

## **2022 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 a solid work plan in place, REAP staff and members took actions to enhance and increase collaboration with the federal and state legislative delegations, as well as regional organizations, councils of governments and education institutions in south central Kansas. Continued cooperation with governments and private and public sector partners, is key to maintaining a sustainable path of recovery and development for the region.

In January, REAP co-hosted the South Central Kansas Legislative Delegation's (SCKLD) Annual Meeting and Public Forum. Important legislative and policy issues to be addressed during the 2022 legislative session were identified. For those key issues (education and workforce development, behavioral health, and regional infrastructure) that are shared as priorities among and between organizations in South-Central Kansas, a collaborative awareness and advocacy strategy was developed.

During the 2022 state legislative session, REAP staff coordinated many meetings and events for the SCKLD. The conversations encouraged cooperation to solve complex state policy issues. The topics addressed: groundwater management governance, behavioral health and substance abuse, criminal justice reform, and workforce development.

REAP is represented and engaged on the following boards and committees: Talent Roadmap Coalition, K-254 Corridor Development Association, South Central Kansas Transportation Task Force, Wichita/Sedgwick County Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition, Childcare Advocacy Task Force, I Fly Wichita, WAMPO, Wichita Airport Advisory Board, and Wichita Transit Advisory Board.

Combined efforts with both public and private partners on the South Central Kansas Transportation Task Force successfully identified and prioritized transportation projects in South Central Kansas. 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 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.

# REAP | Regional Economic Area Partnership

REAP continues its advocacy for state and federal funding for expansion of passenger rail in Kansas, specifically passenger rail service expanding the Heartland Flyer from Dallas/Ft Worth and Oklahoma City connecting through Wichita to Newton and the Southwest Chief, providing our state with service to Oklahoma and Texas. This will improve the Kansas transportation system by creating an expanded connection to the Amtrak national grid.

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.

The Wichita/Sedgwick County Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition continues to develop a sustainable, accessible and integrated system of care that serves people with mental health and substance abuse disorders who are in crisis, in order to efficiently and effectively deliver services that create positive outcomes. Three distinct goals have been established by the coalition:

1. Access to care: To reduce barriers so patients can get to services they need when they need them.
2. Coordination, Communication, Collaboration: To create a system of care that relies on improved communication, coordination and collaboration among service providers.
3. Workforce: To have enough employees to meet demand in mental health, substance abuse, social work and other behavioral health professions.

REAP continues 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-19 pandemic further amplified the childcare crisis. Many child care centers 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, more investment is needed.

In 2020, REAP became concerned of the lack of municipal representation on the Groundwater Management District 2 (GMD2) governing board. At their annual meeting in August 2020, GMD2 members removed the last remaining municipal representative from its board of directors. The GMD charges annual water use and land assessments to finance their operations. It is important that our members have input on how much is assessed and for what purposes.

In 2021, REAP formally asked the GMD2 Board of Directors to mandate the number of board seats for municipal users to three of nine, which accurately reflects the municipal water allocation within GMD2.

# REAP | Regional Economic Area Partnership

At the 2022 GMD2 Annual Meeting, in an effort to provide municipal representation, GMD2 members voted to expand its Board of Directors from nine to 11 members, with the two new members designated as municipal users. REAP staff and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members continue to collaborate with other regional organizations, state legislators and water policy experts to draft legislation that will address municipal water supply and regulatory uncertainty.

Access to clean and potable water is an economic driver. The regional economy depends on clean water: manufacturing, farming, healthcare, tourism, recreation, energy production, and other economic sectors need clean water to function and flourish. Water is a vital factor of production, and diminishing water supplies translates into slower growth. The basic economic principle in managing water resources is that we need to balance the demand for water from all users and the supply of water resources, in a fair and equitable manner.

At the final REAP Executive Committee meeting of 2022, REAP members appointed new REAP Executive Officers:

- Chair: Commissioner Pete Meitzner, Sedgwick County
- Vice Chair: Ms. Kelly McElroy, City Manager, City of Newton
- Treasurer: Mayor Russ Kessler, City of Haysville

Over the last three years of Mayor Tom Brown's leadership, REAP expanded its membership and presence in the region, it welcomed many education institutions to the partnership, it overcame the challenges of Covid-19, and addressed many regional priorities that cross over jurisdictional boundaries. Mayor Brown has been a remarkable leader and advocate for collaboration in south central Kansas. He provided key input and testimony on legislative issues that impact all of us, including: transportation, groundwater management, broadband access, mental health, and passenger rail. Thank you just doesn't seem enough!

Regional collaboration is hard work. In order to be successful, the leadership of every REAP member needs to be involved and continually supportive of a successful outcome. Many of the challenges facing our communities have no jurisdictional boundaries and are of a scale and complexity beyond the resources, capacity, and expertise of any single member to tackle on its own. Only by working together, across jurisdictions, can there be possibilities for action and change.