



# Hutchinson/Reno County Chamber of Commerce

## 2023 Public Policy Agenda

The Hutchinson/Reno County Chamber of Commerce is an advocate for policies and actions that promote a positive business climate, economic growth, business investment in the community and tourism. This document provides an outline of the issues the Hutch Chamber's Public Policy Committee and the Board of Directors have identified as core policy priorities.

### CORE POLICY PRIORITIES

#### **Economic Development**

The Chamber supports the important role of government programs and support for economic development efforts, as well as the use of competitive incentives and workforce training and development programs intended to support the needs of existing employers and the recruitment of new business investment in the community and state.

#### **Early Childhood, Childcare & Education**

The Chamber supports the need for an adequate supply of childcare and early childhood education options to affordably meet the needs of the community, as well as education and workforce training programs to prepare a pipeline of workforce for the future. Quality community basic services, including childcare and education options, are important to attract and encourage young families to make their homes in Kansas and the community.

#### **Healthcare**

Health care providers and hospitals combined are the largest employment by sector in Hutchinson and Reno County and are important for the area's economic health, quality of life and future development. The Chamber supports programs which ensure access to health care as a top consideration to prospective residents and businesses and as one of the keys to a productive and efficient workforce.

#### **Housing**

The Chamber recognizes and supports the need for an adequate supply of available residential housing as a key component to attracting a skilled workforce and maintaining the local quality of life. Housing was named as one of the top priorities in the recent citizen survey and therefore we support the need for both housing rehabilitation programs and programs which encourage private sector development of housing options as an important tool to help retain and attract workforce.

#### **Tax Policy**

The Chamber supports efforts to promote fiscal responsibility and thoughtful consideration of tax policies by federal, state, and local governments. The Chamber supports opportunities for local government cooperation, consolidation of public services and improving the working relationships between local governments and local businesses. The Chamber supports preservation of local control over the policies and governance of local organizations and boards. The Chamber supports the careful



consideration of the American Rescue Plan Act funding, guided by the input from the citizen engagement process, to inform the allocation of the local priorities to be funded under ARPA.

### **Tourism**

The tourism industry in Hutchinson and Reno County is one of the key pillars of our local economy. The Chamber through our Visit Hutch division supports the implementation of programs that enable our area to compete for local, regional, national, and international events which supports the entire coalition of businesses involved and supported by tourism attraction.

### **Transportation**

The Chamber recognizes the importance of a quality, well-maintained comprehensive highway system, as well as regularly scheduled maintenance of highways and bridges throughout the state and supports preservation of a dedicated transportation fund to ensure that the South-Central Kansas region receives equitable distribution of transportation funding to build and preserve the infrastructure that is vital to business and industry.

### **Utilities**

The availability of sustainable natural resources is essential to meet the basic needs of all citizens and adequate supplies of clean air and water are essential for business and economic growth. The Chamber is an advocate of proper management of natural resources in a manner consistent with its members' economic and business interests.

### **Workforce Training**

A skilled workforce is essential for economic growth and expansion of employment opportunities. The Chamber supports policies that provide incentives for investment in internships, apprenticeships, and technical education programs to match the needs of local employers and facilitate greater cooperation between businesses, schools, and community colleges to provide cost-effective opportunities for career and technical education.



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## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Economic development is a top priority of the Hutchinson/Reno County Chamber of Commerce through our public/private partnership through the Greater Hutch economic development partnership with the local cities and Reno County. The Chamber believes federal, state, and local government play important roles in efforts to facilitate employment growth and business investment opportunities, to retain and encourage the expansion of existing businesses and to offer a competitive climate for new employers to invest. The Chamber realizes that economic development programs are critical tools used to retain and attract businesses and create jobs.

The Chamber supports economic development and workforce programs intended to recruit new business investment in the community and state such as PEAK, HPIP, KIT/KIR, and EDX and strongly encourages the adoption of recommendations in the Kansas Framework for Growth. Kansas must be aggressive in implementing and maintaining economic development policies and resources that support business development and job growth to compete with other states and communities that dedicate substantial resources to economic development.

The Chamber as a member in the Kansas Economic Development Alliance, supports specific recommendations and general positions of the KEDA Legislative Agenda notably in regards to continued state funding for economic development tools and programs, the strategic plan created by the Kansas Framework for Growth, programs which support entrepreneurship and small business development, as well as specific proposals related to workforce development, child care programs, support for minority, service-disabled and women owned businesses, research and development tax credits, expanded broadband services, specific project based sales tax exemptions, and housing and residential development programs. The Chamber supports funding for current economic development incentives so there is security and consistency in state policy as well as development of new programs and tools to attract and retain business in the state.

