

First Impressions

Conway Springs, KS

K-State Research and Extension in Partnership with
The Dane G. Hansen Foundation



- Conway Springs requested First Impressions, St. John was obtained as its partner; 1¾ hours separate the communities.
- Volunteers in both communities were trained. Photos were taken of Conway Springs on September 5, 2019.
- Six St. John visitors came on different dates: 7/22, 8/1, 8/8, and 8/9.
- Results are presented to the public tonight.
- Conway Springs 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 and no one is noticing or talking about it.
- Only 36% lived there previously.
- 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

- In a survey of newcomers to rural areas, the reasons they come are:
 - Simpler pace of life
 - Safety and Security
 - Low housing cost
 - ***“A job,”** isn’t in the top 10 reasons.*
- “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
March 1, 2019 First Friday Call.*

See the recording at:

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

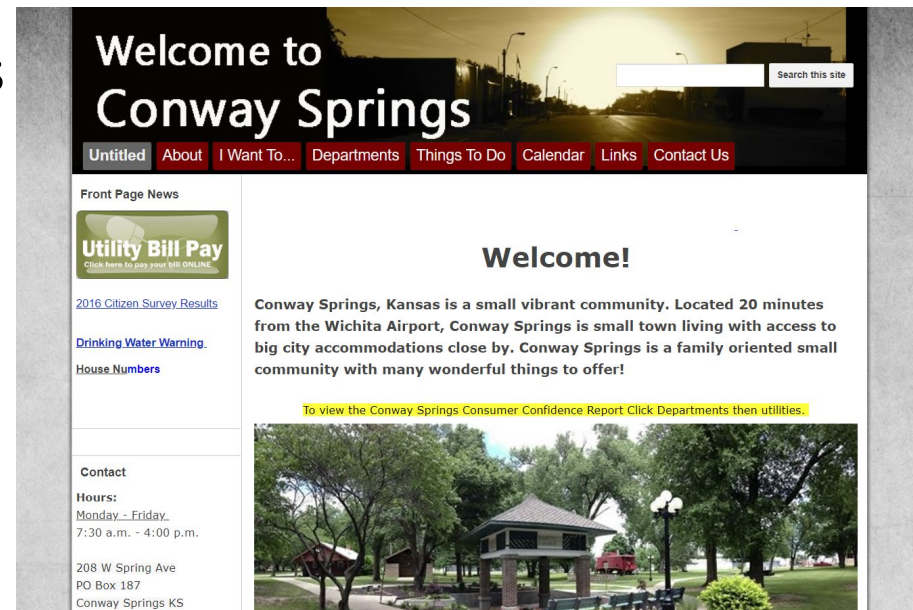
- 2010 Census Population 1,272
(down 3.78% since 2000*) **KS= +6.1%**
- 2018 Estimate is 1,217
(down 7.94% since 2000 **KS= +8.0%**)
- 92.6% high school or GED, 18.5% college educated,
— **90.5% HS or equivalency, KS 32.3% college education, KS**
- Poverty rate 18.9% **(KS=12.8%)**
- Median Age 34.1 years **(36.3)**
- Median household income is \$50,855 **(\$55,477)**

* 2000 Census was 1,322

- **Website**

- <http://www.conwayspringsks.com>

- Website appeared to have a lot of information, but it was not there or not current.
- Dates for events not updated.
- Says housing is available, but doesn't have listings or real estate agent contacts.
- Ironical that History section talks about best water in the U.S. but the site shows a "Drinking Water Warning" on the side.



- **Facebook**

City of Conway Springs

<https://www.facebook.com/ConwaySpringsKansas/>

- More information than city site.
- Regularly updated.



“Five-Minute” Impression

- A bedroom community.
- Projects around town that are trying to make things better for residents.
- Entrance signs were faded and hard to see, blending into shrubs. North sign almost blocked by grocery store sign.



“Five-Minute” Impression

- Highway entrance through town seemed overgrown, run down, with some blighted housing, neglected yards, and commercial buildings needing a facelift.



“Five-Minute” Impression

- Casey's was nice and new, but car wash next door was an eyesore.



