

By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

Last Friday's announcement that a single-family 10-house rental project development in Imperial won federal housing tax credits provided a reason to celebrate.

Anyone who's tried to find rental housing in Imperial—for themselves, a friend, an employee—knows it's a near impossible task. So to hear that 10 new houses will be available for rent within the next 12 months, well that was music to the ears of all those who have been trying to crack the housing shortage nut for years.

Out of desperation, people working on the issue contacted a California developer who has developed other single-family home rental projects in other parts of Nebraska. It was a long shot, but so what.

Admittedly, the developer wasn't really interested in a small rural community in southwest Nebraska—until he found out that little community had grown since the last census and the city had their own land for housing development.

That interest expressed more than two years ago resulted in a rental-home project winning federal tax credits last week.

This type of rental housing is not the kind of housing you might expect from a federal program. The homes offer three bedrooms, two baths, a two-car garage and are very attractive to the neighborhood. Two of the homes will include four bedrooms.

Eight of the homes will have rents based on income thresholds while two others will rent for market rate. The new homes will be built along East 2nd Street in the Cornerstone Development.

The Cornerstone Development has had its share of darts, jabs, rocks and stones thrown in its direction. Some felt the city should have never purchased the land. Some said it would never be developed.

It took some mighty courage and bold vision for elected city leaders to buck the coffee shop talk and move forward with the purchase of Cornerstone.

Also, hats off to the present city council and LB 840 advisory boards for approving a loan of \$300,000 to the developer. That was probably the tipping point that pushed the application over the top, the developer said.

But we can't rest on our laurels!!!

Putting in 10 new rental homes will only make a dent in the demand for housing in this town. No doubt it will make a significant impact. But we still must do more.

Based on the growth in population in Imperial alone, it's estimated we still need at least 50 more homes to meet demand.

Let's continue to be innovative and visionary in our efforts to attack housing issues in Imperial. That will insure Imperial will continue to grow and offer a thriving community for our young people to return home to.