### **Workforce Programs**

The Chamber supports the coordination of state workforce efforts that enhance professional, technical, and vocational education programs to meet the workforce retention, recruitment and training needs of Kansas business and industry, including resources to assist in the training and retraining of Kansas workforce. Policymakers should provide mechanisms for educators to adopt innovative and cutting-edge programs to meet the needs of employers, thereby developing a pipeline of well-educated, career-ready, and highly skilled workforce.

### **Incentive Programs**

The Chamber supports incentive programs that enhance primary job creation. The Chamber supports continued use of performance-based tax incentives and encourages consideration of programs that provide monetary incentive to job creating businesses earlier in the development process. The Chamber supports the continuation of tools such as the APEX bill, the High-Performance Incentive Program, the Promoting Employment Across Kansas program and economic development programs including STAR Bonds. The Chamber supports local control and flexibility in the use of tax abatements, tax increment financing, neighborhood revitalization programs, and other incentives to promote economic development and job creation in the community.

### **State Department of Commerce**

The Chamber works closely in partnership with the Kansas Department of Commerce to recruit new business investment and employment in the community. The Chamber supports appropriate funding of the Department



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and opposes any reorganization that could hinder fulfillment of the Department's important mission as the front line of business recruitment and promotion of the State for business investment.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD, CHILDCARE & EDUCATION

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The Chamber supports investments in Kansas public education because top quality educational opportunities attract young families to Kansas and promote a well-educated workforce which are essential for economic development. The Chamber supports funding public education under a balanced formula that utilizes revenues from *ad valorem* property taxes, sales and use taxes and income taxes in a manner to assure that students throughout Kansas have equal access to educational opportunities and that the burden of funding public education does not fall disproportionately on local communities.

The Chamber calls for a fair, adequate, and equitable K-12 funding formula that allows for a substantially equivalent opportunity for all students to achieve statewide defined educational outcomes. The formula should include strong and flexible local authority regarding the raising and spending of education funds.

The Chamber encourages the Legislature to fulfill its constitutional duty to make suitable provision for financing public education from early childhood through high school. Such financing must be reliable and reduce, to the extent possible, reliance on local property taxes to pay the costs of public education. The Chamber supports restoring and maintaining state funding for public education in accordance with current law.

Hutchinson Community College is a vital component of public education and an important resource for the region's workforce development and economic growth. The Chamber supports measures to expand and improve career and technical education opportunities and funding for Kansas public colleges and universities, including the full funding of Excel in Career & Technical Education program and full funding of the post-secondary tiered and non-tiered credit hour funding model.

The Chamber supports the work of local and statewide organizations who are working to address a lack of available and affordable childcare options across Kansas and in Reno County. Recently the Chamber was a partner in the local coalition which embarked on a study of the childcare ecosystem in Reno County. The Chamber supports advocacy at the state level for policies at KDHE and the local level that help center operators and staff comply with regulations, as well as future long-term solutions to address the viability of childcare centers in providing affordable care, while also being able to provide a livable wage and benefits for childcare center employees.

## HEALTHCARE

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Health care providers and hospitals combined are the largest employment by sector in Hutchinson and Reno County and are important for the area's economic health, quality of life and future development. The Chamber believes that access to health care is one of the keys to a productive and efficient workforce and is a top consideration in locating and operating businesses.

The Chamber supports bi-partisan action that positions Kansas to take full advantage of federal funding; improve the quality and efficiency of the KanCare system; and adopt a Kansas program for Medicaid expanded eligibility



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and coverage, because currently health care costs of uninsured individuals are being passed on to businesses and providers throughout the state.

The Chamber therefore supports expansion of the State's Medicaid program to reduce the numbers of the uninsured and ensure the viability of health care providers who serve the uninsured and underinsured. In addition, the Chamber supports efforts by the legislature to expand telehealth services and broadband access to rural areas throughout Kansas. The Chamber also encourages the legislature and administration to consider programs to further address the treatment of mental health and substance abuse.

