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Assuming Mother Nature cooperates over the next few weeks, guests at Riverside Park and Ralph Mitchell Zoo will soon be enjoying several new amenities.

The largest improvement project underway is happening in Kiddy Land, where new accessible sidewalks have been constructed, along with an ADA-compliant bridge leading to the play castle and a new single family restroom facility. Additionally, new lighting has been installed courtesy of the Independence Lions Club, whose members have served as caretakers of the Kiddy Land play structures since 1961. The Kiddy Land renovation is scheduled to be completed

in June.

A fresh coat of paint has been added to several fixtures of the park and zoo, including the slides at Riverside Beach Family Aquatic Center, benches and railings throughout the zoo and, of course, the lions standing sentry at the park's Oak Street entrance. Several projects were completed with the much-appreciated help of community volunteers on LOVE Independence Day.

Other recent projects include re-arranging some of the zoo exhibits to prepare for the arrival of our new Red Fox, which is coming soon from the Clay Center Zoo. ►



FUN ZOO FACTS

Who's the oldest animal at our zoo?

Label, age 45, our Black-Handed Spider Monkey. She was born 8/12/1976 at Sedgwick County Zoo and came to Ralph Mitchell Zoo 3/21/1988.

The largest and smallest animals?

Largest:
Eyore, a bull Bison, and **Tommy**, our bull Elk. Fully grown bison bulls can weigh up to 2,000 lbs. and adult bull elks can weigh up to 1,100 lbs.

Smallest:
Our Sugar Gliders. Males grow to between 100 and 160 grams; Females 80-130 grams.

Another fun fact...
May 28, 2022 marked the 63rd Anniversary of **Miss Able's** space flight!

The previous bobcat and wood duck exhibits are being consolidated to make one large enclosure for the fox. The wood ducks have been moved to the old caiman exhibit, and the red and gold pheasant is being moved to the vacant exhibit by the raccoons.

The exhibits in the Stevens Building which previously housed Burmese Pythons have been renovated as the new home for a Kinkajou and a Green Iguana. More exhibits also have been added to the Stevens Building to accommodate a Bearded Dragon, Western Hognose Snake, Veiled Chameleon and Sugar Gliders.

Zoo staff are also working to expand the Macaw exhibit to provide more space. Unfortunately, all waterfowl - including the Mute Swan, Peafowl and Macaws - have been off exhibit as of late due to a pandemic of Avian Influenza that has spread across Kansas. This is also why the duck pond remains empty. It was drained to avoid attracting potentially infected wild waterfowl into the zoo.

More park and zoo upgrades are planned in the coming months and years as part of the overall Zoo Master Plan. A project to update Riverside Park's electrical service will begin in the fall and will be completed in phases, with eventual extension to the zoo.

We also appreciate your patience with the Logan Fountain lights. We have been dealing with a computer system issue, and we are working with the manufacturer to get the problem resolved as quickly as possible. ■



Fire/EMS facility expansion progressing

Maneuvering around Southeast Kansas' rainy spring weather, construction crews are forging ahead on the nearly 11,000-square-foot expansion of the City's Fire/EMS facility with a targeted December completion.

The expansion project will extend the existing Myrtle Street facility eastward, providing a drive-through bay for the department's Tower 1 fire truck and new areas for supplies; equipment cleaning and disinfection; living quarters; offices; training space; and a fitness room. The project brings some closure to the question of where the Fire/EMS services would ultimately be stationed as renovation of the 1916 City Hall building continues for the eventual relocation of most other City offices.

Fire/EMS Chief Shawn Wallis said the expansion will help improve efficiency for his crews and ultimately could positively impact response times, as everything the department needs to operate will be located together. Currently, offices, sleeping quarters and some supply storage for the department are located on the second floor of the temporary City Hall building.

"Once our expansion is complete, when a call comes in, our

personnel will no longer have to travel from the adjacent building to the vehicle station to respond," Wallis said. "Even shaving a few seconds off our response time could be significant in many situations. This project ultimately will help our crews better serve the community, with all our necessary equipment and functions in one place."

"It also will solidify this spot as our permanent headquarters, which is ideal thanks to its central location. Our crews are looking forward to being settled here."

