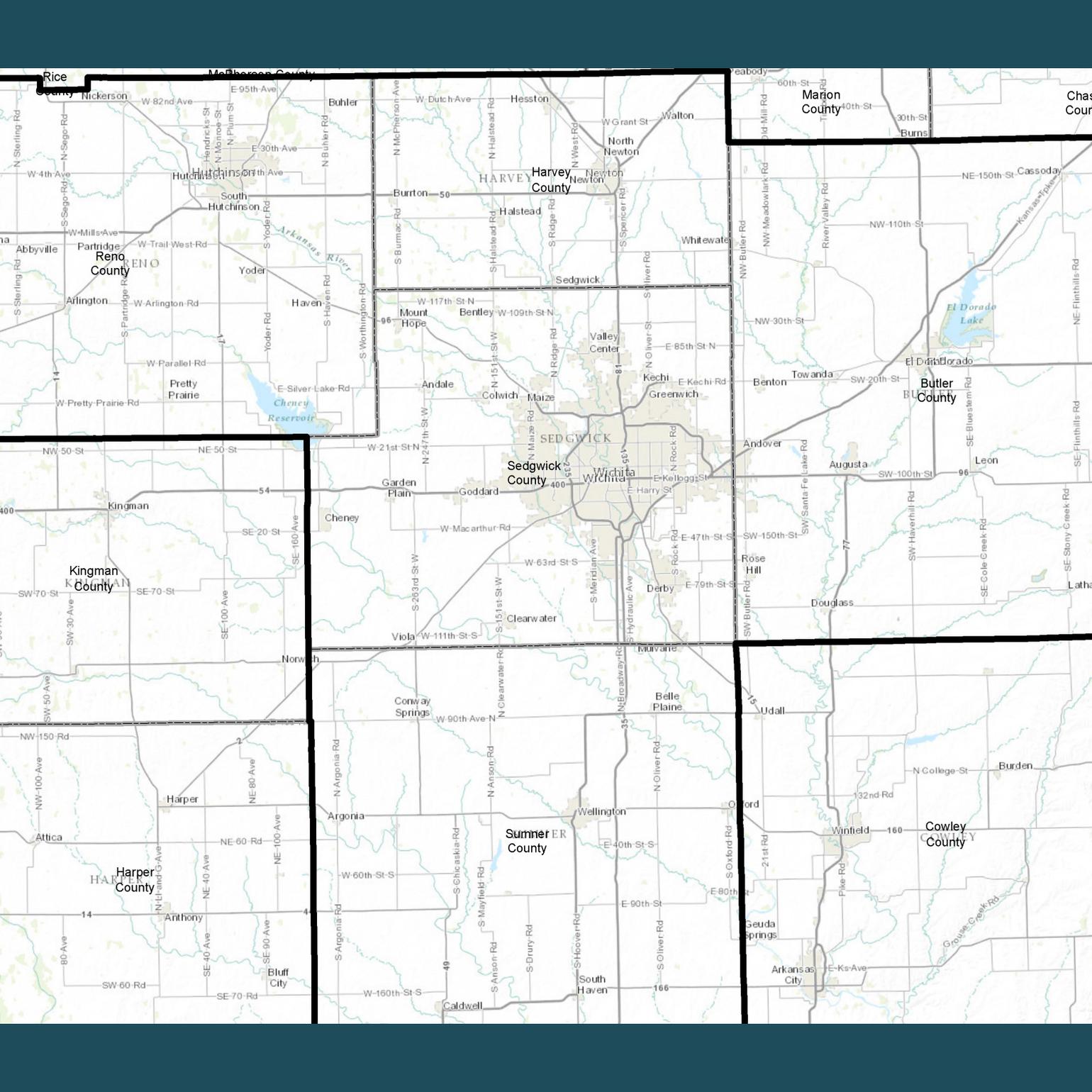




**SOUTH
CENTRAL
KANSAS
PROSPERITY PLAN**

The work that produced the South Central Kansas Prosperity Plan was supported by funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and consortium partners from South Central Kansas. Local partners were responsible for the development of the planning documents and the content reflects the vision and strategies of local communities in our region.



Rice

McPherson County

Marion County

Chas. County

Nickerson

Buhler

Hesston

Walton

Burns

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The South Central Kansas Prosperity Plan is a result of 3 years of intensive collaboration among elected officials, local government staff, partners, stakeholders, and citizens. Their participation in the planning process involved numerous meetings, presentations, data and information collection, document review, and idea sharing. Their commitment to the region resulted in the creation of a regional plan and toolkits to ensure that South Central Kansas is a prosperous place where people can live, work, play, and learn.

