

First Impressions

El Dorado, 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 Great Bend visited El Dorado in September.
- Results presented on April 18, 2024
- El Dorado uses the results for further discussion and action plans.

- **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

- 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. *KSRE has a guide.
- If you bring 7 people to a 700-citizen town every year in 10 years, you’ll have a 10% increase. It matters! Housing is a challenge, 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: **↓ .3% since 2012**
- 2022 KS Certified Population: 12,865
- 2012 KS Certified Population: 12,900
- Median household income: \$52,921 **\$68,925**
- High school or GED 95% **92%**
- At least a B.S. Degree 27.2% **35.6%**
- Median Age: 34.3 years **37.6 years**
- Persons 65 and Over 15.9% **17.2%**

Blue: Kansas Comparison Data

(Source: Kansas Secretary of State Division of the Budget Certified Population Data 2022; Census.gov)

- Moved since Last Year (2021):**
20.8%
14.6%

Consider the margin of error. For example, the Census lists 1,625 lived in the same house, but give a +/- 174 margin of error for that total.

- Poverty rate**
15%
12%

(% of people below poverty line)

Race/Ethnicity

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| White: 86% | American Indian: 1% |
| Black: 3% | Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander: 0% |
| Asian: 1% | Two or more races: 8% |
| Other: 2% | Hispanic or Latino: 5.4% |
| Not Hispanic or Latino: 94.6% | |

Blue: Kansas Comparison Data

Source: 2022 ACS 1-year estimates <https://data.census.gov>) Table P8, P9

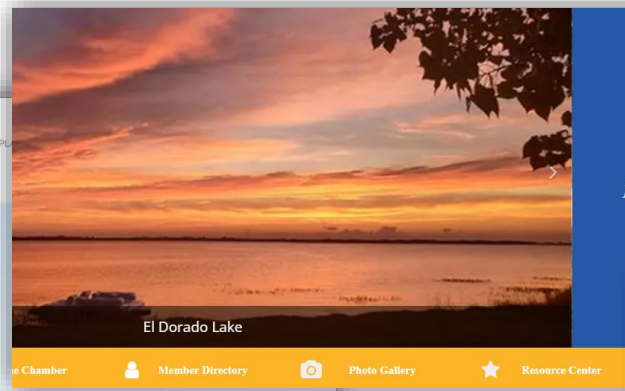
- **Website** <https://www.eldoks.com/>
- Visitors had generally positive reviews of the city's website.
- They noted it is easy to use, up to date, and included many resources for new residents.



Website

Visitors gave constructive feedback for improvement of all the websites they found.

- Experience El Dorado <https://www.experienceeldo.com/>
- Chamber of Commerce <https://www.eldoradochamber.com/>
- El Dorado Main Street <https://eldoradomainstreet.org/>



- **Facebook** <https://www.facebook.com/cityofdorado>
- The official FB page launches from the City website, but it comes up below a FB-generated site* and several other sites.



* <https://www.facebook.com/places/Things-to-do-in-El-Dorado-Kansas/106313082733022/>

Retrieved from internet 4-11-24

“Five-Minute” Impression

- Visitors liked the nice entrance signs on the west and were impressed with the businesses they passed.
- The other entrances were not as welcoming.
- The east entrance said, “Well Refined Living,” but the visitor didn’t see that theme anywhere else. They liked “Experience El Dorado” better.



Photo Retrieved from Google Earth 4-10-24
Dated Nov 2023

“Five-Minute” Impression

- One visitor first noticed the weeds at the intersections.
- The neighborhoods were well-kept and maintained.
- There was activity downtown with shops to meet everyone’s needs.



- El Dorado seems like it would be a great place to raise a family.
- Visitors saw playgrounds and people out walking, up-to-date sporting facilities and schools.



“Five-Minute” Impression

- One visitor wanted to visit the college but accidentally turned in a back entrance first. They felt way-finding signs for the college would be a great improvement.
- They didn't easily find way-finding signs, but when they did, they thought the signs needed to be refreshed.



- Some turning lane paint was very faded, causing one visitor to nearly miss turns.
- Visitors LOVED the hanging plants and bridges.
- Loved the Butler Welcome Banners.



- The downtown is clean and inviting.
- They stumbled onto the Art Museum and didn't know from the outside that it was a museum. The small signs under the horses were the only thing they saw.
- There were uniformly positive comments about friendliness and customer service.





Downtown Business Area

- Visitors wished for major retail like Maurice's or Brown's Shoe to bring people downtown, and wondered what the college students did for a night life.





