

By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

Take a look around Imperial and you'll see a community that is always striving to move forward. Just read through this year's Progress Issue of The Imperial Republican and you'll see what I'm talking about.

Take Cornerstone Development, for example. There was plenty of second-guessing the decision by the city council to buy the 70+ acres for economic development purposes.

Now, thanks again to efforts by council members and city officials, a new residential development is springing up there.

Fourteen new homes will be built in Cornerstone over the next six to eight months. The most important element of the project centers on the fact that 10 of the homes will be rental homes.

Increasing the inventory of rental properties by 10 units, not to mention that they will be new units, will fill a dire need that has been holding Imperial back.

In addition, the developer is building four new spec homes for sale. It's been years since a spec home has been built in Imperial. The developer did that because he too believes Imperial is a community moving forward.

In the last census, Imperial was one of a handful of small communities in Nebraska that actually showed population growth. Without seeing that kind of growth, the developer said he would not have taken a second look at Imperial for such a project. In addition, no Cornerstone—no development.

In west Imperial, residents of the Sage Addition took a bold step by agreeing to pay assessments to their property for the addition of storm sewer and paving in the subdivision and the paving of 12th Street.

Just the infrastructure improvements in the two areas represents an investment in the future of Imperial of more than \$2.1 million. Adding another \$1.7 million in the value of the homes being built in Cornerstone provides the evidence of a community moving forward.

New businesses have opened in Imperial in the past year and other businesses have made substantial investments in new facilities to better serve their customers.

As you've heard me say many times in this space, a community is either moving forward or it's moving backwards. There's no in-between.

But the vision of progress hasn't stopped at the city limits of Imperial. During the past year, we saw businesses outside of Imperial expand to better meet the growing needs of their ag customers.

We've seen farmers invest in grain storage, buildings and, of course, land. The success of the ag economy over the past several years has enabled farmers to invest in what they know best—land. Center pivot quarters worth \$800,000 a year ago are now worth anywhere from \$1 million to \$1.3 million.

Our region can also take credit for having a vision for the future. This year marked the first year of operation of the Rock Creek augmentation project in southwest Dundy County.

Again, not without some controversy, this project has enabled the Upper Republican Natural Resources District to make up pumping overages caused by drought conditions in 2012 and 2013.

That vision was expanded when the three Republican Basin NRDs joined the Twin Platte NRD in buying 19,000 acres in Lincoln County for a much larger augmentation project.

With both projects operating, it will ensure that farmers in the basin can offset drought effects

and continue to use groundwater irrigation that sustains the ag economy in this region.

It takes vision to move a community and region forward. For generations, Imperial has displayed the ability to look past today and plan for the future. This year's growth in Imperial is yet further evidence of the unique intuition that sets Imperial apart from its peers.