

Ignite Emporia focused on issues that are more critical than ever during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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When the first investors in the Ignite Emporia campaign began to sign on only 11 months ago, no one could have imagined how critical the timing for this initiative would be less than one year later. With a focus on workforce development, affordable housing issues and business retention, the COVID-19 pandemic has only added greater urgency for action and the need to move forward with the goals of Ignite Emporia to help the region be in the best position possible for recovery.

The workforce development goal is focused on better connecting the community with job opportunities locally and ensuring that we can continue to grow a qualified workforce to support business and industry in the region. A tool that can help us to better identify an individual's skills and connect them with employment opportunities best suited to those skills is the partnership with ACT and the Work Keys Assessment. This tool can help employers by focusing their searches to fill open positions on hiring the right individuals with skills critical to that job. For job seekers, the assessment helps to identify both skills strengths as well as opportunities for training and improvement that can better align with career paths in the area.

Lyon County is in the process of becoming a Work Ready Community certifying our efforts to better connect our employers with a trained and appropriately skilled workforce. We are currently 43% of the way to our goal, as outlined by ACT Inc.; and area businesses can support that effort by signing up to recognize the National Career Readiness Credentials as a useful tool for hiring a quality workforce. Supportive employers can sign up online on the [Lyon County Work Ready Community](#) page or can contact me with Ignite to sign up over the phone at 342-1600.

Housing availability and affordability isn't a problem unique to Lyon County, but each community is faced with finding its own path to developing and rehabilitating its housing inventory. We started this process in December by partnering with RDG Planning and Design to complete a comprehensive housing study of Lyon County so that we would have a complete picture of the needs and opportunities that exist. Supporting development from both public and private programs and recruiting additional investment in the community will be critical to ensuring steady progress on modernizing and updating our housing.

Once again, current events and protocols for safety may alter our change the reality of our market when it comes to housing and future planning as we work through the pandemic. Economic shifts, new or changings demands or needs in the market, and opportunities that come from our new reality mean that we need to be prepared to act as we better understand future needs. Ignite will focus on keeping connected to our industry leaders and identifying opportunities to spur development as they are available. Opportunities exist in communities throughout Lyon County and we will do our best to support efforts to improve housing availability.

The final area of focus has become one of the most critical in light of current events, with an ever changing dynamic of what may be needed to respond. The impact that COVID-19 and the response has had on business cannot be understated. The bigger problem is that truly understanding what the long-term ramifications will be and what will be the most responsible and strategic path forward as businesses are slowly allowed to move back towards operating.

Business retention is a broad term and it will mean different things at different times. Helping our local and regional businesses recover from COVID-19 will be one piece of the business retention puzzle. Working with area businesses that need to respond or react in different ways will be another task. Finally, some of our local businesses will have new opportunities and supporting them to take advantage of these while staying or growing in our area will be just as critical to our community's long-term success as everything else, we do.

While we don't have many of the answers yet, or even truly understand the bigger picture of our new reality, Ignite Emporia is a coalition of investors from business and industry, public and non-profits and the one thing they do share is the strong desire to support a collaborative community effort to grow and thrive in spite of our challenges. If we can be of help to you or your organization please be sure to reach out and we will be there to help how we can.