“Five-Minute” Impression

- “Nothing to pull me into town if I was not intentionally going there.”
- Signage was good – easy to find sports complex, park/pool. No signage to find schools.
- Main paved through streets in good condition, several streets were not, or were sand or gravel.



“Five-Minute” Impression

- Housing appears to be a mix of nice, run down and some in between. Some nice new builds on the outskirts of town.
- Sidewalks seem to be a mix of good and bad.



Downtown Business Area

- Some buildings have received some paint. Some other buildings are run down and not utilized.
- Downtown was cute with a lot of newer looking buildings.



Downtown Business Area

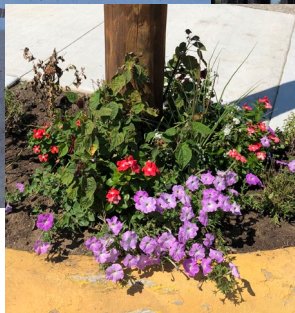
- Businesses noted: Salon and spa, photography studio, 2 banks, mortuary, paint company, aviation company, bar and grill, city hall, library, newspaper, auto repair, insurance offices, pharmacy, dog grooming, fire station, quilting shop, bar and grill*, liquor store.



* Visitors thought bar and grill was a liquor store initially.

Downtown Business Area

- Clean streets. Park benches and planters were nice. Good parking.
- Salon and spa and photography studio both have a super nice storefront.
- Some run down older buildings, but you can tell love and money were put into some operating businesses.



Downtown Business Area

- Farmers Market area looked nice with a sign that had all the information you'd need if you wanted to attend.



- Customer service:
 - Never greeted at salon, though visitors realize the stylist was cutting someone's hair – a “welcome” would have been appreciated.
 - Wait staff and cook at bar and grill were very friendly. Plenty of seating, appeared busy. One visitor noted the seating, condiment containers, and floor could use a good cleaning.



- Amenities
 - No public wi-fi was observed.
 - No drinking fountains observed.
 - There were restrooms near downtown in the park, as well as more benches and trash cans. Restrooms were cleaner than expected.



Other Retail Shopping Areas

- Near north side of town: Veterinarian, Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, Dollar General, Casey's. All appear to have parking lots that are inviting.
- Customer service at grocery store was friendly. No place noted to sit to eat food from the grill.



Other Retail Shopping Areas

- Automotive shops and CO-OP looked run down and not approachable.



- *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 areas on the east side of town around the CO-OP elevators.
- Additional space in that area already occupied by industry so there could be room for more.



- Health clinic, long-term care (Spring View Manor), and pharmacy.
- Is EMS housed in fire department?
- Close to Wichita for hospitals/doctors.



- Homeowners appear to take pride in their yards. Lots of American flags being flown, which was nice to see.
- A lot of construction and new roofs being installed.



- Some blighted housing, super nice housing and some, but not a lot in between. Lots where new housing could be built exist.
- Is there enough housing in town for different income levels? Low income availability was lacking. Low income housing complex didn't seem kept up – overgrown trees and weeds.
- A few for sale or rent property signs. Hard to find a good real estate agent online with Conway Springs properties.



- While some noted a few “For Rent” signs in town, most visitors didn’t see any.
- Nothing for rent found online.
- City clerk said she could provide a list of landlords with multiple properties if interested.



KANSAS

• Total Housing Units	506	
• Total Occupied Houses	450 (88.9%)	(89.1%)
• Vacant Houses	56 (11.1%)	(10.7%)
• Owner Occupied	336 (74.7%)	(66.4%)
• Renter Occupied	114 (25.3%)	(33.6%)

May be a need for clean-up/demolition of older properties

2010 Census Data

- School buildings are decent size. High school is impressive with great landscaping!
- Middle school appears old, but large and well maintained.