- A visitor's photo documented broken windows and dirty windows that invited graffiti.
- A visitor loved that stores sold El Dorado merchandise.

- We saw benches, public art, and numerous trash cans.
- We didn't see any water fountains or public Wi-Fi posted.



- There was no problem finding parking. The sidewalks and public areas were clean and inviting.
- The landscaping was good in some areas and overgrown in others. Visitors gave examples.
- The area in front of the courthouse looked good with planted flowers.



Other Retail Shopping Areas

- A mix of strip stores and retail, mixed with fast food areas from the west.
- Very easy to access.
- Visitors admired the dining options.



- *A drive-by is not how industry will find you, check with your local Eco Devo director to ensure your site is listed on LocationOne @ Kansas Department of Commerce.*
- **Resources:** [Kansas Certified Sites](#) to demonstrate shovel-readiness.
 - see <https://ksre-learn.com/entrepreneurship> May, 7, 2021 and June 7, 2024 for webinars.

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.*

- The refinery area is impressive.
- This area is visible from the Turnpike and gives the impression El Dorado is proud to have industry.



Photo Retrieved from Google Earth 4-10-24
Dated Sept 2023

- The hospital complex and adjoining buildings looked nice and updated.
- One visitor had a personal, very positive experience at the hospital when their son was injured at a sporting tournament.



- Visitors didn't notice physicians' offices but thought they were in the hospital complex.
- They didn't see dentists or eye care.
- By web searches, El Dorado appears well-served with assisted living and long-term care services.



- We noticed new construction around the golf course and infill construction south of the swimming pool
- There were a wide variety of houses, but not many for sale.



- Visitors were impressed with the number of apartment complexes.



- Visitors didn't think it was easy to find realtors in El Dorado.
- The neighborhoods looked well-kept in every neighborhood; citizens seemed to take pride in their properties.





| | | Kansas |
|-----------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| • Occupied Housing Units | 86.5% | 90.9% |
| • Owner Occupied: | 61.2% | 67.7% |
| • Renter Occupied: | 38.8% | 32.3% |
| • Vacant Housing Units | 13.5% | 9.1% |
| • Average Travel Time to Work: | 17 mins | 19.6 mins |

Resources:

Have you done a [Housing Assessment Tool](#)? (HAT)

- Kansas Department of Commerce keeps an updated list of housing resources from all state sources.

<https://www.kansascommerce.gov/housing/>

- *Kansas Housing Resources Overview*



- We saw four newer campuses on the north side. Our research said there are seven campuses in all.
 - *By looking carefully at the eldoks.com site map we understood that two school districts serve El Dorado.*
- We saw Head Start downtown.



- A private school looks like a church. It wasn't clear how to enter the building if you wanted to inquire about the school.
- Butler would benefit from way-finding signs.





