

2020 REAP Yearly Review

Vision

A connection between communities in South Central Kansas to convene partners for collaboration to develop regional initiatives and strategies to promote economic growth, job expansion & workforce development, and to give local governments an organized forum to identify policy priorities and take joint actions.

Mission

Provide a strong voice for the region at the state and national levels, advance greater economic prosperity through regional cooperation, and address issues that cross governmental boundaries.

With newly adopted bylaws, and a solid work plan in place, REAP staff and members worked to enhance and increase collaboration with regional organizations and councils of governments. In January, REAP co-hosted the South Central Kansas Legislative Delegation's (SCKLD) Annual Meeting and Public Forum. Important legislative and policy issues that were to be addressed during the 2020 legislative session were identified. For those key issues (transportation, behavioral health, broadband access and workforce development) that are shared as priorities among and between organizations in South-Central Kansas, a coordinated awareness and advocacy strategy was developed.

REAP is represented and engaged on the following boards and committees: Covid-19 Community Task Force, South Central Kansas Transportation Task Force, Wichita/Sedgwick County Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition, Childcare Advocacy Task Force, WAMPO, Wichita Airport Advisory Board, and Wichita Transit Advisory Board.

REAP staff is actively participating on the COVID-19 Community Task Force. Immediate needs and critical issues facing our communities are being identified and we are working together to streamline efforts, identify barriers and find solutions. We identified PPE needs and purchasing resources and engaged with community partners developing guidelines to safely open businesses.

Through combined efforts with both public and private partners on the South Central Kansas Transportation Task Force, the REAP region was able to identify and prioritize transportation

projects in our region. The North Junction, where I-235, I-135, K-96 and K-254 connect, was recognized as the top priority project and was awarded both state and federal funds to complete the Gold Phase of the multi-phase project. Completing the North Junction project will provide travel time savings of \$127 million, safety savings of \$4.6 million resulting from reduced crashes, and the creation of 1,220 jobs.

The Wichita/Sedgwick County Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition is in the process of formulating a five-year plan to address mental health, substance abuse and homelessness in South Central Kansas. The three goals it hopes to achieve are:

1. Access to care to allow patients to get services they need
2. Coordination, communication and collaboration between service providers, and
3. Have enough qualified employees in Wichita to take care of mental-health patients

REAP will continue to encourage the legislature and administration to consider additional investments in south central Kansas designed to address the treatment of mental health and advocate for additional and innovative solutions to combat, treat and prevent addiction to opioids and other drugs.

In early 2020, a workgroup was established to address child care capacity in the region as it directly impacts workforce sustainability. Based on the most recent 2019 Childcare Supply Demand Report, 11-20 children are vying for every one childcare opening in Sedgwick County. Before Covid-19 impacted the region, existing licensed centers/providers had the capacity to accept only about 45% of the potential demand for children under six years of age needing care. The Covid pandemic further amplified the childcare crisis. Many child care centers have closed to prevent the spread of the disease and the physical, emotional, and economic impacts on providers, families, and workplaces, have added additional stressors. While some funding relief has been identified through the CARES Act, more investment is needed.

Through participation on WAMPO, Airport and Transit advisory boards, REAP remains vested and engaged in regional transportation projects and initiatives. REAP staff and members have provided valuable input on policy and strategic long-term development issues affecting our airports and regional transit system.

REAP quarterly convenings were put on hold through the first half of 2020. In September, REAP hosted a virtual convening with WSU President, Dr. Jay Golden. He invited our REAP officials to join WSU leadership to build trust and find solutions to the challenges of: stopping the outflow migration, creating new jobs, attracting new business and industry, growing existing businesses and identifying new ways to leverage South Central Kansas. He has established the President's Economic Development Council and encouraged REAP members to contact Dr. Kaye Monk-Morgan via email (Kay.Monk@Wichita.edu), if interested in participating on the council.

In an effort to add more value to REAP membership, REAP staff and executive committee members looked for ways to provide transactional services to help offset REAP assessment fees and reduce operational expenses in their city/county budgets. Cooperative purchasing/group purchasing contracts will increase member's purchasing power and decrease expenses. While REAP is mostly a regional transformational organization focused on policy issues impacting South Central Kansas, it can provide transactional services to its members, without changing the organizational structure, as these services will add more value to the assessments members pay.

REAP entered into a partnership with Ford Motor Company for fleet vehicle purchases. With help from Rusty Eck Ford, REAP has obtained a Fleet Identification Number (FIN) which gives members special pricing based on the cumulative buying power of the eleven-county South Central Kansas region. REAP members may use the REAP FIN code at any Ford dealership to receive special pricing. The partnership with Ford is only the beginning. REAP staff will continue to explore other group purchasing opportunities that could save cities and counties in South Central Kansas valuable tax revenue.

In September, REAP was alerted to recent action taken by the Equus Beds Groundwater Management District 2 (GMD2) Board of Directors. At their annual meeting in August, the GMD2 Board removed the last remaining municipal representative from its board. The GMD charges annual water use and land assessments to finance their operations. The water use assessment fee is applied on a per acre-foot of water basis (1 acre-foot = 325,851 gallons), and the land assessment is applied on a per acre basis. Assessment rate caps, established by the Kansas Legislature, have experienced multiple increases over time. The most recent change was in 2018, when the legislature increased the assessment rate for water use from \$1 per acre-foot to \$2 per acre-foot. The land assessment rate remained at \$0.05/acre. In 2019, GMD2 increased the fees being assessed water users in the REAP area from \$1.10/acre-foot to the maximum cap limit of \$2.00/acre-foot (82% rate hike). It is important to our members to have input on how much is assessed and for what purposes. REAP staff and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members are working with our state legislators and the GMD2 staff and Board to have municipal representatives reinstated on the GMD2 Board without the need for state legislation.

REAP welcomed the City of Pratt as a new member in 2020. In 2021, REAP has received new membership commitments from the City of Arkansas City and Sedgwick County. As REAP membership continues to grow, South Central Kansas will rebound faster from the economic downturn through collaboration, communication and partnerships between our local governments, regional organizations, business and industry.