Indy Fire/EMS crews respond to approximately 3,500 emergency calls per year. In 2021, the total number of calls was 3,607, including 3,373 medical calls, 27 structure fires, 49 outside fires, 8 vehicle fires, 66 public assist calls and 84 false alarms. As of the end of May this year, the department had answered 1,261 calls for medical assistance and responded to 10 structure fires and 33 medical assist calls, along with 17 outside fires, 5 vehicle fires and 28 false alarms.

"We think of Independence as a small town, but we are a busy department with top-notch personnel. We will put our new facility to great use." ■

PARK, ZOO & POOL SUMMER INFORMATION

PARK

6a-11:59p Daily

RIDES

Thurs & Fri: 11a-1p and 6p-8:30p

Sat & Sun: 1p-8:30p

Train, 50 cents; Carousel, 5 cents;

Mini-Golf, \$2

GLOW GOLF

Every 4th Friday through October:
9p-Midnight (ticket sales stop @ 11:30)

ZOO

9a-7p Daily

FREE Admission

MISS ABLE'S SNACK SHACK

Thurs-Sun: 11a-7p

(through August 14)

POOL

Weather Permitting

Mon & Tues: 1p-4p

Wed: CLOSED

Thurs & Fri: 1p-7p*

**Family nights beginning at 5p*

Sat & Sun: 1p-6p

\$4/person (3 and older)

Ages 2 & under FREE

Half-price Mon & Tues 4p-6p

\$5/family Thurs-Fri 5p-7p

PROJECT UPDATES: Public Works and Infrastructure

The City continues to make progress on several important initiatives related to streets, facilities and infrastructure. Below is a quick-read chart of highlights for the most current and soon-to-start activities:

PROJECT	STATUS	PROJECTED TIMELINE
Main Street Rebuild (10th St. east to 8th St.)	Includes new sidewalks and buried infrastructure. In progress, working around rainy weather.	Completion expected late June or early 3rd Quarter 2022
Enterprise Drive (Build-out of street and utilities)	Enterprise & Hackney intersection under construction, preparing for curb and gutter. Addressing right-of-way issue.	Expected completion by end of June 2022
Maple Street Rebuild (17th St. west to city limits)	Paving underway. Addressing issues with storm sewer and railroad crossing.	Expected completion 3rd Quarter 2022
Kiddy Land ADA-compliant sidewalks and new restroom.	Sidewalks nearly complete. Restroom construction still in progress and sod work yet to be completed.	Expected completion in June, weather permitting
ADA Improvements remaining from 2021	Mostly complete. Only Big Cheese parking lot and small amount of alley work between Equity Bank and Dickey's Barbecue Pit remain.	Completion expected very soon
Wayfinding Signage	In progress, design and installation of signage and kiosks	Expected completion 3rd Quarter 2022
Airport Taxiway Improvements (Taxiways B & D and Terminal Apron)	On hold to accommodate Textron Aviation's production schedule.	START: June 2022 COMPLETION: 3rd Quarter 2022
Chestnut Street Mill & Overlay (9th St. east to Penn)	Plans sent to KDOT for approval	START: 2nd Quarter 2022 COMPLETION: 4th Quarter 2022
New Sewer Lines (1st St. & Birch and Westminster area)	Awaiting loan documentation from KDHE. Requesting property easements.	START: 3rd Quarter 2022 COMPLETION: 4th Quarter 2022
Water Line/Meter Project (Northwest of 10th St. railroad crossing, south of Oak Street)	Plan under review. Will include replacement of water meters and some water mains.	START: 3rd Quarter 2022 COMPLETION: 4th Quarter 2022
Lakeview Lift Station	Awaiting loan documentation from KDHE and preparing to award bid to improve inflow and infiltration issues (preventing ground water and storm water from entering the sanitary sewer).	START: 3rd Quarter 2022 COMPLETION: 4th Quarter 2022
Southeast Lift Station	Completing project design for pump replacement to improve reliability and ease of maintenance.	START: 3rd Quarter 2022 COMPLETION: 4th Quarter 2022
Central Park Sports Complex	Bid currently on hold awaiting grant notifications. Working to finalize storm sewer and conduct site visit re: woodland removal.	ON HOLD / AWAITING GRANT NOTIFICATIONS



Main Street Project



Kiddy Land



Fire/EMS Facility Expansion

Indy housing study sets the stage for new development

A comprehensive Housing Needs Analysis completed in December 2021 by the Independence Housing Authority (IHA) has provided a revealing snapshot of the housing availability in Independence - or more accurately, the serious lack thereof.

