

Published online 6/9/2009 10:49 PM

Adviser urges city to address housing

Improving stock now will pay off later with increased tax revenue, strategist says.

By Edie Ross - The Hutchinson News - eross@hutchnews.com

Hutchinson city leaders have homework to do.

At a Tuesday study session, the Hutchinson City Council was introduced to two 100-plus-page documents to study - one a housing needs assessment, the other a proposal for new zoning regulations.

Housing Needs Assessment

The 2009 Hutchinson Housing Needs Assessment, completed by St. Louis-based Development Strategies, compiles an evaluation of existing housing programs, a market analysis and strategic plan for the future and information about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the Hutchinson housing market.

The council will have the opportunity to formally accept the housing needs assessment at its June 16 meeting. Accepting the report does not mean the council will implement all the strategies.

On Tuesday, Brad Beggs, a principal with Development Strategies, summarized the findings for the council, explaining that, among other things, housing conditions have generally deteriorated since 2001, when the previous housing needs assessment was completed.

The greatest area of concern about deteriorating housing is concentrated south of 11th Avenue, although there are other areas of concern near the Hutchinson Municipal Airport.

Beggs added that area of concern is widening - creeping north from 11th to 17th avenues and also in residential areas near 30th Avenue and K-61.

Beggs outlined the 12 strategies his firm suggests the city implement. Some council members raised concerns about the funding for some of the strategies, which would necessitate the hiring of additional city staff.

Beggs countered the cost of implementing the strategies would be worth it.

"You're at a crossroads," he said. "You're seeing the housing stock fall into decline. If you don't do anything it will continue to fall into decline and you'll end up with a blighted area.

"It will cost money, but in the long run it will increase your property values, which is how you generate tax revenue."

Proposed zoning regulations

Next, the council moved to proposed new and revised zoning regulations. Planning Director Nancy Scott summarized some of the more high-profile additions and revisions that are being proposed.

The revisions are needed because the current zoning regulations are more suited to a rural community than an urban area, Scott said.

The proposal includes, among other things, the addition of regulations for adult entertainment businesses, a new zoning district that allows for subdivisions of owner-occupied manufactured homes, and a new zoning district to accommodate established compatible mixed-use developments of residential, commercial and industrial uses.

Scott emphasized that the proposal the council received Tuesday was a preliminary draft. There will be a series of public meetings to gather feedback. Any issues the public or stakeholders have with the proposed regulations will be shared with the council and the planning commission.

An official public hearing will take place with the planning commission before the proposed regulations go to the City Council for approval.