



Nebraska city offering \$50,000 in down payment aid to new residents

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Pawnee City has a grocery, a hardware store, a day care, a golf course, and a swimming pool. “We have all the things you need for a small town,” said Steve Glenn, chairman of the Pawnee City Economic Development Council of the Chamber of Commerce.

Attracting people to live in a small town requires a little bit of magic — and possibly some serious money.

That’s why Pawnee City is offering \$50,000 in down payment assistance for people moving there. The program aims to make home ownership easier and attract new residents.

Bringing just 200 more people to the small city of about 850 could have a big impact, said Steve Glenn.

“Housing is the magic sauce for small towns in rural Nebraska,” Glenn said. “It’s not jobs, it’s housing.”

The down-payment assistance is limited to people making below a certain annual income. For one person, that limit is \$69,450, and for a family of four, it’s \$99,250, according to the program’s website: pawneecitynewhomes.com

The funding comes from the Pawnee City Community Foundation, which is part of Pawnee City’s **Vision 2030** plan to bring new life to the community by building **25 single-family homes**.

Pawnee City, located about 75 miles southeast of Lincoln between Beatrice and Falls City, has already started construction on at least one new house. Glenn, a business owner in Pawnee City and Lincoln, said he hopes **five houses are built each year until 2030**.

The first houses are expected to be completed by this summer, according to a news release.

The Pawnee City Foundation was awarded a **\$640,000 grant** from the Department of Economic Development as part of the **Nebraska Affordable Housing Trust Fund** in September 2024 to support its efforts to grow.

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Since receiving that grant, the city has been applying for additional grants for beautification, tree planting, and other projects.

“We basically said we control our own destiny,” Glenn said. “And we set up this chamber group to be the economic development driver.”

In addition to the chamber’s foundation, Glenn leads an alumni and fundraising organization called **Pawnee City BOLD**. The chamber also hired an economic development director.

Glenn said he imagines each house attracting a family of four to Pawnee City. The effort will be paired with another plan to build **25 rental homes**.

The city’s population has been declining for decades, and the program is an attempt to reverse that trend.

Pawnee City also has a hospital, school system, and other key infrastructure. Glenn said the new homes could add **50 students to the school system** and increase spending in the community.

“You hate to say something as devastating as COVID could be a blessing to small towns, but it is,” Glenn said, noting how remote work has made small-town relocation more viable.