Led by IHA Director April Nutt, the study was a first step toward understanding where the community's housing challenges lie, how the deficits hinder economic development and how we might begin to tackle the problem. The study also fulfills one of the key requirements to accessing assistance through the Kansas Department of Commerce's (KDOC) statewide effort to support housing development in rural communities.

"Our needs analysis was truly eye opening," Nutt said. "But once we processed the initial shock of the relatively bleak housing picture, we were able to focus on the valuable, actionable data and recognize this as a real opportunity and a great foundation to build on, literally."

The KDOC's **Rural Housing Incentive District (RHID)** program is designed to support cities, counties and developers by assisting with financing for housing development projects within rural communities. The program is available to any city or county with a population under 60,000 and supports the development of all types of housing (multi-family, single family, etc.) in a variety of price ranges. Financing assistance is offered in the form of reimbursement to the governmental entity and/or the housing developer of a percentage of the property taxes that increase as a result of property improvements. The reimbursement period can be up to 25 years.

Since the presentation of the IHA housing study, the Independence City Commission has approved additional

steps to solidify participation in the RHID program, including establishing four designated parcels of land as "development districts" where eligible construction or rehabilitation projects may qualify:

1. Jefferson Subdivision Development District (across from Jefferson Elementary);
2. South Rainbow Subdivision Development District (south of Rainbow Drive)
3. Horizon Estates Subdivision Development District (north of Taylor Road near Eagle Estates)
4. Downtown Central Business Development District (downtown - including upper story housing)

The IHA Housing Needs Analysis written by Nutt summed up the current situation this way, "For years, various stakeholders in the Independence community have discussed the lack of housing as a hindrance to community growth, advancement of economic development, bringing new jobs and businesses, and the need to expand the tax base.

"Economic development is tied to a quality housing stock – without the latter, it is hard to attract the former.

"The future economic well-being of Independence depends upon developing new housing to meet the needs of a variety of consumers."

While IHA, City leaders and Commissioners work on the next steps to stimulate housing development, read on to learn some of the key takeaways from the Housing Needs Analysis.



AGED STOCK

The study revealed **61.6%** of Independence's housing stock is older than 50 years. The Secretary of Commerce uses a threshold of 40% of stock age 50 or older as an indicator that a community has a shortage of quality housing.

MORE SALES = MORE SHORTAGE

Independence home sales in 2021 were up **14%** over 2020 and **16.87%** over 2019. While a brisk real estate market is generally a positive economic indicator, it also exacerbates the housing shortage when new home construction is not keeping pace.



The average sale price for 2021 was up **11%** over 2020 and up **25.4%** over 2019. The median number of days on the market for 2021 was 55, compared to 88 days in 2020 and 110 days in 2019.



As of December 2021 (the time of the study), the community had 2.6 months' worth of housing inventory for sale. Of the 21 homes available, 10 homes were priced at less than \$50K; seven homes were priced between \$50K and \$75K; and only four homes were priced above \$75K.



DEMOLITION OUTPACING BUILDING

When demolition outpaces new construction, this is another indicator of a housing shortage. Since 2015, while 10 new units were constructed, 72 units were removed by the City. This does not take into account any homes removed by property owners.



HALF A BILLION

POSITIVE INDICATORS

- 2021 Commercial building permit values were up \$24,762,764 over 2020 and \$22,689,841 over 2019.
- The 2021 mean average wage in Montgomery County increased to \$19 from \$17.72 in 2020.
- City sales tax revenue has increased annually for several years and in 2021 vs. 2020 was up 5.5%.
- The county announced more than half a BILLION dollars in commercial development in 2021.