## HOUSING & LOCAL REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

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The Chamber recognizes that variety in available local residential housing is a key component to attracting a skilled workforce and maintaining the local quality of life. While no single policy or legislative action will address all housing issues, certain policies will be helpful. The Chamber supports the use of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) to encourage new investment in blighted areas across Reno County and supports local efforts to establish their appropriate NRP areas based on local needs within the state law.

The Chamber also recognizes that attractive, cost-effective housing development can be better achieved through a balanced approach to land use regulation that does not impose disproportionate costs and burdens on contractors and developers. It also is important to provide local government with effective tools to improve blighted neighborhoods. Accordingly, the Chamber opposes efforts to restrict local government's use of its powers of eminent domain to acquire blighted property for re-development.

The Chamber also supports the implementation and enforcement of development friendly policies that incentivize and create an environment to allow for quality building construction and encourage renovation of existing structures while upholding and maintaining public safety standards.

## TAX & REGULATORY POLICY

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Federal, state, and local tax policies exert substantial influence on the business climate. The Chamber supports efforts to promote fiscal responsibility by governments at all levels, fiscal restraint in state and local spending and transparency in budgeting and implementation of tax policies while limiting overreach of state and federal policies that take away local control.

The Chamber supports a balanced, reasoned approach to tax reform, to funding public services through a traditional balance of revenues derived from *ad valorem* property taxes, income taxes, and sales taxes. The Chamber opposes tax policies that have the effect of further increasing the burden of local property taxes. Any proposed changes in state and local tax policies should carefully consider the implications of such changes on economic development, employment, and the delivery of essential public services. Sound tax policies should facilitate retention of existing business and industry and attract new business investment. A balanced structure of personal and corporate income taxes, sales and use taxes, and equitable property taxes are important to an economic environment in which businesses may succeed and grow.

The Chamber supports personal property tax exemptions for manufacturing machinery and equipment and inventories. The expansion of internet-based retail sales without collection of retailer sales taxes places local



retailers at an unfair disadvantage. The Chamber supports continued efforts to ensure on-line retailers collect state and local sales taxes on par with local retailers.

## **Regulatory Environment**

The Chamber encourages a business climate in which regulatory burdens on business are minimized and necessary regulations are administered in a manner that promotes economic and community development and facilitates planning for the future.

## **TOURISM**

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Tourism plays a part in the overall economic health of our state as it is an industry that has both direct and indirect impacts that help keep our communities vital and vibrant. Directly, jobs, wages, taxes, and local businesses are supported by visitor spending. The investments made in capital projects including roads, utilities, parks and recreation and arts and cultural amenities indirectly benefit the tourism industry which contributes to a healthy balance in our state and local economies.

The Chamber through our Visit Hutch division supports the implementation of programs that enable our area to compete for local, regional, national, and international events which supports the entire coalition of businesses involved and supported by tourism attraction.

### **Kansas State Fair**

The Hutchinson Area Chamber of Commerce supports the Kansas State Fair and encourages the utilization of the fairgrounds for activities not only during the ten days of the fair but throughout the year. Typically, about 600 individual events are hosted on the Fairgrounds bringing individuals from all over Kansas and the Midwest to the community. The Fair itself, during a traditional year, will bring approximately 350,000 individuals to the Fairgrounds from across Kansas.

The Kansas State Fair is a celebration of all things Kansas, Agriculture, Education, and Industry. The Fair is a fee-based agency that relies on revenue generated for its operations. As such, there are not adequate funds to make major renovations and improvements to the physical plant. Capital improvement projects on the grounds of the Fair are largely funded through the Fair's Capital improvement fund and private donations. To further enhance the Fair's self-sufficiency, it is proposed that the state continue to provide support for major renovations such as the Bison Arena and other needs identified by the Fair to enhance their future competitiveness and relevance to fully maximize the grounds.

The Chamber supports the allocation of funding to fully implement the vision to make the Bison Arena a Center for Agricultural Innovation and Education. The Center would be open year-round for students and adults to experience all the exciting changes in Kansas Agriculture. It is anticipated that the Center would be another revenue stream for the Fair. In the 2022 Legislative Session, \$10 million was allocated to the State Fair to begin renovation of the Bison Arena. It will be a showcase for Kansas' number one industry - agriculture.

