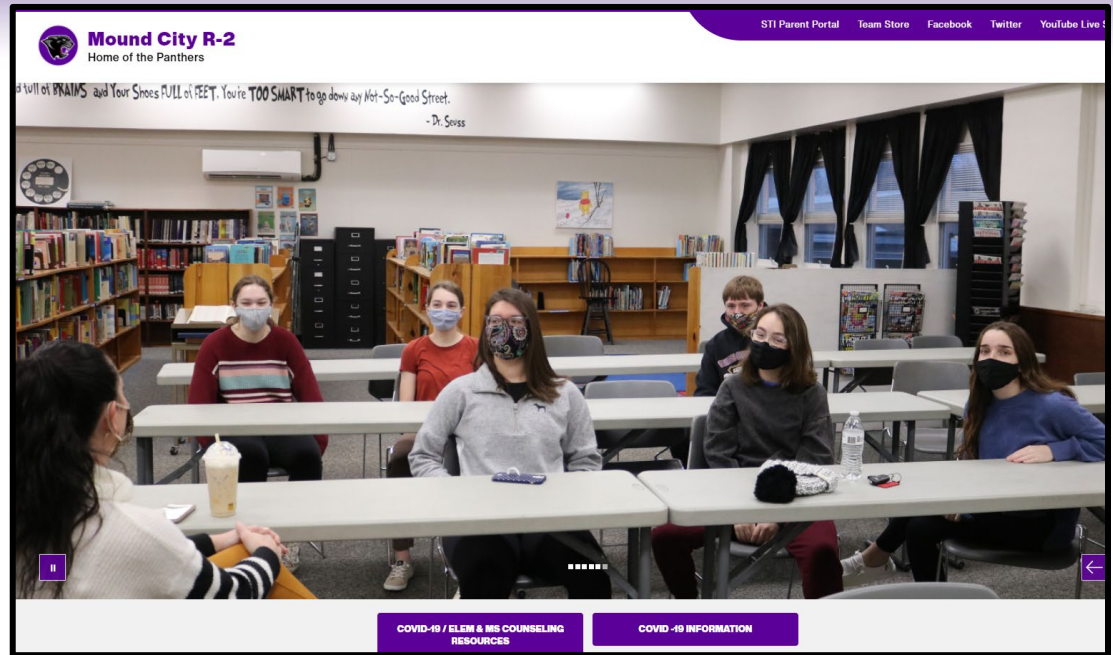


- Information was available on the school district website and nces.ed.gov
- There was also information about a state assessment on the school district website.



“Potential Students” are an audience for your website.

- This is Mound City, MO:
- “Why choose us” info on home page.



ABOUT US

Why Us

Graduation Rate

100%

Technology Ratio

Computer to Student Ratio: 1:1

Teacher Ratio

1:9 Teacher to Student Ratio

Career Ed. Programs

Agriculture Education, Business Education, Family Consumer Sciences and Human Services



Comments:

- There were a few daycare facilities seen but no information about cost was readily available.
- Some didn't see any indication of childcare facilities in person.
- An online search pulled up about a dozen childcare facilities for some. Visitors think they remember hearing from the Chamber that space was limited.

Barton County Data:

- **Extent Desired Capacity meets Potential Childcare need** **45%**
- Contact ks.childcareaware.org to access local childcare specialists.
785-823-3343

Source <https://ks.childcareaware.org/data-research/> Retrieved from internet 11/29/2023

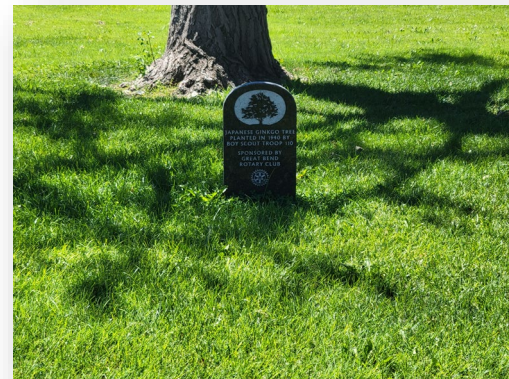
- Many churches were seen with a variety of denominations.
- People would likely find a church they were affiliated with here in town.
- Most were not located on main roads and you had to look for them.
- Nice appearance of buildings and facilities – looked inviting.
- No evidence of faith-based community services seen, but often those are only known to those seeking services.