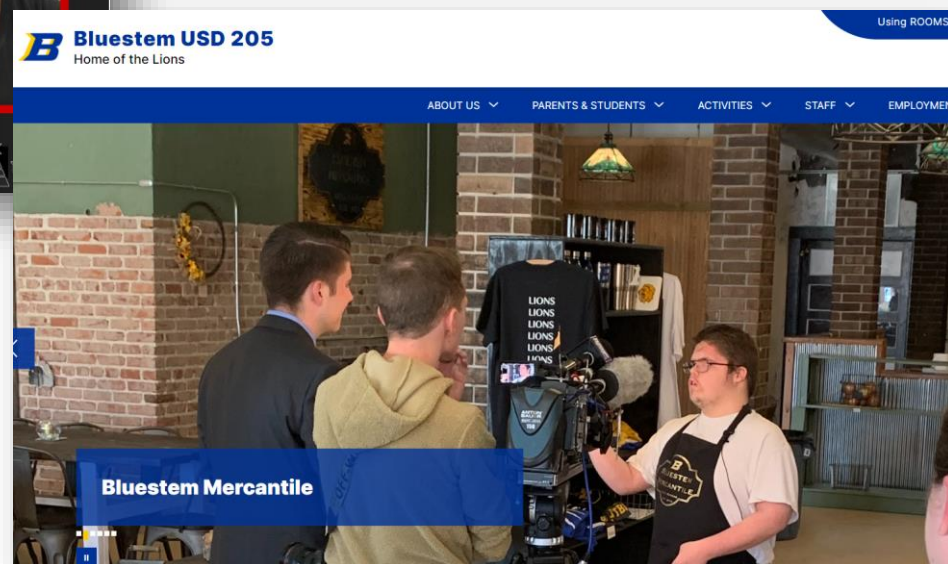
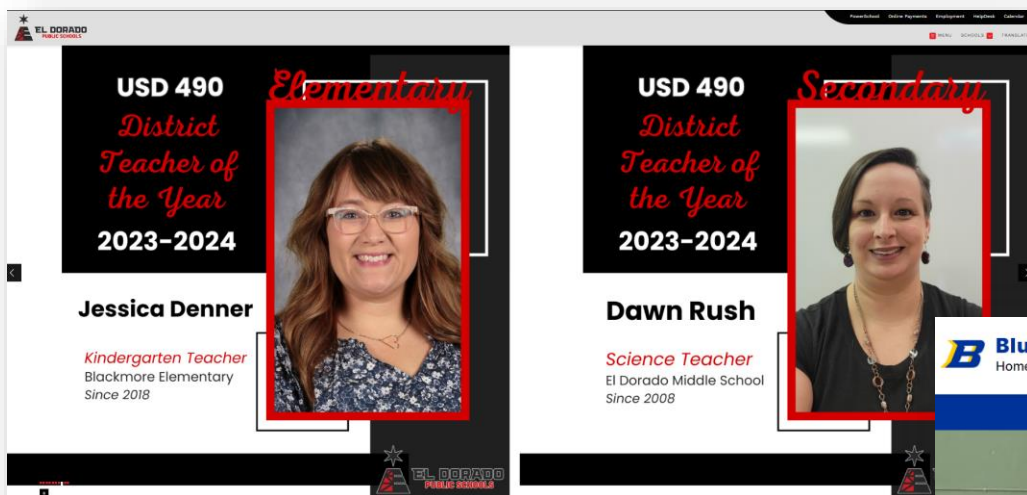
- The High School was VERY hard to find.
- Everyone is new once- which door is the gymnasium? Auditorium? Office?



- It was charming to see families biking around schools.
- Your efforts to make schools accessible for walking and biking was impressive and appreciated.



- Visitors had varying impressions of quality based on the KSDE data and student/parent reviews.
- Butler County website gives interesting data for the communities, including links to all 9 school districts.



“Potential Students” are an audience for your school websites. This is Mound City, MO

I preferred their former title, “**Why Choose Us**” on the home page.



ABOUT 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:

- Visitors found childcare locations through online searches. They called a few to learn that it costs \$100/week, and most are in-home care.

Butler County Data:

Kansas

- **Extent Desired Capacity meets Potential Childcare needs: 32%**
- **Potential Slots needed: 2,089**
- Contact ks.childcareaware.org to access local childcare specialists.

46%

Source <https://ks.childcareaware.org/data-research/> Retrieved from internet 4-10-24

- Visitors saw a number of well-kept faith communities.





- More than one visitor commented on the downtown I AM, WE ARE LOVED signs.

“I wondered what the downtown banners were “I AM, WE ARE LOVED,” which we saw all over but couldn’t tell what religious organization or group they belonged to. A very consistent message, but I had no idea what it meant – I asked several people downtown, and nobody knew.”



- As is typical, visitors relied on web searches to find civic groups.
- They saw Big Brothers Big Sisters in table tents downtown, the VFW, and Flint Hills Services.
- The boutique downtown supported women in need and citizens bragged about that in other stores too.



- Most comments were positive about infrastructure, but visitors highlighted these areas for improvement:
 - It is difficult to find things in town.
 - Several turning lanes and lines need to be painted.
 - The sidewalks could use some work downtown as they had been ground down before and could cause liability issues.

- We stopped by City Hall and asked about rentals and realtors and were given good advice. The information on display was timely and helpful. The City Map needs to be bigger and include all the schools and the college.
- The **City Hall** sign needs to be painted black to pop.



Fire, EMS and Police Services

- The City Services compounds were impressive. While not brand new, they were well-kept.
- It was nice how city hall, public works, and Fire, EMS, and Police services were located near each other.
- There is a beautiful fire station in the northwest part of the city.



- Visitors saw flyers around town for the book and bake sale, and their web searches revealed book signings, activities, and good reviews.
- The building appeared well-maintained and cared for.
- The online pictures are very, very small and hard to see.



- Visitors uniformly commented on well-kept parks, except for the area around the swimming pool.
- The pool didn't have the amenities visitors expected, but they liked the splash pad.









- The park with the bandshell and pool needs a little work on eye appeal, including the color of the paint on the seats.



- LOVE LOVE LOVE your walking track! You need signage by that bridge to indicate the start and explanation of that trail around the river! WHAT A COOL feature! I want to go back just to walk the full thing!