STAGNANT CONSTRUCTION

Since 2015, only **10** single-family homes have been constructed in Independence, and zero multi-family homes have been built. In the past 21 years, only 91 new single-family homes have gone up and only 71 new multi-family units. Of the 162 total new housing projects, 44 (27%) were constructed with private investment, and 118 (73%) were built with the help of federal, state or local funding.

72 UNITS



Considering a home improvement project this summer?

CITY GRANT PROGRAMS CAN HELP

NEIGHBORHOOD EXTERIOR Grant Program

Designed for residents living in the City's designated Revitalization Districts, this grant provides up to 50 percent reimbursement for neighbors who work together to improve their properties. Homeowner investment from \$1,000 to \$10,000 in qualifying exterior projects may qualify for reimbursement.

Qualifying improvements include façade restoration; exterior painting or siding; masonry; window and door repair or replacement; awnings; gutters; exterior lighting or electrical work; building additions; front porch repair; roofs; driveway repair or installation; landscaping (with limitations); and tree removal (with limitations).



Scan here for more details, an application and a map of the City's Revitalization Districts



DEMOLITION COST SHARE Grant Program

This new program offered by the City is designed to help property owners with expenses for demolition of blighted structures in Independence. All property owners meeting the established criteria are eligible to participate in the Cost Share Program for qualified demolition projects as funding availability allows.

The program is designed to provide up to 100% reimbursement (up to \$6,000) for labor and materials for applicants who qualify as low-income; and up to 50% reimbursement (up to \$3,000) for applicants who do not meet the low-income criteria.

Scan here to see the complete criteria and print an application form



We can't ignore the signs

Sometimes you have to invest in yourself and your community

Many years ago, I suddenly became a single mother with a 1- and 2-year-old. The realization of a failed marriage was devastating. But even more terrifying was trying to figure out how to continue to provide for my young children. The rent, utilities, formula, diapers, car payment, daycare and the rest of the bills still needed to be paid even after our household income was cut by more than half overnight. I still remember the feelings of despair, fear and worry, so much worry.

This major life change forced me to re-evaluate what I needed to do to provide the life for my children that I wanted them to have and to do it on my own. It was time that I reinvested in myself. I continued to work full-time during the day and started taking night classes at PSU. While some were satellite classes, the majority were on the Pittsburg campus. This was before the availability of online classes. It wasn't easy, in fact it was incredibly difficult. I can still feel the guilt of being away from my very young children on those long school nights after working all day. This guilt combined with the worrisome burden of assuming additional debt to go back to college was so overwhelming that at times I wanted to give up. The thoughts of whether I was being selfish and whether I was being a good mother kept me up many nights. But I had to keep telling myself that failure was not an option and to focus on the goal of providing a better life for my children. I finished my degree. I worked hard and was promoted multiple times over the years. And, although it was not in my original plan, I did eventually get remarried to a man that has been a wonderful father and "Papa" to our children and grandchildren.

SOMETIMES WE NEED TO REINVEST

Now, why did I tell you that story? For those that have gone through a difficult time in your life, I want you to know that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Don't give up on yourself and don't listen to those that don't have your best interests in mind. I didn't realize it at the time, but had I not gone through those difficult times many years ago I would most likely not be where I am today.

I also wanted to illustrate that sometimes we need to reinvest, not only in ourselves, but in our community. There are a variety of City projects in process, many of which are highlighted in another section of this newsletter. All of these projects are reinvestments in our community in one way or another. Some may be obvious, such as improvements to infrastructure or economic development initiatives that create jobs. While the reasoning for others may not be as easily understood if you are not aware of the project background.

For example, the significance of wayfinding signage has been under discussion by our Commission and community partners for more than a decade, based on a professional assessment in 2012 by world renowned community development expert Roger Brooks. In his review, Brooks identified wayfinding signage as a key element that was lacking but, if improved,

could greatly boost tourism - and ultimately revenue - in our community.