- There were some service clubs listed on the signs as you enter town, though they weren't easy to see what was represented while driving.
- Kiwanis and Lions stood out the most.
- The Bargain Barn told visitors about Rosewood Services.
- There was an American Legion noted on the west side of town.



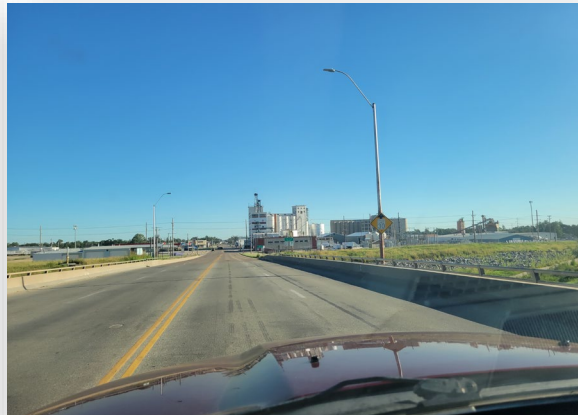
- Some visitors did not see where the civic clubs met or any evidence of activities or projects they were involved with in town.
- Others noticed placards on some murals that explained civic involvement. The Chamber explained how the alley was painted by community members.
- Some didn't notice any signs indicating "this project by" for any of the civic groups other than the work done by the mural committee.



- The streets all appeared to be in good shape and well maintained.
- The directional signage was difficult to locate as some was high on stoplight poles.
- The parallel parking was sometimes overwhelming for some visitors as they weren't used to it on such busy streets.



- Sidewalks, parks, and lighting all seemed to be in nice shape.
- The oval neighborhood on McBride and Russell Parkways was really neat!
- Highways themselves were well maintained as residential streets were good and easy to drive on.
- Visitors liked the trees and landscaping down the middle of the streets in residential areas.



- Visitors to the Chamber of Commerce and City Hall were very well received at both locations.
- Helpful staff who offered a lot of information on murals, the Main Street program, and recommendations of places to visit.
- Maps were given out which made visitors feel welcomed. Places to visit on the route home were also suggested which was great!



- Some visitors noted City Hall but didn't go inside, though they indicated they saw it was near the Chamber, downtown, and the fire and police departments.
- Some visitors received a new resident's welcome packet from the Chamber which they felt was very useful.



Image retrieved 12/4/2023 – Google Maps

Fire, EMS and Police Services

- Fire trucks were observed to be well maintained and looked new.
- Two fire stations were seen.
- The police vehicles also appeared to be new.



Welcome to Kansas Insurance Department

Home Contact Us

Kansas Insurance Commissioner Vicki Schmidt

Kansas Insurance Department
420 SW 9th Street
Topeka, Kansas 66612-1678
Consumer Hotline: 800-432-2484 (KS only)
[Email Us](#) | Phone: 785-296-3071



ISO Public Protection Classification

HOME : ISO

Most U.S. insurers of home and business properties use Insurance Services Office's (ISO) Property Protection Classification (PPC) in calculating premiums. In general, the price of insurance in a community with a good PPC is lower than in a community with a poor PPC, assuming all other factors are equal.

PPC Program: <https://www.isomitigation.com/program-works/how-the-ppc-program-works.html>

A community's PPC depends on:

1. Emergency communications systems, including facilities for the public to report fires, staffing, training, certification of telecommunicators, and facilities for dispatching fire departments
2. The fire department, including equipment, staffing, training, and geographic deployment of fire companies
3. The water supply system, including the inspection and flow testing of hydrants and a careful evaluation of



- The library's Facebook page showed it had a lot of community programming being offered.
- Visitors indicated they did not see the library while they were exploring the city.



- The waterfall feature at Santa Fe Park was noted to be really pretty.
- The Rec Department's website was amazing! So much programming and easy to follow.
- A sign for a walking path out west was observed.
- Not a lot of playgrounds or neighborhood parks seen.



- The Zoo was visited. It wasn't very big but had a lot of animals and food was offered so visitors could feed the animals. The facility was well maintained.
- A sign at the Zoo's parking lot said "No Large Gatherings" – multiple visitors indicated they are sure there's a story there. It does seem contradictory and not inviting. With the zoo and water park right there it seems a logical place for family reunions and other types of get togethers, but apparently that's not possible.



Well-Known for an attraction or event?

