



HB2298 – Removing the Sunset for Rural Opportunity Zones

Prepared for the House Taxation Committee
By Christy Hopkins, Director of Greeley County Community Development
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Greeley County Community Development strongly supports the extension of the Rural Opportunity Zone program. Our community has experienced great success in utilizing the ROZ program and we are eager to see it continue.

Currently, Unified Greeley County has 25 active ROZ student-loan repayment participants. Collectively, these 25 individuals have 17 children and the total number of individuals in their collective households is 55 people. In a recent survey conducted by the Kansas Department of Commerce, 9 of the 10 Unified Greeley County participants who responded indicated that the program was a contributing factor in their decision to move to Greeley County and remain living here. Please see the attached infographic for more Greeley County ROZ participant results.

Unified Greeley County is currently experiencing population growth, and was one of only 4 Kansas counties to experience greater than 3% population growth from 2010-2014 – the other three are in the Fort Riley region. From the opening day of school in 2013 to the opening day in 2014, Greeley County Schools increased its enrollment 25%. A number of factors influenced this increase – young families returning to the community resulting in larger classes entering pre-school and kindergarten than high school classes, additional jobs added by existing businesses and new developments, businesses establishing transition plans for the next generation of ownership, and more. Local tax valuations have increased over the past couple of years and three times more houses have been built in Greeley County since 2010 than were built from 2000 to 2010.

The Rural Opportunity Zone program is a highly useful tool that has helped our community achieve these successes. We strongly support the renewal of the Rural Opportunity Zone program that helps bring primarily young, educated, productive residents to rural communities statewide.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if I can be of assistance. I can be reached by phone at (620) 376-2548 or by email at clhopkins@fairpoint.net.

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Rural Opportunity Zone Program Impact

For Unified Greeley County, February 2015

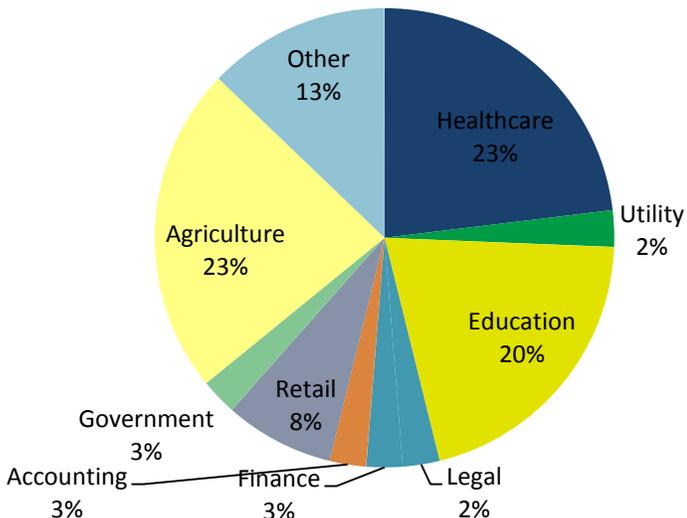
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Active ROZ participants

Collectively, these individuals:

- Purchased **7** homes (plus an additional 4 live in previously-unoccupied family homes)
- Have **17** children (5 enrolled in school and 12 that are pre-school age)
- Are fully employed (including two stay-at-home moms)
- Opened **2** businesses— a financial planning office & an audiology clinic
- Account for **55** additional people in the Greeley County community, when all members of their households are counted. Of those, 54 are under the age of 40.
- Are from Kansas and beyond—**9** participants relocated to Greeley County from other states

Unified Greeley County ROZ Applicants by Industry



Unified Greeley County

County Seat: Tribune

Population: 1,295

In Their Own Words

When surveyed in 2014, 10 of 20 participants responded, confirming that:

9 of 10 (90%) said ROZ was a contributing factor in their decision to move to Greeley County and remain living here.

4 of 10 (40%) said they had purchased or built a home in Greeley County.

2 of 10 (20%) said they had started or purchased a business in Greeley County.

"The Program has been very helpful and it has allowed me to start up a business because I could allocate other funds towards the business that may have been needed to help pay back student loans if it were not for the ROZ program."

"I have thoroughly enjoyed teaching in wonderful Tribune, KS and I have appreciated the support the county and state have given to recruit teachers (and other workers) to small rural communities. Thank you so much for the financial support."

"Great idea and a great incentive to get younger people back into smaller communities. I personally have had nothing but a very positive experience with the ROZ grant and the people whom have contacted me."