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Want To Live in Pawnee? Nebraska Will Give You \$50,000 To Move There

By Allaire Conte | March 27, 2025 | SFGATE

It sounds like something straight out of *Parks and Recreation*: a small-town revival plan worthy of Leslie Knope herself—build new homes, invest in the community, and watch the town come back to life.

But this isn't fictional Pawnee, Indiana—this is **Pawnee City, Nebraska**, a real town with real charm and now, a very real incentive for anyone looking to relocate.

As part of an ambitious effort to attract new residents and revitalize the local economy, the city is offering **\$50,000 in down payment assistance** to buyers of newly built homes. The initiative is designed to boost population growth, support local businesses, and breathe new life into this historic town.

Vision 2030: A Rural Comeback Plan

Pawnee City is a small, tight-knit community in Southeast Nebraska, about a 90-minute drive from Lincoln or Omaha. It's the kind of place where people know their neighbors, kids walk to school, and local businesses line Main Street.

Like many rural communities, it has seen a sharp population drop—from **1,300 in the 1970s** to **just 850 today**—a decline local leaders are determined to reverse. Their solution: **Vision 2030**, a revitalization plan focused on housing and quality of life.

The initiative involves building **25 new single-family homes** on city-owned lots that have been cleared of deteriorating structures. These homes offer **modern open layouts**, two or three bedrooms, full basements, two-car garages, and are priced around **\$325,000**—significantly below the national average for new builds.

The \$50,000 Incentive

The city is offering **\$50,000 in down payment assistance** per house, funded by the **Pawnee City Community Foundation**. The goal is to attract new families, returning alumni, and remote workers in search of a higher quality of life.

“What we need is just rooftops and people and houses,” said **Steve Glenn**, chairman of the Economic Development Council for the Pawnee City Chamber of Commerce.

By reusing existing infrastructure and keeping the lots close to schools and downtown, the town cut about **30% from construction costs**, and with the incentive, **buyers may see costs reduced up to 40%**.

Early Response

Without any formal marketing, the town received **about 50 applications** for the first two homes within days of the program’s soft launch.

“They came in really quickly,” Glenn said.

Beyond Housing: Building a Community

Vision 2030 also includes amenities to make Pawnee City a vibrant place to live. A newly built **limestone amphitheater**, funded by a local family, will host **eight summer events**—concerts, a dueling piano show, and an outdoor screening of *Cars* with an appearance by **Larry the Cable Guy**, a Pawnee City native.

Other amenities include:

- **Pickleball courts**
- **Public pool**

- **Basketball courts**
 - **A grocery store, pharmacy, hardware store, and flower shop**
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A Blueprint for Rural Success

Other small towns have taken note of Pawnee City's approach. Glenn said the goal is to use Vision 2030 as a **template for rural revitalization**, starting with housing as the foundation.

“A lot of times, people are afraid to fail,” he said. “You’ve got to just jump in with both feet.”

“The whole key to rural America is housing. It’s all about housing,” he added.

How To Apply

Learn more or apply at 📍 pawneecitynewhomes.com