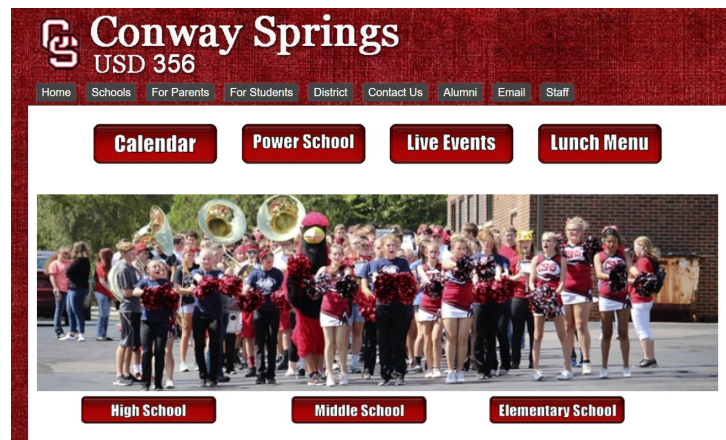
- Stadium is nice and appears to be a great facility.
- Grade school could use some TLC, but is adequate in size.



- District office was also seen.
- Catholic school was easy to spot. Welcome sign really stood out upon entering town.
- There's no signage for the other schools that would direct visitors to school buildings for events.



- Not much information about the quality of education to be found in the community.
- School website information is not descriptive, can't tell classification (1A, 2A, 3A). Considering recruiting new families or just keeping a generic site to get parents by? For what's going on there could be more information posted.
- School website is not easy to navigate on visitors' phones. City website has a link to the schools.



Comments: City clerk was able to provide information on several in-home daycare providers in town. Preschool downtown and Little Folks Childcare Center were seen. No information on pricing available at city office or online.

Sumner County Data:

- **Number of Children Under Age 6 Potentially Needing Care:** **1,911**
- **Children with all parents in the workforce:** **60%**
- **Desired Capacity of Child Care Centers** **679**
- **Extent that desired capacity meets potential need** **60%**
- **Creating a Child Care Action Plan**

<https://ks.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Draft-Child-Care-Supply-Demand-Action-Plan.pdf>

*Contact ks.childcareaware.org to get access to local child care specialists.
785-823-3343*



- Several churches of different denominations found: Catholic, First Christian, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian.
- Not all churches looked to be up and running. Presbyterian Church is now a community development center that doesn't have normal business hours.



- Catholic Church is behind the school.
- Methodist Church had a welcome sign coming into town. Did not notice any evidence of faith-based community services, though some past events were listed on their Facebook page.



- Masonic Lodge looks run down and not active.
- Aging Projects, Inc. advertisement in post office.
- Development Foundation has a LOT of ads and a calendar of events in the post office, but no number to contact, just a Facebook page. Not much signage/advertising on the old church building itself.
- No other civic organizations or activities observed.



- It appears the city couldn't keep up with street infrastructure as housing grew over the decades.
- Fairly rough non-paved residential roads. Would be difficult to walk especially with a stroller.
- Not many sidewalks in residential areas. Sidewalks, again, weren't all great.



- Street signs were a mixture of green/white and black/white. Some missing completely, some on opposite sides of the road compared to others.
- You can tell the city has been working on sewer or water lines because of dirt in people's yards and in streets.
- Sports complex: example of possible half-finished projects in town.



- Building looks nice from the outside. Was having roof work done during the visit. Staff apologized for the fans and noise.
- Knowledgeable, friendly staff, really knows what's happening in the city.



Fire, EMS and Police Services

- Police vehicles and building were noticed.
- New fire station is very nice. Is EMS housed there?



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



- > The Department
- > Auto/Home
- > Health/Life
- > Insurance Fraud & Education
- > Producer/Agency Services
- > Company Services
- > Other Services



HOME : ISO

ISO Public Protection Classification

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

- Library has a summer reading program listed on city website and Facebook page.
- Hours are minimal which could make it hard to keep people interested in using it. Most people probably at work when open.



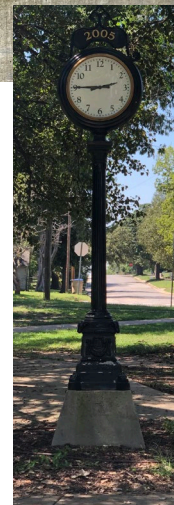
- New sports complex on the south side of town looks really nice and was easy to find with signage. Drawback is the parking lot is kind of a mess, but the facility is great.