- The Convention and Visitors Bureau guidebook says “Proud Home of the Kansas Wetlands and Wildlife National Scenic Byway.” The visitor’s guide is very nice.
- There’s a B-29 Memorial Plaza near town.
- Cheyenne Bottoms and Fort Hays’ Kansas Wetlands Education Center both close to town.
- The courthouse and plaza was beautiful as was the zoo and water park.



Well-Known for an attraction or event?

- Some didn't notice the community slogan in town other than on the visitor's guide.
- Panther Pride was evident all over town.
- Great Bend and Panther wording was also seen in shops visited.
- A lot of events listed on Facebook and mention of a GBKS or I Love GBKS group included.
- Fridays on Forest looked like a lot of fun.
- The Chamber did provide a list of events of interest and visitors noted the Chamber calendar mentioned things for residents to know about, like "shred days" – this was appreciated.



Image retrieved 12/4/2023 – Great Bend Economic Development

Natural or manmade features that can draw people?

- Other than the murals and recreation items mentioned earlier, nothing else was noted that might bring people to town.



Visitor's Center

- The staff at the Chamber was very kind, knew all about the area, and was very helpful.
- The Chamber recommended places for lunch and shopping, explained Fridays on Forest, and had publications for everyone.
- The volunteer at the front of the office and the office manager and director were all great.
- Seems like it would be a great place to work!
- Visitors did have to look up the location of the Chamber on Google since they weren't familiar with the city.

What would bring you back?

- Many shops downtown – visitors would like to come back and spend more time.
- They'd like to come back to Cheyenne Bottoms, the Scenic Byway, and the B-29 Memorial Plaza to spend more time.
- The Bargain Barn seems like it would have inventory turnover enough to be a draw back to town.
- Visitors would love to attend an event on the courthouse lawn.
- Forest Avenue Antiques had cute, trendy collectibles and the owner was awesome to visit with – definitely a place to come back to!

What would bring you back?

- Some said there was so much to see that they didn't have a chance to experience and they'd like to come back again to explore more.
- Visitors would visit the zoo and the antique and thrift stores again.
- Great Bend Coffee is a place visitors would like to bring family and friends to see – it was delicious.
- The town square was so inviting – that would be a draw.

Most Positive Observations

- Merchants and people downtown.
- The whole downtown area and the cooperation – it seems to keep that area welcoming and updated while preserving the old.
- There's a lot of industry in town.
- The kindness of people in town in general – everyone had an answer to any question visitors had and genuinely made them feel wanted there.
- The art movement.
- School pride.
- Fridays on Forest.
- Strong family and community pride and spirit. Business owners and residents obviously care about the city.
- Seems like a great place to spend a day or the weekend without having to travel too far.

Biggest Obstacles/Challenges

- Being able to find where visitors were wanting to go. The signage was either not located well or not visible.
- The traffic, parking, and finding where to go on the main drag through town – easy to the west but seemed very clustered.
- Entrances to the city from all directions were more industrial than appealing – not very welcoming.
- Getting people traveling through to stop and spend some time. How do you make them aware of what they city has to offer if they are just passing through? Lack of signage highlighting attractions or businesses.

What will you remember?

- The downtown and how welcomed visitors felt walking around.
- How welcomed the Chamber and City offices made them feel.
- How relaxing the zoo was.
- The courthouse!
- Great Bend Coffee and its atmosphere. Such a cozy, family-friendly place with people playing games and enjoying their time with others. The food was great, too!

- In total, visitors report that they spent about \$293 while in town.

Thank you to our volunteer visitors.

Set Next Steps:

- Start talking! Find ways to discuss what you heard in small groups of every kind.

Contact me if you need resources or have questions:

Jan Steen

Community Vitality Specialist, K-State Research and Extension

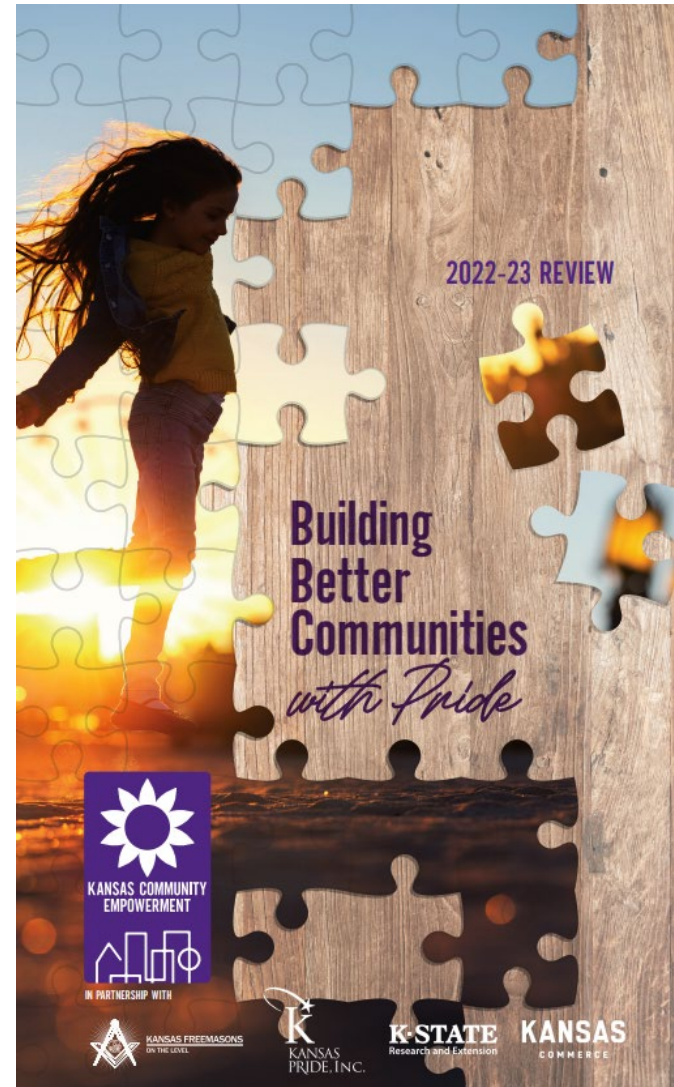
785.532.5840

jmsteen@ksu.edu

Kansas Community Empowerment

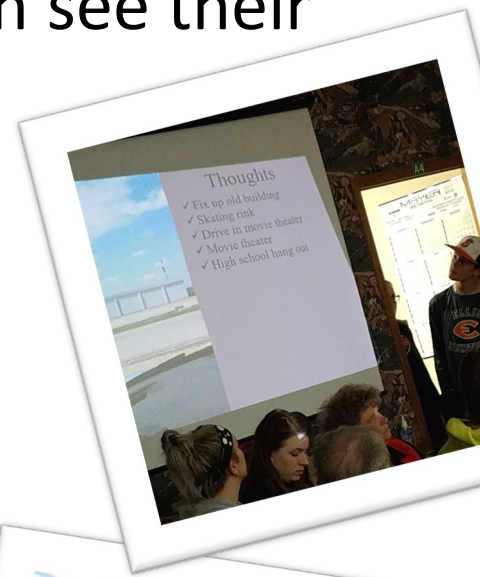
<http://kce.k-state.edu>

- Local communities identify what they would like to preserve, create, or improve for their future and volunteers pull together to create their ideal community future.



Youth Community Perceptions <https://bit.ly/ks-ycp>

- Youth-Based Community Assessment.
- Gives communities insights on how youth see their community.
- Creates opportunities for youth voices in the community.
- Allows youth to become involved in local government and community process



Grant Writing Classes and Support

Contact

KSRECV@ksu.edu

to participate.



5 GRANT WRITING RESOURCES

K-State Research and Extension provides resources to help you write and submit successful grant proposals to improve lives, livelihoods and communities across Kansas.

- 1 ONLINE GRANT WRITING CLASSES**
Class alum reported receiving \$28 million in successful grants. 
- 2 A PROFESSIONAL LEVEL GRANT DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT COURSE**
An 8-week course dedicated to helping you complete a fundable proposal. 
- 3 A LIST OF CONTRACT GRANT WRITERS**
Professionals willing and ready to write grants on a contract basis.
- 4 SUPPORT FOR KANSAS PRIDE COMMUNITIES**
Excellent resources for those wanting to bring more to their communities.
- 5 ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT BY K-STATE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION PROFESSIONALS**
Our professionals are prepared to help you find grants and review your grant proposals.

Small Business and Community Development

- **First Friday e-Calls 9:30-10:30 am**

Connecting small businesses and communities with the resources to make them successful.