- Extremely nice football complex and baseball field.



Well-Known for an attraction or event?

- Stapleton #1 and the Oil Museum seem to be their claims to fame, I am sure they promote it in certain ways, but I did not notice anything extra. The Baseball Hall of Fame in proximity to the Ballpark is great. The WW2 Museum has very limited hours.
- Gold-Fest is promoted online as their biggest event, but I did not see any signs of it while there. Usual events (Trick or Treat, Christmas Parade, 4th of July)

Well-Known for an attraction or event?

- The Gold Fest looks like a lot of fun! Your Facebook does an amazing job of promoting that event. The Farmers Market also looks like a hit.
- Some flyers for Gold Fest were in strange places on the downtown windows. The flyers did not indicate what the event was, didn't tie together, and were hard to read.

Well-Known for an attraction or event?

- I hoped to see Butler Events around town but didn't.
- I liked the kiosk downtown with the map.
- Adding events or a QR code to drive to the events listings would be an easy enhancement.



Natural or manmade features that can draw people?

- The lake should be a big draw in the summers, scenic Flint Hills could surely be promoted.
- The archery and shooting range was very cool.



Natural or manmade features that can draw people?

- Your public art is fun – I liked that you had the little alleys, that should be fixed up and added to! It's a cool concept, but not a lot to show now.



Natural or manmade features that can draw people?

- The COUTTS MUSEUM needs to say its name on it and what it is bigger on the outside of the building – I drove by and noticed the horses but couldn't tell what it was until I walked by and saw the small signs. It was a very enjoyable place, and with it being downtown, it is a gem!





Visitor's Center

- Visitors saw the Chamber Offices beside the events center with a community calendar, events, and public information scrolling in the foyer.
- City Hall service was amazing.
- Visitors saw a Main Street page but didn't know where they were located.
- A sign recruiting in "lots of water usage businesses" didn't tell visitors where to inquire.

What would bring you back?

- Willie's.
- I want to bring guests back to the Mexican place on Main Street and my husband wants to come back to the cigar store.
- I will come back to try that walking path – I found that very special and I seriously wished I had more time to walk it and explore!

Most Positive Observations

- Busy strip with fast food and stores that fit the needs of today's residents.
- The pride the community has! From the flowers downtown, to the local businesses' hospitality, to how well kept the community was. The people of El Dorado do love their town.
- The main drag was impressive. I hope downtown can gain more activity in the vacant buildings. There was a lot of shopping and eating available. The town has good employment drivers. The state park is close. The number of pocket parks was a huge plus, they give families the opportunity to get outside and play.

- People were VERY friendly!
- Special mention was made of staff at the Art Museum, Dilly Delli, and other retail staff.
- Two ladies who were part of the writer group at the used bookstore were very friendly and asked why we were in town when we couldn't figure out that we needed to ring the bell for staff to come out.
- Visitors were jealous of the restaurant chains you have that their city lost.
- The Dillons area is very nice.

Biggest Obstacles/Challenges

- Finding and keeping an identity in your downtown area, investing in an ever-demanding public for quality-of-life projects (pool/splash pad).
- Keeping local businesses when Wichita is so close.
- I was confused at your brewery- can you go in and taste? Can you eat there? The arrow was directing us there, but the outside of the building confused me.
- The El Dorado Lake sign at the north entrance is very faded and needs to be replaced.

What will you remember?

- We saw livestock trailers in town and went and watched the cattle sale at the sale barn.
- The flowers! I've told everyone since coming back just how beautiful the flowers made your downtown.
- I enjoyed getting out and experiencing the town. I've been to town many times for meetings and didn't get out to explore because I wasn't sure where to go or what to do. It was great! That walking path along the Walnut River needs to be promoted.

- Be proud of all you've accomplished and make it as visible as possible: trails, walkability, Coutt's and history museums.
- Consider the visitors' constructive comments about online searches.
- Consider hosting a new resident welcome dinner or a "Middle of Everywhere" Exercise for existing groups.

