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Lawrence Housing Trust Fund Supports Demonstration Project

by Michael Anderson // 2016, Spring



The Lawrence, Kansas Housing Trust Fund Board voted in February to advance a proposal for a demonstration project illustrating the potential of the trust fund to help advance key affordable housing goals for the City. The Trust Fund announced that it had \$100,000 left over from previous funding to support this initial endeavor. The Lawrence, Kansas Housing Trust Fund was created several years ago and the nine-member Affordable Housing Board has been activated recently to advance activities of the Fund and to make recommendations to the Governing Body to ensure the Fund has adequate and continuous revenues.

The demonstration project includes three homes, with three-five bedrooms, supported through the collaboration of five nonprofit organizations: Tenants to Homeowners, Habitat for Humanity, Family Promise, Willow Domestic Violence Center and the Lawrence-Douglas County Housing Authority. Two of the homes will be rented and the third owned. Family Promise and Willow Domestic Violence Center will refer residents to the homes and provide support and case management. The homes will be used as transitional housing for households earning no more than 80% of the area median income, but it is acknowledged that the customary references made will reach much lower income households. Tenants for Homeowners currently owns the three properties and is in the process of removing one blighted structure. Habitat for Humanity will build the owner home on the third lot. In addition to contributions and funds from the Housing Trust Fund, additional revenues were obtained from the federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program. All three homes will remain permanently affordable. And all three homes will meet Energy Star certification, saving renters and owners more than \$100 per month in utility bills.

Tenants to Homeowners (part of the National Community Land Trust Network now Grounded Solutions) and Justice Matters (an affiliate of the DART Network) have been actively engaged in working to strengthen the trust fund. In April, Justice Matters—a consortium of 22 local congregations—held their Nehemiah Assembly and repeated the call for investing \$15 million over the next five years for affordable housing. In front of nearly 2,000 people, elected officials were asked to commit to this goal. Both the Mayor and Vice-Mayor confirmed addressing affordable housing was a priority. The Housing Trust Fund will soon see some contributions from local developers, who must pay into the Fund in accordance with their agreements with the City for public incentives. The Affordable Housing Advisory Board is continuing their discussions about other, long-term revenue streams for the Fund.

The approved demonstration project is an important indicator of what the housing trust fund can accomplish in Lawrence in rebuilding neighborhoods and working with partner nonprofit organizations. The development intentionally creates ownership and rental units and prioritizes two different transitional situations (homelessness and domestic violence) to show the community the range of housing types and services needed to successfully address the need for affordable homes in Lawrence. Its focus on creating affordable homes for families in transition addresses what has been defined by the community as one of the biggest housing gaps in Lawrence. The collaboration among the five organizations combines expertise in numerable areas related to accessing affordable homes and demonstrates to the residents of Lawrence workable avenues to ensure that more households have permanent safe affordable homes.

For more information: Robert Baker, Tenants to Homeowners <http://tenants-to-homeowners.org/> or Ben MacConnell, Justice Matters <http://www.justicemattersinkansas.org/>

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