This document represents a vision and plan for our future. It was created by individuals who want to ensure a continued high quality of life through implementation of strategies that address the challenges and opportunities before us. It is a reflection of local values and a vision for setting priorities and allocating limited resources. This is an important tool for implementing sound strategies around the issues of workforce and business development, water, transportation, natural resources, the built environment, and healthy

community design. All of these are vital issues that are at the core of our communities and connect us as a region.

We are a diverse region with many assets and great sense of pride. We have a strong foundation in agriculture, manufacturing, oil and gas, entrepreneurial opportunities, and a landscape of rural, suburban and urban living. We are economically, socially, and community rich. This planning process has allowed us to proactively think about where we are today and evaluate trends that will need to be addressed moving forward. This thoughtful and proactive planning opportunity provided us the advantage to begin to think differently about our future and how to meet the needs of our communities.

The development of this planning document was guided by the Regional Economic Area Partnership (REAP), the Consortium Leadership Team, and the six Work Teams, who provided, not only insight and ideas, but strong leadership and

commitment to making the region strong, sustainable, and resilient. The South Central Kansas Prosperity Plan is a valuable, genuine, and unique resource that was created as a blueprint of choices. It is intended to enhance local decisions, policies, and planning efforts by offering new perspectives and recommendations on critical topics.

This plan reflects the views and concerns of our local communities and reflects the strong desire to enhance and strategically shape our region over the next 20 years. For this planning process to be successful there needs to be a continued commitment to advance its strategies and focus on opportunities to think and act regionally by encouraging the efficient use of resources and promote residents' concern for quality of life issues. Continued collaboration will ensure our ability to address future challenges and meet the needs of our communities.

We appreciate the dedicated commitment of the region to complete the South Central Kansas Prosperity Plan and look forward to continued collaboration and strategy implementation.

PLANNING TOGETHER FOR PROSPERITY



John Waltner

South Central Kansas Prosperity Plan
Consortium Leadership Team Chair

In 2012, Regional Economic Area Partnership (REAP) received a grant to create the South Central Kansas Prosperity Plan (Prosperity Plan). REAP has been guiding stakeholders to think and act regionally since 1997. Their work will continue to support the implementation of the Prosperity Plan and bring together partners and stakeholders to enhance South Central Kansas.

The South Central Kansas region study area consists of Butler, Harvey, Reno, Sedgwick, and Sumner Counties. The region is highly diverse, ranging from Kansas' largest city in Wichita, to numerous small communities such as Newton and Wellington. Many issues facing the region are not specific to any one political jurisdiction: adequate water, efficient transportation, and a prepared, skilled workforce are just three examples of needs that transcend city and county boundaries. A regional approach to these challenges promotes the most efficient use of available resources and allows organizations to work together toward a common goal.

The plan evolved through a five-step process that began with goal setting and baseline analysis and continued through issue identification, an assessment of growth options,

The strategies and recommendations resulting from the Prosperity Plan will build on the following principles:

- Provide more transportation choices
- Promote equitable, affordable housing
- Enhance economic competitiveness
- Support existing communities
- Develop a regional approach to economic development, infrastructure investment, and natural resource protection
- Value communities and neighborhoods

and the development of recommendations.

A regional consortium of government and non-profit agencies led the Prosperity Plan. Representatives of each of these organizations served on the Consortium Leadership Team (CLT), providing oversight of the planning process and giving input and direction for the final plan. Directed by the CLT, planners worked with six Work Teams to develop the elements of the plan. The Work Teams were at

The Work Teams focused on areas critical to the quality of life, health, and economic competitiveness of the region:

- Built Environment
- Healthy Community Design
- Natural Resources
- Transportation
- Water
- Work Force and Business Development

the heart of the planning process, producing the majority of the plan contents: their products included a guiding vision, goals, focus areas, key issues, and recommended strategies for each study area.

The purpose of the Prosperity Plan is to develop short- and long-term strategies to increase the South Central Kansas region's economic competitiveness, enhance the quality of life for all residents, and establish a framework for regional coordination and planning.

PLAN BACKGROUND



A photograph of a brick sign for Wichita State University. The sign is a light-colored rectangular panel mounted on a red brick wall. The text "WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY" is engraved in a serif font. The sign is flanked by two stone pillars. In the background, there are green trees and a red brick building under a clear blue sky. In the foreground, there are green bushes and a large red-leafed shrub.