The Chamber supports state allocation of resources back into this state-owned asset for the renovation and expansion of current facilities to attract even more events to the Fairgrounds, further enhancing revenue to support the Kansas State Fair enterprise. The Chamber also supports changes to legislation that would allow out-of-state motor coach dealers to sell their products in the state of Kansas at various trade show events to facilitate



attraction of national motorcoach, agriculture, and sporting events at the Kansas State Fairground, which is needed to attract certain national events to our community.

## TRANSPORTATION

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The Chamber recognizes the importance of a quality, well-maintained comprehensive highway system, as well as regularly scheduled maintenance of highways and bridges throughout the state and supports preservation of a dedicated transportation fund to ensure that the South-Central Kansas region receives equitable distribution of transportation funding to build and preserve the infrastructure that is vital to business and industry.

The quality, ease of travel, maintenance and access provided by the transportation network within Kansas is a core component of economic development, job growth and the retention and expansion of existing Kansas businesses. Kansas must position its transportation system to be competitive in an increasingly global economy. The Chamber supports the implementation of the IKE Transportation Plan and opposes the reduction of funding for highway improvements, or any diversion of funds intended for highway improvements to other state governmental uses.

### Priority Highway Projects

The Chamber has identified the following highway improvements as priorities for future investment to increase the efficiencies to create a north-west passageway between K-96 and I-70 and encourages completion of the following:

- K-96 diagonal super-two between Hutchinson and Sterling
- K-96 diagonal to Great Bend and, ultimately, to link with I-70
- K-61 super-two upgrade from Hutchinson to Pratt

## UTILITIES & NATURAL RESOURCES

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The availability of sustainable natural resources is essential to meet the basic needs of all citizens and adequate supplies of clean air and water are essential for business and economic growth. The Chamber is an advocate of proper management of natural resources in a manner consistent with its members' economic and business interests.

### Renewable Energy

The Chamber encourages Kansas lawmakers to support programs which encourage the development of wind energy and renewable energy resources. The state goals for wind and renewables support significant local employers that manufacture wind energy products and encourage new business investment by enterprises that seek a range of traditional and renewable energy resources.

### Energy Production Facilities

Adequate energy resources are essential for economic development and the Chamber believes that decisions relating to the development and expansion of energy production facilities should take into consideration the needs and perspectives of local businesses and governments. The Chamber supports reasonable land-use regulations that acknowledge the desire of local landowners to site wind energy conversion systems on their



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property as additional source of revenue and encourages the local planning commission to adopt reasonable regulations in keeping with industry standards.

### **Utility Costs**

The Chamber supports fair and equitable policies governing the allocation of energy production costs that balance the interests of homeowners and residential consumers with the interests of Kansas businesses. A balanced approach to utility cost allocation is important to enhance Kansas' ability to compete effectively for economic development projects.

### **Water**

The Chamber supports continued implementation of the State Water Plan and dedicated funding with an urban/rural balance. The Chamber supports encouraging voluntary, cost-effective measures that will maintain water quality in compliance with federal regulations to minimize regulatory impact to business. The Chamber supports policies that encourage cooperation between local governments to aid in the strategic cooperation efforts around the utilization and capacity of water and utility infrastructure to spur future economic development efforts.

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING**

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### **Workforce Development & Training**

A skilled workforce is essential for economic growth and expansion of employment opportunities. The Chamber supports policies that provide incentives for investment in high-cost, high-demand and critically needed career and technical education programs and that facilitate greater cooperation between public schools and community colleges to provide cost-effective opportunities for career and technical education for both secondary and post-secondary students in Kansas. The Chamber supports and encourages the Kansas Legislature to fully fund the vocational and technical training initiatives.

### **Workforce Regulation & Right to Work**

The Chamber supports current Kansas "right to work" law. The Chamber recognizes the importance to provide workers protection from unfair practices by employers, laws and regulations that impose unreasonable burdens on employers may impair economic development and expansion of employment opportunities.

### **Workers Compensation**

The Chamber supports continued reform in the Kansas Workers compensation system to provide fair, cost-effective workplace insurance protection for employees and employers alike. The Chamber advocates refinements to the definition of work disability, improved guidelines, and the provisions to clarify and simplify administration to control costs and maintain adequate employee protection.

### **Unemployment Programs**

The Chamber opposes legislation that diverts unemployment compensation funds for other programs and urges the legislature to protect the integrity of the unemployment compensation fund and maintain it for the purpose for which it was originally intended. Further, the Chamber encourages the Legislature to continually review the Unemployment Compensation Fund account balances adjust employer rates accordingly.