

Housing prices in Kansas have exploded.



[KCUR](#) | BY DYLAN LYSEN

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Home and rental prices have skyrocketed in recent years because of a housing shortage. That's leading to a rise in homelessness and could be hurting the economy.

A housing shortage in Kansas has [sparked skyrocketing home prices](#), making it much harder to purchase a home. State lawmakers have taken notice and are considering ways to create more affordable housing.

A special committee in the Legislature reviewed the situation in Kansas and suggested several ideas that may be able to alleviate some of the problems. But none of the ideas include large new programs or major state funding.

Republican Rep. Sean Tarwater of Stilwell, who led the committee, said the state approved [affordable housing initiatives](#) in recent years. He said those changes have not had enough time to make a significant difference yet.

“We've got to be cognizant of the programs that we currently have before we start piling on new programs,” Tarwater said, “and we’ve got to make sure the ones we have work.”

Still, the state has a long way to go. Housing advocates estimate it would take several thousand new homes built each year just to meet demand. And construction costs keep rising as well. So it could take years before the shortage is resolved.

The lack of housing is also [contributing to rising homelessness](#) in the state. While home prices are rising, so are home and apartment rental costs. Advocates serving the homeless say Kansas had the sixth highest rent price increase in the country in 2023. Data in Johnson County also shows more than half of homeless people there have some sort of income, but still can’t afford a place to live.

The housing shortage may also hurt the economy. Republican Rep. Leah Howell said she’s heard from business owners who are having a hard time filling positions because new employees can’t find housing.

Here are some of the ideas the committee is recommending:

Reviewing tax incentives

Federal tax credits for affordable housing projects are not new but were not regularly utilized. Housing development in Kansas took off once the state joined in on providing its own tax credits.

The Legislature enacted the Affordable Housing Tax Credit in 2022, which can be coupled with federal benefits to further incentivize developers to build more affordable housing in the state. The Kansas Housing Resources Corporation, which oversees those state tax credits, shows that it helped develop nearly 5,000 homes over the last two years.

The committee suggested looking at whether the state can find more opportunities to couple state tax credits with federal funding opportunities to create an even larger impact.

But lawmakers said they also want to review whether some incentives should be spread out, rather than coupled with the federal funding or connected to other state tax credits, to make sure they are dispersed and support more housing projects.

Reworking state zoning law

Kansas zoning laws are currently based on land use. Some communities want to create more mixed-use zoning, like allowing multi-story buildings with businesses on the ground floor and apartments above.

Jamie Sauder, who is the president of the Kansas Association of Realtors and a city commissioner in Emporia, said his community tried creating a new comprehensive plan that would have implemented form-based zoning. That focuses more on the

appearance of a property, rather than its use. So buildings can be mixed-use.

However, the city and Lyon County could not enact the plan, because state law requires land-use zoning. So a property can only have one use, like commercial or residential. Mixed-use zoning is allowed, but it usually requires a special permit. That also gives people in the community an extra chance to block a project they don't like.

Sauder said amending the state law could allow cities to enact form-based zoning. That and streamlining could allow more housing development. He said form-based zoning also promotes housing density and makes property more affordable.

"It puts more people using the same amount of infrastructure (together)," Sauder said, "which means it's cheaper. Property taxes go down."

Republican Sen. Renee Erickson of Augusta said she wants the Legislature to consider reworking state zoning laws to allow more flexibility for cities to create local solutions.

But she said she wants lawmakers to be careful and not go too far. She said any changes should not restrict a community's local control of zoning.

Sealing eviction filings

When a landlord begins an eviction process in court, they must provide notice to the renter and then file a lawsuit. However, that filing is a public court record and can be held against a renter when they try to find new housing, even if they are never formally evicted.

For instance, a renter could fall behind on paying rent and a landlord could then file an eviction notice. The renter could resolve the issue and the eviction case does not

proceed in court. But that filing is still on the renter's record, and a landlord of a different property could point to that as a reason to disqualify them.

Christina Ashie Guidry, director of policy and planning for United Community Services of Johnson County, told lawmakers that it's unfair to renters who are never formally evicted. She said landlords in Kansas file more than 14,000 eviction filings each year, but only half of them are finalized.

"It stays on your record, publicly searchable, forever," Ashie Guidry said. "That is despite the fact that half of these cases are never prosecuted."

The committee recommended sealing the election filings in court, meaning they won't be publicly viewable.

That won't create more housing, but it may provide relief to low-income renters who have previously faced eviction and are struggling to find a home.

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