WICHITA STATE
UNIVERSITY

COMMUNITY VISION

The South Central Kansas Plan for Prosperity reflects the feedback of individuals and groups throughout the five-county region. Outreach included one-on-one stakeholder interviews of business representatives, government officials, and citizens; in-person meetings; open house events; surveys; and an online idea forum. The diverse perspectives heard on the concerns, hopes, and priorities for the region and its communities strongly shaped plan recommendations.



When asked to complete the sentence “People living in South Central Kansas should be concerned about...,” survey respondents emphasized:

- Region’s aging infrastructure (streets, bridges, water, sewer, etc) and the rising cost of maintenance and/ or replacement
- Decline in the number of good paying jobs
- Whether communities will have an adequate supply of water

Across all input activities, stakeholders stressed the importance of economic development initiatives, including job creation, education and training, infrastructure maintenance, and reliable, adequate water supplies. Feedback also recognized the value of regional cooperation in making South Central Kansas stronger and more competitive.

According to stakeholders interviewed around the region

...the regional economy is improving
...finding qualified workers is a major challenge for companies
...the region suffers from a lack of a coordinated economic development strategy
...water supply is emerging as an important issue
...region suffers from a poor self-image
...many young people leave for perceived quality-of-life issues
...some communities need housing

strategies to attract workers and other new residents
...local governments need to structure regulations that respond to market forces
...we need consistent attention to business needs
...more leadership is needed to develop a regional mindset
...growth is concentrated in Sedgwick County, with little occurring in surrounding counties
...there are concerns about future infrastructure funding

THE BIG CHALLENGES IN THE REGION

To develop recommendations for the Prosperity Plan, planners working in collaboration with the Work Teams created a 'snapshot' of the region's existing economic, social, and environmental context. South Central Kansas consists of very diverse places from downtown Wichita to suburban neighborhoods, small towns, and very rural areas with natural and agricultural landscapes. Each of these communities is distinct with its own character, sense of place, and values, and faces unique challenges. Rural and small-town areas must confront shrinking populations and a lack of

suitable housing for middle-class workers; at the same time preservation of community character is of great importance. Suburban areas lack connectivity but offer a single-family lifestyle that most of the region's residents desire. Urban areas offer more diversity in housing and employment choices, but some areas suffer from lack of reinvestment and need redevelopment. At the same time, the snapshot also highlights critical challenges common to communities across the region.



Fragmented planning for the region's physical and natural systems

Modest and uneven projected population growth

Modest projected job growth

Lack of diverse housing choices and limited supply of newer, quality housing

Lack of diverse transportation choices

Lower public health outcomes and prevalence of health risk factors

Aging infrastructure and declining and unstable funding for maintenance and repair of systems



Alternative futures give us a way to think about the different choices that we can make to prepare for change and address challenges within the region. They also help us to think about trade-offs. Given limited resources, what are the most important things that we should be doing first? Each scenario becomes a package of choices, emphasizing a particular theme or course of action for the years ahead. To arrive at a Preferred Scenario that can guide implementation, the project team drew from CLT and Work Team feedback, as well as public input.

Currently, the region faces overarching trends that affect

its long-term prosperity and competitiveness: fragmented planning; modest and uneven job and population growth; a lack of housing and transportation choices, particularly for the region's older and younger populations; aging infrastructure; and public health risks. This alternative addresses these challenges by emphasizing more attractive, vibrant communities and downtowns, and expanded housing and transportation options. The scenario also promotes tools and cooperative partnerships to develop solutions for complex resource and infrastructure issues that cross boundaries.

South Central Kansas strives to offer prosperous and innovative communities of choice that offer opportunity and quality of life to all people and create connections throughout the region and the world.

THE PATH FORWARD

South Central Kansas will achieve

GREAT COMMUNITIES & EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

through...