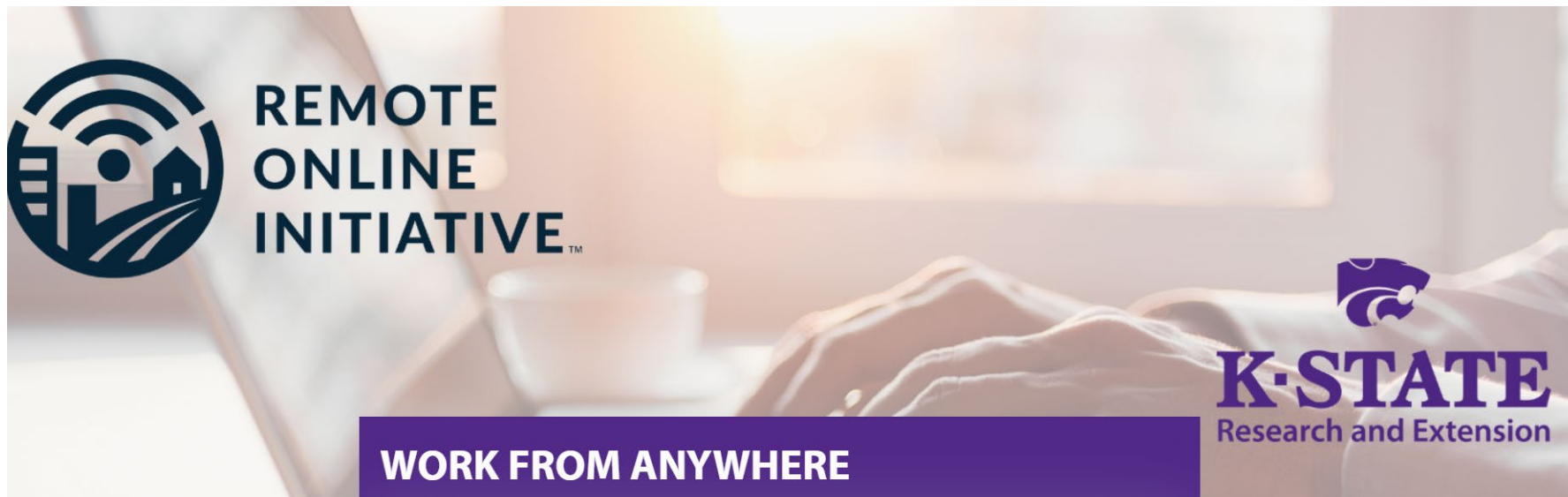
— Register here: <https://ksre-learn.com/ecall>

— Previous calls are recorded at
<https://ksre-learn.com/entrepreneurship>

- Now people have a choice, and millions of them are planning to move.
- **“The pivot to remote work is the biggest, fastest transformation of the labor market since the World War II mobilization.”**
- **Major cities will see the biggest out-migration:** 20.6% of those planning to move are currently based in a major city.
- **People are seeking less expensive housing:** Altogether, **more than half** (52.5%) are planning to move to a house that is significantly more affordable than their current home.
- **People are moving beyond regular commute distances:** 54.7% of people are moving over two hours away or more from their current location, which is beyond daily or even weekly commuting distances for most.

UpWork October, 2020 <https://www.upwork.com/press/releases/economist-report-remote-workers-on-the-move>, retrieved from Internet 12-12-20, UpWork October, 2020

- Kansas Remote Online Initiative
 - Certified Remote Work Professional
 - Certified Remote Work Leader
- *Certification in 4-weeks*
- Monthly Classes: <https://kansasremotework.com/>



Rural Grocery/KS Healthy Food Initiative

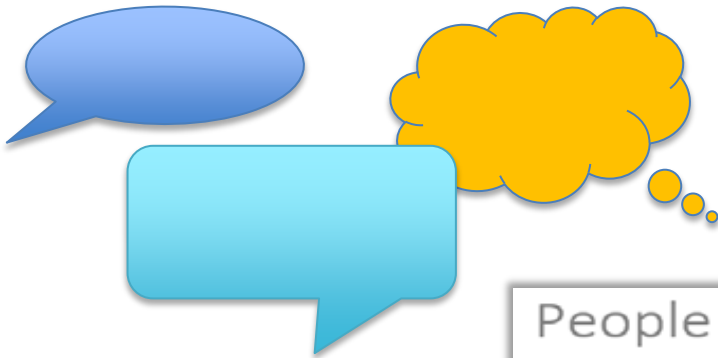
- **Goal:** Increase access to affordable, healthy food and to improve the health and economic development of Kansans and their communities.
- Technical assistance and financing to develop new or renovate fresh food retail in underserved communities throughout Kansas.

<http://kansashealthyfood.org/>



What will we do?

What did you hear?



What will we do?



People move in the direction of their conversations