- City park had mix of newer and older equipment – cool!
- City park is huge and appears to be center of attention and activity in town.
- Lots of picnic tables, grills, trash bins.
- Park is beautiful and inviting! Good place to host events.
- “We were envious!”



- Didn't see signage at the park to identify Springhouse. Only signs were right at the building indicating water wasn't drinkable and the structure was on the historic register.
- Good landmark to visit, but unless you know you're looking for a gazebo type structure you might not find it.
- Landscaping and clock near Springhouse were nice.



- Springhouse might be in need of some repairs.
Rotting boards and paint missing near roof line.



Well-Known for an attraction or event?

- Home of Pure Spring Water. Signs direct to Springhouse, but never identify it at the end of the street. Could capitalize on that for tourism.
- Farmers Market
- Fall Festival coming up. Didn't see any signs in town for it, only on website.
- Summer Concerts in the Park listed on website, but not info to go with it.
- Maybe a nice rodeo?
- Things listed on website are outdated.

Natural or manmade features that can draw people?

- Sports complex.
- Rodeo arena looks large and might be a good place to have entertainment, but looks rundown and overgrown, possibly not utilized anymore.
- Springhouse in the park has potential to be a touristy spot for people to stop, but not enough good signage to identify it or tell the story.
- Park is large and pretty nice.
- Website has a “Things to Do” section that has suggestions.

Visitor's Center

- There is no visitor's center, chamber office, or other facility that would be specifically there to serve visitors.
- City Office is one stop shop like most other small towns. Office is inviting.
- Staff very friendly and helpful.

What would bring you back?

- Gambino's, Au Dean's, Casey's, Chester's Chicken at Hired Man's – a few choices for food, but probably wouldn't drive back just for the food.
- Doesn't seem like there are any specialty places to get local favorites.
- Bar & Grill was “really good” “...will eat there again and would recommend it to someone”.

Most Positive Observations

- Cleanliness of the town. City and most homeowners really take pride in keeping things nice.
- The park is awesome!
- Schools are well kept and well marked (on the buildings).
- The homes that are newly constructed and newer sports complex.
- Repair work, roof replacements, home upkeep speaks volumes about town growth and pride.
- Young people said they are proud to live in Conway Springs. They would probably leave after high school, but always consider it their home.
- People that live here seem genuinely happy.
- Downtown is really cute and has had a lot of effort put into it.

Biggest Obstacles/Challenges

- Business growth doesn't appear to be happening. Some vacant buildings with nothing really being promoted for lease.
- Street and sidewalk infrastructure would be a huge priority as a newcomer for the city to invest in.
- Repairing some of the older vacant buildings and houses.
- Not close to a main highway/interstate, but can't do much about that.
- Mix of paved and gravel streets is pretty random. Road repairs needed in front of fire department and Gateway Cottages.

Biggest Obstacles/Challenges

- Better signage at the Springhouse and some repairs there. Warning signs are important but shouldn't be all or the first things people see.
- Move welcome signs at entrances to town so they are easier to see.
- Update website to remove old drinking water warnings, maybe capitalize on spring water or its history.
- Entering from highway is not pretty. Maybe some landscaping and mowing would make a huge difference.
- Railroad tracks were difficult to drive over. Are they still used? Can they be paved over if not?
- Wayfinder signage to schools/stadium.

What will you remember?

- High school is IMPRESSIVE.
- Some nice housing.
- City is trying hard to get ahead of infrastructure issues they were faced with. Making that commitment takes the whole community, so a feeling that people are working together exists.
- Some areas seemed dirty and run down.

What will you remember?

- Other areas clean – cleanliness of town, schools, and park.
- The Springhouse “we almost didn’t find” – thought it was pretty awesome once found.
- Probably no reason to go back or move to at this time. If I lived there my whole life I might feel different. Feels a lot of work needs to be done to the main street through town.
- Good food at the Bar & Grill.
- Lots of sand and dirt roads.
- I want to go back and check out the Fall Festival!