The wayfinding signage project was included as a goal in the City's Community Based Strategic Plan adopted by the City Commission in 2018. The City's \$100,000 investment in this project was approved when the 2020 and 2021 budgets were adopted by the City Commission in 2019 and 2020, respectfully. These dollars were leveraged with other funding sources when the City partnered with the Chamber, FORPAZ and various community businesses and organizations who provided additional financial support to make this project a reality. On October 14, 2021, the project moved forward as the Commission unanimously approved a contract to produce multiple signs and kiosks for the community. This project is in process and the signs are scheduled to be installed later this year.

The City's action to pursue wayfinding signage represents an important investment to help sustain the economic health of the community and, in turn, all our citizens. Moreover, approval of the project by the City Commission was not a rash or frivolous decision.

THE MORE VISITORS THE BETTER - FOR EVERYONE

Let's be clear. Wayfinding signage is not for the locals. It is for guests visiting, passing through or exploring our community. Yes, they may be traveling to a specific location that they entered in their navigation device to receive directions. But as they drive, they will see signs that point to our historic downtown, our park and zoo, museum and other notable destinations. Hopefully they will get curious and explore, shop downtown and spend the afternoon at our attractions. Perhaps a first visit will inspire another, and return visitors may see different wayfinding signs and discover even more amenities (generate sales tax), and even better yet, eventually decide to move here and invest in our community (property tax). Both tax sources are reinvested into the operation of City services and City facilities. Having more people support these types of amenities for the benefit of our entire community is good for everyone.

The wayfinding signage represents an opportunity - just one of many - to help us maintain a community where we all want to live, work, play and raise a family. If this isn't a legitimate investment in our town, our citizens and our collective future, then I don't know what is. Just as it is important to reinvest in ourselves and each other, the sustained vitality of Independence also depends on our continuous reinvestment. If we don't do it, who will?

-Kelly Passauer, City Manager



If we don't reinvest in our community, our citizens and our collective future, who will?

BOOKMARK THESE IMPORTANT WEATHER SAFETY RESOURCES



FAMILY PREPAREDNESS Create a family emergency kit, create a pet emergency kit, check and maintain your kits routinely. Go to: https://resultsyoudeserve.com/blog/steps-creating-family-emergency-plan/for-assistance	STORM SAFETY Join the City of Independence's public alert system to receive weather notifications and local emergency alerts. https://public.alertsense.com/SignUp/?RegionId=1716	TORNADO SAFETY Create a family plan for where to go when a tornado warning is issued. Know the safest place in your home or identify the nearest storm shelter before you need it.	LIGHTNING SAFETY NO PLACE outside is safe when thunderstorms are in the area! If you hear thunder, lightning is close enough to strike near you. You should shelter indoors for at least 30 minutes after you hear the last sound of thunder. For more information: www.weather.gov/safety/lightning-tips	FLOOD SAFETY Flooding can occur at any time during the year. Families should create a plan, assemble an emergency kit, know your risk, sign up for emergency notifications, prepare your home, prepare your family/pets, and be ready to evacuate should flooding occur. For more information: www.weather.gov/safety/flood
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For more information on weather safety, flood zones and flood safety in the City of Independence, please feel free to contact City of Independence Emergency Manager David Cowan at 620-332-2528; davidc@independenceks.gov

REMINDER: We offer several paperless billing and payment options for your convenience

You can save time and trees by using one of our paperless billing/payment systems to manage your utility bill.

Our free phone payment system now offers both English and Spanish language options: **1-844-215-7377**.


Or, by creating your own account in our online payment system, you can manage your transactions and keep all your personal information up to date. A few of the other

benefits of your online account include paying by credit/debit card or through your bank account; managing multiple accounts in one location; the ability to select e-billing (paperless); requesting reminders for when your payments are due; and viewing your payment history. You can even submit service requests through your account.

Scan the code to the right for more details:



Come be part of our team!