**NO ONE CAN DO EVERYTHING,
BUT EVERYONE CAN DO SOMETHING.**

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:

Nancy Daniels

Community Vitality Specialist, K-State Research and Extension

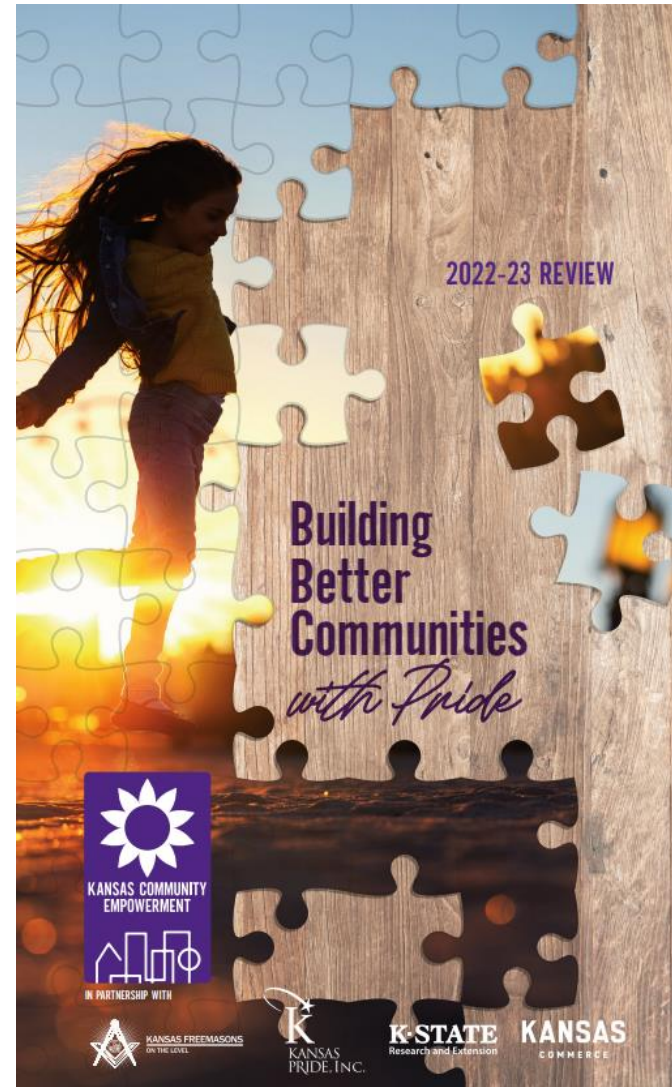
785-410-6352

nkdaniels@ksu.edu

Kansas Community Empowerment

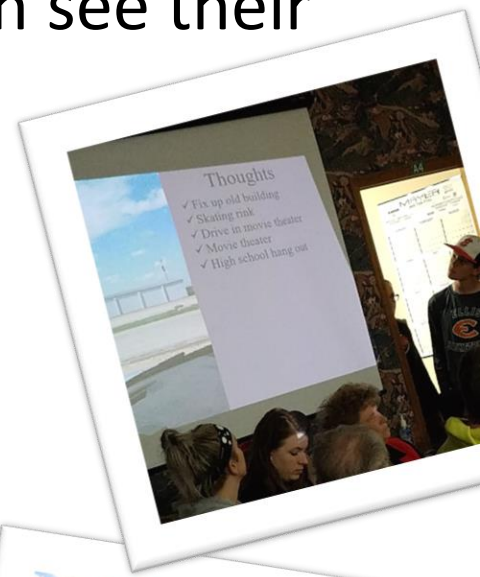
<http://kce.k-state.edu>

- 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

for more information.



K-STATE
Research and Extension

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>

Public Trails Resources:

- A series of Webinar Recordings from our Trail Talk Tuesday series.
 - Where do we start?
 - Let's Get Started!
 - What will it cost?
 - Where's the Money?
 - Trail Sustainability.
 - Let's Talk Rail Trails.
- The Recordings and other Trail Resources are online:
<https://ksre-learn.com/public-trails>



- 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/>



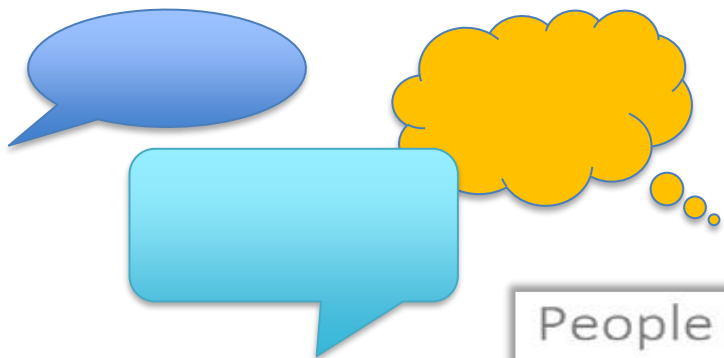
Rural Grocery/KS Healthy Food Initiative

- **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 did you hear?



What will we do?



People move in the direction of their conversations