Thanks to our leadership team and volunteer visitors!

Set Next Steps:

- Which group will lead the discussion?

Contact us if you need resources or have questions:

Nancy Daniels
Community Vitality Specialist,
K-State Research and Extension
785.410.6352
nkdaniels@ksu.edu

Bernadette Love
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Jan Steen
Community Vitality Specialist,
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K-State Research and Extension

Kansas PRIDE: <http://kansasprideprogram.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.



K-State Research and Extension

Youth Community Perceptions: <https://bit.ly/33GGwGS>

Helps youth learn to identify needs and opportunities in their community while working with local leaders to make a difference!

Assists Youth and Communities in:

- Creating opportunities for youth to have a voice in the community.
- Involving and familiarizing youth with local government and community processes.
- Bridging the gap between youth, local government, and the community.

YOUTH
COMMUNITY
PERCEPTIONS



K-State Research and Extension

Contact

Nancy Daniels

nkdaniels@ksu.edu

to participate.

Grant Writing Workshops

Grants are a vital piece in your community's funding puzzle...and *you* can do it.

K-State Research and Extension's Community Vitality Team offers grant writing workshops for local communities.

Objectives

- Conquer your grant writing fears and start writing.
- Learn new sources of data to document community needs.
- Learn new sources of grant funding.
- Practice developing the Grant Elements: Problem, Outcomes, Activities, Evaluation, and Budget.

Short Term Outcomes

- 93% have increased confidence to write a successful grant.
- 94% learned new sources of data to document community needs.
- 80% learned new sources for finding grants.
- 91% have increased confidence to develop the elements of a successful grant.



K-State Research and Extension


- **First Friday e-Calls 9:30-10:30 am (CT)**
 - Connecting small businesses and communities with the resources to make them successful.
 - Contact Nancy Daniels nkdaniels@ksu.edu to participate.
 - Previous calls are recorded at <http://www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/business/entrepreneurship/>
 - Community Vitality Calendar of events: <http://www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/>

- <http://smallbizsurvival.com/>
– THE SMALL TOWN AND RURAL BUSINESS RESOURCE

NEW! SURVEY	BOOK BECKY TO SPEAK	THE BOOK: SMALL TOWN RULES	SHOP LOCAL EBOOK	SAVEYOUR.TOWN	
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SMALL BIZ SURVIVAL

THE SMALL TOWN AND RURAL BUSINESS RESOURCE




FRONT PAGE	LATEST STORIES	ABOUT	GUIDED TOUR	SUBSCRIBE	PODCAST	CONTACT	RSS	
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WHAT BUSINESS STAGE ARE YOU IN?



Dreaming

For those who are dreaming or planning to start a business of their own. ... [Get started.](#)