RIDE OPERATORS, TICKET SELLERS, CONCESSIONS Operators needed for miniature train and carousel; ticket sellers for train, carousel and mini-golf; concession workers for Miss Able's Snack Shack. Seasonal April-October, \$10/hour Must be 18 years old	BUILDING INSPECTOR • Review and approve building permit applications according to Building Codes. • Inspect plumbing, electrical, mechanical and structural installations. • Maintain project documentation. • Inspect housing for HUD compliance. • Serve on Condemnation Committee. • Serve as back-up Code Enforcement Officer. Full-time, \$18.76/hour starting, plus benefits	BUILDING INSPECTOR TRAINEE • Review and approve building permit applications according to Building Codes. • Inspect plumbing, electrical, mechanical and structural installations. • Maintain project documentation. • Inspect housing for HUD compliance. • Serve on Condemnation Committee. • Serve as back-up Code Enforcement Officer. Full-time, \$17.18/hour starting, plus benefits
FIREFIGHTER I/EMT • Tests and maintains ambulances, pumping engines, aerial ladder trucks, hoses, other equipment. • Participates in fire rescues, fire prevention, station maintenance and training. • Performs clean-up and overhaul work after a fire. • Responds to EMS calls, administers first aid and writes reports. • Responds to major alarms while off duty. • Assists with fire prevention education. Full-time, \$689.92/56-hour week, plus benefits	MOBILE INTENSIVE CARE TECHNICIAN/FF1 (PARAMEDIC) • Tests and maintains ambulances, pumping engines, aerial ladder trucks, hoses, other equipment. • Participates in fire prevention, station maintenance and training. • Performs cleanup and overhaul work after a fire. • Performs rescues. • Responds to EMS calls, administers first aid and writes reports. • Responds to major alarms while off duty. • Assists with fire prevention education. Full-time, \$858.48/56-hour week, plus benefits	PATROL OFFICER I • Patrols city to enforce law and order. • Investigates and prepares reports of complaints and accidents. • Issues citations and makes arrests. • Responds to crime, accident and emergency scenes. • Serves subpoenas and warrants. • Controls traffic and crowds. • Appears in court. • Books and transports prisoners. • Takes fingerprints. Full-time, \$17.18/hour, plus benefits
DISPATCHER/CLERK I • Receives regular and 911 telephone calls and dispatches personnel to handle emergencies. • Processes reports for prosecutors. • Maintains case, report, accident, complaint, insurance and related files. • Tests sirens, radios and phones. • Checks validity of driver's licenses and vehicle tags. • Submits crime information to law enforcement databases. Full-time, \$14.75/hour, plus benefits	PUBLIC SERVICE WORKER III / HEAVY MACHINERY OPERATOR WATER/SEWER OR STREET DEPT • Valid Kansas CDL required. • Operates and maintains medium and heavy equipment. • Reads, maintains, repairs, tests and replaces water meters. • Mows and trim lawns and brush. • Picks up and disposes of trash and brush. Full-time, \$17.18/hour, plus benefits	 <i>Scan here for complete job listings</i>

TWO WAYS TO APPLY:

Complete an application online at:
www.independenceks.gov

Applications also accepted at:
KansasWorks, 317 N. Penn
620-332-5904
www.southeastkansasworks.com



City of Independence
811 W. Laurel
Independence, KS 67301

*What I love most about working for
the City of Independence...*

*"I love working with all the animals and
making the park and zoo look good for
the community."*

*- Heath Young
Park & Zoo*

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 9 & 23

July 14 & 28 | August 11 & 25

CITY COMMISSION MEETINGS
5:30 p.m. - Independence Civic Center

July 4

**INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION
@ RIVERSIDE PARK**
Mid-Continent Band Concert,
Park Rides & Mini-Golf, Fireworks Show
(No fireworks allowed in park and zoo)

July 1 | August 5 | September 2
FIRST FRIDAY

7:30 a.m. Independence Civic Center
& Facebook Live

July 4

CITY HALL CLOSED FOR THE HOLIDAY
*Sanitation services shifted by one day
(Mon schedule picked up on Tues, etc.)*

July 9 | August 6 | September 10
MONTHLY RECYCLING
@ City Sanitation Yard

21st & Maple 8 a.m.-12 noon
Also offered every Tuesday 8 a.m.-2 p.m.

CITY BRUSH DUMP OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
on the FIRST SATURDAY OF EVERY MONTH
(Exceptions: July 9 and September 10 due to holidays)
County Road 4100 8 a.m.-12 noon
one-half mile south of College Ave.