Developing a Partnership Approach to Regional Problem-Solving

Fostering Opportunities for Education and Innovation

Building Pride of Place and Marketing the Region's Economic Assets

Promoting Comprehensive Management of Water Resources

Expanding Mobility Choices

Supporting Healthy Lifestyles

Providing Adequate and Efficient Infrastructure

Redeveloping Existing Areas, Neighborhoods, and Houses

WORKFORCE and Business Development



Vision: *Develop a collaborative regional environment that coordinates assets and implements strategies to grow businesses and create jobs in South Central Kansas.*

CHALLENGES

- Need for a regional brand to enhance national competitiveness
- Need to diversify the regional economy
- Need to match workers with companies
- Need to upgrade worker skills
- Need to support entrepreneurial development

FOCUS AREAS

- Regional Image
- Workforce Development
- Business Development

Regional Export Planning Initiative to assist regional business around export and trade

TOP STRATEGIES

1. Develop a regional image for economic development purposes that understands global connection and utilizes asset map information
2. Support, promote, and utilize strategies from the Wichita

3. Establish a sector based system that brings businesses together to discuss and solve issues occurring in their fields across the region
4. Develop collaborative partnerships around economic development efforts through cooperative agreements, protocols, and lead distribution system that is supported by an asset map and regional image
5. Support and partner around the innovation and tech transfer efforts of Wichita State University and connect this effort to the Prosperity Plan

BUILT Environment



Vision: To create connected communities that link people to jobs and services that enhance quality of life in urban, suburban, and rural environments.

CHALLENGES

- Need to enhance the availability and effectiveness of transportation choices
- Need to enhance the variety of housing and neighborhood choices, particularly in small-town and rural areas
- Need for regulatory flexibility in rehabilitation and infill efforts
- Need to address aging infrastructure

FOCUS AREAS

- Community/Neighborhood Design
- Reinvestment/Infill Development
- Sustainable Architecture and Design
- Regional Housing Market

TOP STRATEGIES

1. Provide communities with pedestrian-friendly “Complete Streets” design to increase community appeal, safety, and provide access to all users
2. Identify housing needs around job centers to support

communities in attracting and retaining workers and identify workforce housing programs so workers can live near jobs

3. Target and apply finance incentives and dedicated funding for infill development that creates opportunities to lower construction costs and assists communities in addressing the gap between rehabilitation costs and market value
4. Address blight and safety in neighborhoods by developing vacant lots and buildings
5. Develop rehabilitation-oriented building codes and land use/ suite design standards to address neighborhood/community rehabilitation needs

TRANSPORTATION



Vision: Achieve a safe regional transportation system that includes strategic, responsive, and sustainable transportation choices.

CHALLENGES

- Need for improved coordination among jurisdictions
- Need for better work-home connectivity
- Need for alternative forms of transportation
- Need to expand freight and passenger rail service
- Cost of maintenance of current infrastructure

FOCUS AREAS

- Regional Structures
- Connection between Transportation and Land Use
- Transportation Choices
- Maintenance

TOP STRATEGIES

1. Encourage government bodies to adopt transportation plans that promote the connectivity of hike/bike/trails, pedestrian needs, and transit routes across the region
2. Expand purchase of alternative fuel fleet vehicles in the region
3. Develop a viable regional transit system
4. Develop and adopt policies that commit financial support devoted to the maintenance and replacement of existing assets and future transportation system projects and programs
5. Develop a regional forum to enhance and coordinate regional transportation issues and projects
6. Update policies and procedures for asset management, maintenance, and infrastructure life-cycle analysis to reflect a more regional approach

WATER



Vision: Regional collaboration to ensure an ample, high-quality water supply

CHALLENGES

- Limited nature of water resources
- Need for drought resiliency planning
- Need for conservation information and improved marketing around conservation education
- Lack of preventative infrastructure maintenance/replacement

FOCUS AREAS

- Water Supply
- Conservation and Education
- Cost of Water

3. Develop a regional forum for advocacy around water policies/ issues
4. Develop and implement effective conservation education programs with models of successful incentives/ disincentives/programs categorized by user types
5. Develop water rate models and best management practices tailored to individual needs that balance revenue sustainability with conservation and drought condition strategies
6. Develop an asset inventory model to improve infrastructure, preventive maintenance and replacement
7. Develop best practice information on the benefits of “full-cost pricing” and examples of its success with other utilities (for communities that wish to pursue)

TOP STRATEGIES

1. Determine possible need for alternative water supply in the region
2. Develop drought resiliency planning elements, including drought triggers and water use priorities

NATURAL RESOURCES



Vision: Thinking regionally and acting collaboratively as stewards of air, water, and land, through integrated planning, for healthy environments.