Doing & Growing

For those who have a business and have grown to the point that it's

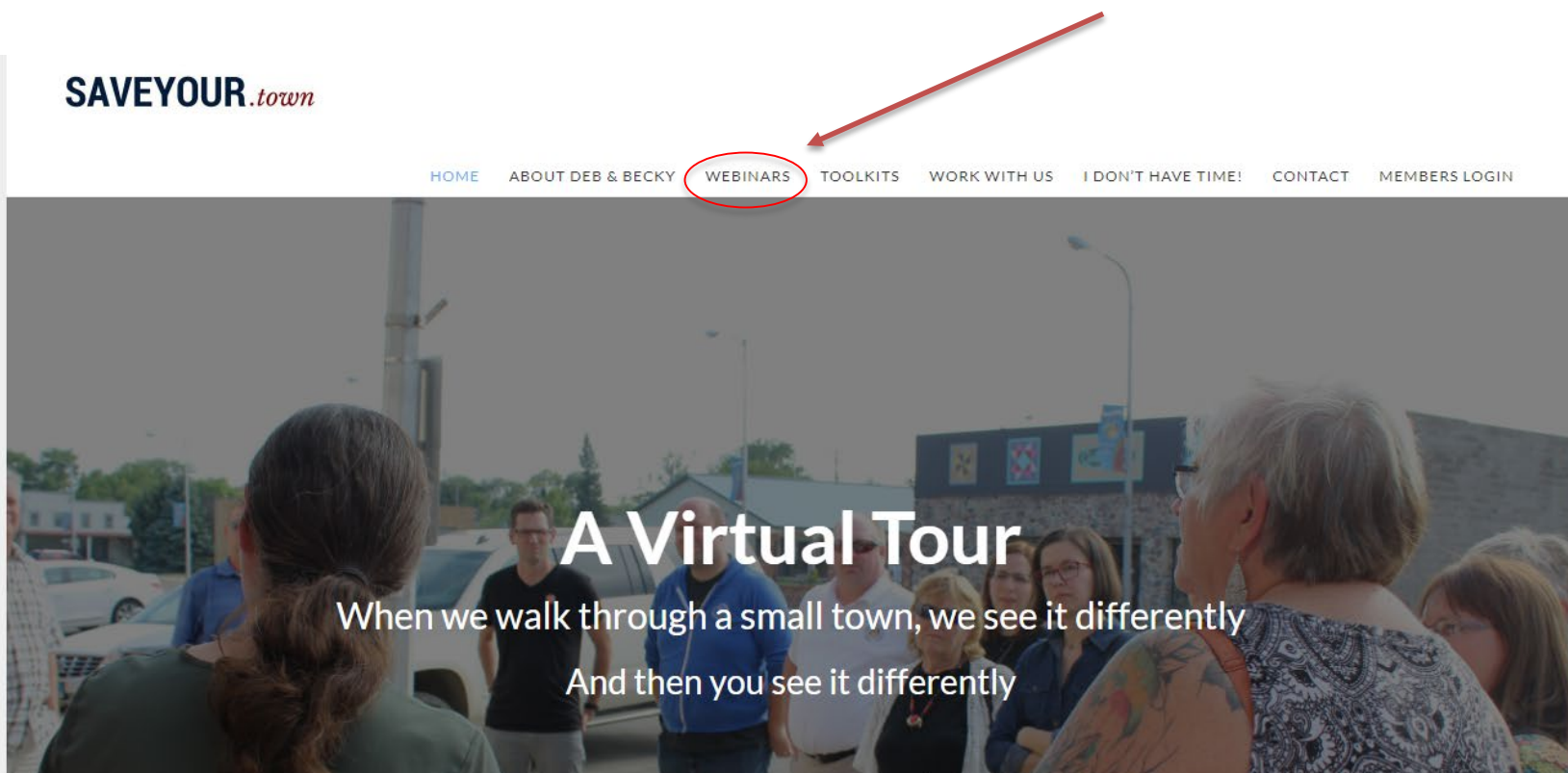
Get our articles plus special bonus emails, a positive view of rural once a week:
Join me and 3546 rural friends.

Newsletters
☒ Small Biz Survival
☒ Positive View of Rural
☒ Building Possibility

JOIN

I will never sell or rent your email.

- <http://saveyour.town/>
 - Monthly live webinars; available on recording.
 - Pay once and show as many times as you want.
 - Watch parties encouraged.



Kansas Department of Agriculture in partnership with other state organizations, will work with your community to find the best opportunities for growth using the assets of your region.

A graphic for the "GROW IN KANSAS" Strategic Growth Initiative. It features a collage of various agricultural and technological images, including a sheep, wheat, a cow, a pig, a chicken, a drone, a green tractor, a circuit board, a horse, a person in a lab coat, and various fruits and vegetables. The text "GROW IN KANSAS" is prominently displayed at the top in white on a dark blue background. Below the collage, the text "STRATEGIC GROWTH INITIATIVE" is written in bold, followed by a description of the program as a pilot for recruiting food, agriculture, and UAS/small aircraft businesses to Kansas.

GROW IN KANSAS

STRATEGIC GROWTH INITIATIVE

A pilot program for the proactive recruitment of food, agriculture and UAS/small aircraft business to Kansas.

For more information on the Strategic Growth Initiative, please contact
Russell Plaschka, Ag Business Development Program Manager
785-564-7466 • Russell.Plaschka@ks.gov
agriculture.ks.gov/GrowAg