

Study shares ways to grow housing

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Thursday, 21 August 2014 15:45 -

HOUSING TARGET DEMAND	
A housing study shows that by the year 2019, the following number of units will be needed in Dawson County's three largest towns.	
Town	Units
Lexington	222
Coaldale	77
Gothenburg	73

Gothenburg will need 73 housing units by year 2019

Finding a place to live in Gothenburg is a challenge.

Just ask families that have recently moved to town and have had to resort to temporary housing in basements or with friends or in other places.

The housing shortage is not limited to Gothenburg but exists throughout the county and beyond.

That's why Dawson Area Development commissioned a housing study recently completed by Hanna:Keelan of Lincoln.

"This could be good for builders and suppliers but it's hard to get going," said DAD community development coordinator Deb Jensen. "We need so many different types of housing—that's one of the reasons we did the study."

Jensen said the study confirmed what DAD officials suspected—that both owner-occupied and rental housing is needed.

"We knew that and now we have the hard numbers to put to it," she said. "It's no longer a perception but a reality so we need to recruit developers to build more housing."

Perhaps the most significant finding is that the county will likely need \$72 million in new and remodeled homes by 2019.

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In Gothenburg alone, estimates show that 73 housing units—52 owners and 21 rental—are needed.

Construction to build these units is estimated at \$13 million.

Throughout the county, housing for the local workforce and elderly populations is of greatest need, the study said.

What the study reveals about projected population growth and the type of housing needed to meet that demand is important as well as ways to fund construction and development, Jensen said.

The study also looked at population trends, household income and more.

Of the nine county and area towns studied, Gothenburg is second to Lexington in growth on a percentage basis.

Projections into 2019 show Lexington growing by 1.27% and Gothenburg by .62%.

County-wide, population is expected to increase by .67%.

Other towns included in the study were Cozad, Eddyville, Farnam, Overton, Sumner and Elwood and Eustis.

The study also identified the type of housing most in demand throughout the county—two- to three-bedroom units with an average purchase price of \$127,000 and an estimated average

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monthly rental cost at \$565 to serve the county's workforce population.

The owner housing type most needed is units with three or more bedrooms with an average affordable purchase price of \$221,900.

Two-bedroom rental units, with an average affordable monthly rent of \$545 present the greatest need in the area.

Through meetings, listening sessions and surveys, Hanna:Keelan identified and prioritized housing needs and goals to meet them.

Some of them include:

Continuing to implement a housing development initiative for the county that includes an employer's housing assistance program, a residential care program for persons 62-plus years of age, downtown housing initiatives in Gothenburg, Cozad and Lexington and a Dawson County Area Community Housing Land Bank Program.

New developments including both owner and rental housing.

Rehabilitation and preservation of existing owner and rental housing stock.

Financing housing development activities with both public and private funding.

Jensen said the first Dawson County housing study DAD did was in 2008 followed by another in 2013.

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The most recent study, which cost \$16,000, is an update and review.

The Nebraska Investment Finance Authority gave DAD a grant to pay for half of the study and DAD paid the remainder.

Copies of the study are available at the DAD office at 1501 Plum Creek Parkway #2B in Lexington. It will soon be available on the DAD website at dawsonareadevelopment.com.

She added that DAD plans a housing summit where funding sources, developers, state and local officials and others can meet to see what's available to develop in the county.

"Hopefully it will spurt more housing units," Jensen said, noting that a similar summit brought about new construction like Jefferson Square in Gothenburg and Legend Oaks in Lexington.

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