CHALLENGES

- Lack of land use planning in some areas of the region, which can result in negative impacts to natural resources, including fragmented ecosystems
- Need to manage solid waste, including increasing recycling
- Development in floodplains
- Effects of non-point source runoff on water quality

FOCUS AREAS

- Regional Collaboration
- Land Use Planning
- Water Quality: Groundwater and Surface Water
- Air Quality
- Solid Waste Management

TOP STRATEGIES

1. Identify/create a collaborative body to engage in regional natural resources planning
2. Provide incentives for infill to address urban sprawl and promote more efficient development patterns
3. Expand development of public/private funding partnerships for development and implementation of ground and surface water best management practices
4. Encourage recycling, to reduce solid waste management costs
5. Develop, promote and educate individuals, businesses of all sizes, agriculture, and local governments on voluntary practices that can reduce non-point source pollution to support the Ozone Advance Plan

HEALTHY Community Design



Vision: South Central
Kansas is a vibrant and
healthy region.

CHALLENGES

- Continuing to reduce smoking in adults and teens
- Access to healthcare providers for transit-dependent persons
- Need for more mental health and substance abuse services
- Need for built environment to better support physical activity
- Lack of access to fresh food in some communities

FOCUS AREAS

- Tobacco Use
- Access to Health Services
- Physical Inactivity
- Food Quality and Access
- Education
- Access to Transportation

TOP STRATEGIES

1. Increase the number of businesses, government entities, university/colleges to implement tobacco free designations on their sites
2. Implement safety net services, with expanded/ flexible hours,

- into emergency rooms, school based health clinics, and other clinic services
3. Build and expand bike/walk paths and require them in new development projects
 4. Establish a Food Council that can formally address issues and strategies around fresh food access/options
 5. Extend the school day to reach wellness goals and expand education initiatives that focus on increasing graduation rates, reducing dropout rates, and increasing focus on college and technical training opportunities
 6. Develop multimodal transportation options and infrastructure (Complete Streets) to provide access to services and amenities and encourage healthy behavior changes

What Are the Most Important Things to Do?

The top strategies are:

1. Develop collaborative partnerships around economic development efforts through cooperative agreements, protocols, and lead distribution system that is supported by an asset map and regional image
2. Support and partner around the innovation and tech transfer efforts of Wichita State University and connect this effort to the Prosperity Plan
3. Develop a regional image for economic development purposes that understands global connection and utilizes asset map information
4. Target incentives and dedicated funding for infill development that lowers construction costs and assists communities in addressing the gap between rehabilitation costs and market value
5. Develop, promote, and educate individuals, businesses of all sizes, agriculture, and local governments on voluntary practices to support the Ozone Advance Plan

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

6. Identify/create a collaborative body to engage in regional planning to carry the Prosperity Plan forward
7. Develop and adopt policies that commit financial support to the maintenance and replacement of existing assets and future transportation system projects and programs

The Prosperity Plan identified nearly 300 individual recommendations to enhance quality of life and strengthen economic competitiveness in South Central Kansas. The recommendations include short and long-term actions, as well as broad strategies that build a foundation for continued collaboration, along with steps to implement specific policies and programs.

Effective implementation of the Prosperity Plan requires two critical elements. First is establishing a sense of priority among the many strategies. Prioritization assists in determining what actions regional stakeholders should take first given limited resources and capabilities. The second critical element of organizing the implementation effort is to develop the underlying structure for ongoing cooperation.

Develop and adopt policies that commit financial support devoted to the maintenance and replacement of existing assets and future transportation system projects and programs

Develop a regional forum to enhance and coordinate regional transportation issues and projects

Develop a regional forum for advocacy around water policies/issues

Develop collaborative partnerships around economic development efforts through cooperative agreements, protocols, and lead distribution system that is supported by an asset map and regional image

Support and partner around the innovation and tech transfer efforts of Wichita State University and connect this effort to the Prosperity Plan



KEY ACTION STEPS





HOW DO WE GET IT DONE?

The Prosperity Plan offers a wide range of recommendations that are appropriate for rural, suburban, and urban settings. Each community differs in its character, values, needs, and organizational capacity. To recognize this diversity, the implementation process developed tools and technical resources that assist local communities in applying plan strategies to their local contexts.

All of these actions are meant to add momentum behind the partnerships that have emerged through the Prosperity Plan process. The most basic implementation step is to continue this dialogue and identify

forward-looking, collaborative solutions that enhance quality of life for all residents and make South Central Kansas healthy, competitive, and resilient for years to come.

We invite you to be part of our effort to build a more prosperous South Central Kansas. It will take all of us working together to make our region and its residents healthier, stronger, and more competitive. Please join us by visiting the REAP website and finding out how you can contribute to the implementation efforts of the plan.

<http://reap-ks.org>

